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**Place-based praxis: Exploring place-based
education and the philosophy of place.**

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**Thesis
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
The University of Edinburgh
2011**

Declaration

I composed this thesis, the work is my own. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or qualification.

Name... Date...12th September 2011

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Abstract

This thesis interweaves two strands of inquiry, one educational, the other philosophical. The educational inquiry is seeded by the need to understand both embodiment and learning within experiences of place in education. The second strand is prompted by Evernden's insight that the environmental crisis is a 'crisis of being' (1985). Evernden argues that our perceived separation from the world is at the root of the environmental issues we face. Highlighting the role that 'place' might have in both these inquiries, I examine the educational and philosophical debates around place, drawing especially on place-based education (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008), and phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Arguments from within these literatures indicate that experiences of, and in, place hold the potential to re-examine what it means to be part of the world, here, now.

Three key research questions emerge from my examination of the literature: 1 – what role do experiences of place have in education? 2 – what is the ontology of place? and 3 – how does place affect thinking and learning? This third question is the meeting point of the philosophical and educational threads of the inquiry, and also reflects back on the process of the inquiry itself. Given the focus of these questions on the lived experience of place, phenomenology is chosen as a suitable methodology. However, I argue that the full potential of phenomenological research can only be met through a more participative and experiential approach. Drawing on literature on participative research, grouped under the term 'action research,' (Reason & Bradbury, 2001), a series of collaborative phenomenological research workshops were run in 2009 and 2010 with two groups of practicing educators.

Descriptions of experiences of place and place-based education, from within the workshops and the participants' workplaces, were distilled into themes by the groups. These themes served two purposes: the first was to explore the possibilities of place-based education in various working contexts, an inquiry which was completed during the workshops. The second was to seed a phenomenological investigation into the ontology of place, exploring questions from the philosophical debate on place. This second part of the inquiry was completed by myself.

Both groups felt place-based education revealed aspects of place taken for granted or un-explored. This was summed up by one participant in the phrase 'bringing place to life.' The participants' understandings of the different aspects of place-based education including the pedagogy involved, and the possible outcomes, show how place-based education was understood and applied in different contexts. The phenomenological analysis which builds on the participants' understandings, describes a contrast between un-examined place and the intimate and immersive experience that can occur when place is 'brought to life.' The final part of the thesis explores in further depth the role of the mind in 'bringing place to life,' putting forward the idea of mind as a phenomenon which can adopt different scales. When learning and thinking on the same scale as the body, the mind is brought to place, and the dualism between mind and body breaks down. 'Thinking in place' is put forward as a way of understanding both the experience of learning in context, and the phenomenological immersion of both body and mind in place. The conclusions explore the implications of this research for the various fields touched on in the study: educational approaches such as environmental education, philosophical approaches to place, and research methodologies.

Map

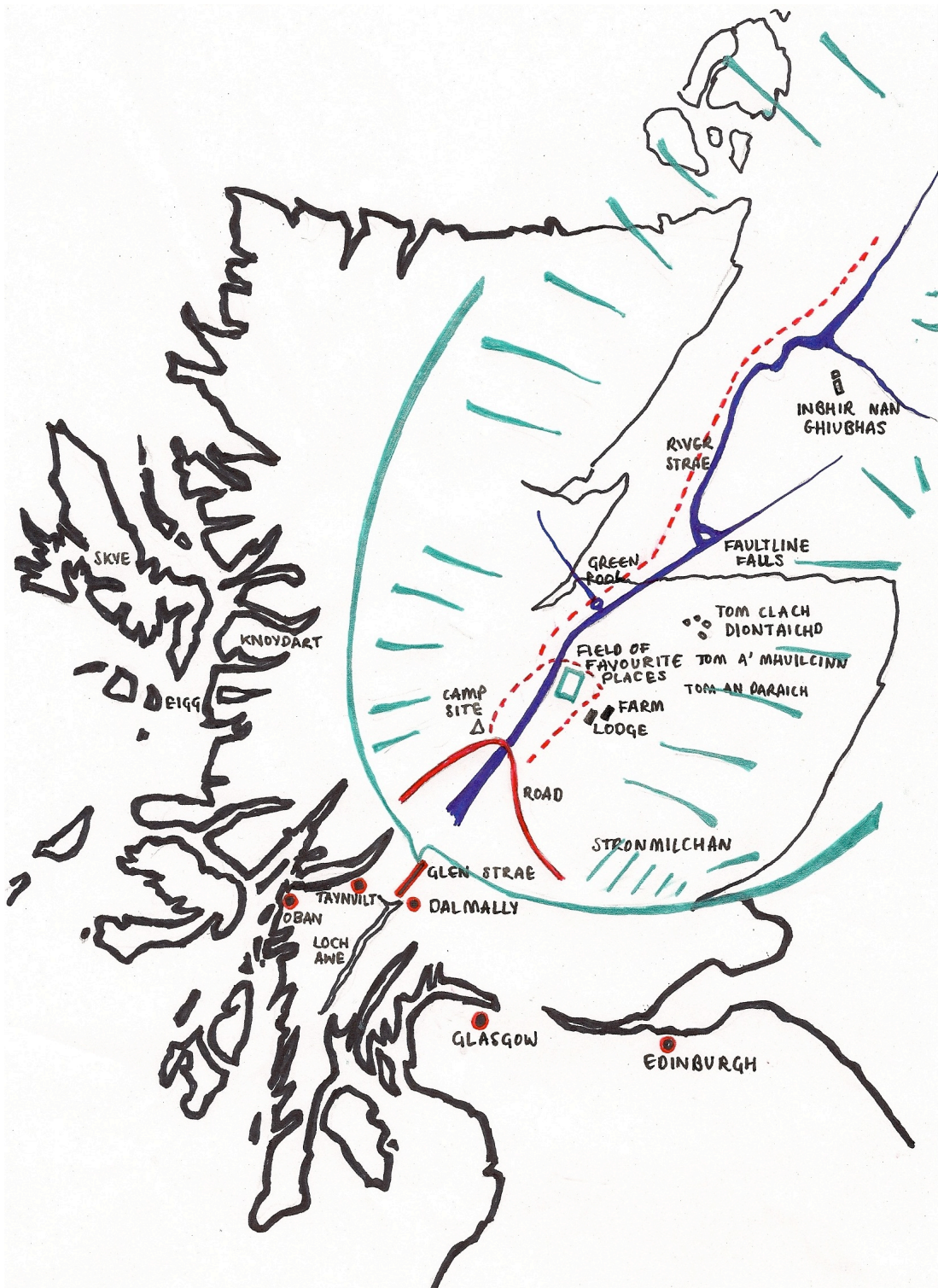


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Philosophy is... a place-based exercise. It comes from the body and the heart and is checked against shared experience, (Snyder, 1990, p. 64).

...place has to be understood as itself a dynamic and relational structure in which we are already embedded, rather than some static object, (Malpas, 2009, p. 22).

Experience anticipates a philosophy and philosophy is merely an elucidated experience, (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 73).

...no-one lives in the world in general, (Geertz, 1996, p. 262).

Chapter 1 – Introductions

1A – Walking up Glen Strae

It is November 2010, and I am walking again in Glen Strae. I have come out to think about ways to write the introduction to this thesis. The glen, running north-east to south-west, its watershed draining into the northern end of Loch Awe, is tucked behind the high ridge of Ben Cruachan. Last night's storm has deposited a good fall of snow on the tops of the ridge, on *Stob Diamh* (Scots Gaelic: the peak of the stags), on *Beinn a' Bhùiridh* (the mountain of the roaring (of those stags)). The storm brought the snow down to about 700m, and today is clear and cold. As I walk up the side of the glen I disturb a stag, but it is not roaring, only running.

Situated in the north of Argyll just inland from the west coast of Scotland, Glen Strae has been a pivotal place for me in the last few years. A short drive from where I live, it was where I ran my first place-based education project with the local school, where I continue to run projects and training with schools, educators and trainee educators. Glen Strae was also where the research workshops for this PhD were held. I have walked and explored the ground here many times, on my own and with groups, accumulating knowledge from reading, speaking to people and my own exploration. But I haven't been here for a while, since before the deer-stalking season which ended last month.

First I pop in to see Donald the estate manager. He is keen for people to understand the land better, and always comes to see my groups wherever we are camped or working. He tells them about the work that he does in the glen, farming Highland cattle and blackface sheep, deer stalking and pheasant shooting. He gets the school groups involved in little things to help: collecting eggs, folding fleeces or having a go at combing the bull. Today, we catch up with news over a cup of tea, and debate how to fund the local school coming back onto the estate for another project. We talk about

rural politics, eagle protection schemes and the balance between nature and people on the land.

And then I am back out, walking up the steep hillside past *Tom an Daraich* (the hillock of the oak tree – the name indicates the probability that it was an important pre-Christian tree worshipping site or *bile* (Macfarlane pers comm.)). There is a new area of native woodland to be planted on this slope, to shelter Donald's pheasants, and the turf has been turned ready to be planted. Having gained some height I can look over the glen, with its patchwork of fields and trees around the River Strae, rising in a typical glacially carved u-shape to the higher hills. In the distance to my left is Loch Awe running south, and down below is the farmhouse, with dogs barking as Donald goes out to feed the pheasants. To my right the head of the glen is visible with the *bealach*, or pass, climbing out of the glen up next to *Eas nan Cabar* (the waterfall of the antlers). This was where people, from farmers, to medieval cattle raiders, to illicit whisky distillers, would leave the glen heading north towards Loch Tulla and Rannoch Moor.

But today I am just walking a little way along the side of the glen, my body warming slightly from the exertion, but my hands still cold and numb. Digging the right side of my boots into the slope, I trend along past an erratic boulder, a regular stopping place with all the people I bring this way. It is a microcosm of the glen itself: a glacial deposit of granite, created with Ben Cruachan as part of a giant volcanic pluton deep underground around four hundred million years ago (Highton, 2007). Left here by the glacier after the last ice age, it is now layered with moss and lichen. A small cairn sits on top of it. I do not know who put it there but it has been there as long as I have known the boulder. Next to the cairn grows a fern, and down on the side of the boulder, alongside the red tipped Devil's Matchstick lichen, is an owl dropping. The jaw and teeth of a mouse or vole, undigested amid feather and fur, is still visible.

All the wildlife I see during my walk is the one stag, a few crows and a lone buzzard. As I walk I think of the rich history of the glen, the many shielings

(summer grazing areas) along the upper reaches, the ruined bothy (cottage) further up. Glen Strae was the heartland of the Macgregor clan, who suffered under a brutal and sustained campaign of government sanctioned slaughter in the 17th and early 18th centuries (Williams, 1998). At one time criminals could have their crimes forgiven in exchange for a Macgregor head. I feel sad at the sometimes harsh and now much reduced human presence in the glen, whose marks in stories, ruins, and place-names I try to resurrect with the groups I work with. I fall into thinking about my self and my own life and hopes.

I am brought back to the present by the stream at *Tom a' Mhuilcinn* (the hillock of the Star Gentian or Fell Wort – a flower now extinct in the UK (Dwelly, 2001)). Moving out of the rust coloured bogs of heather, bog myrtle and sphagnum moss, I step over a narrow but deep tree-lined little gorge into a natural hollow beside the stream: I have to watch my footing. Here I have written poems with several groups. The place always feels special to me. The last of the golden birch leaves are still clinging to the trees, despite the recent high winds. The alder has already shed its black green leaves which lie all around. A cloud moves in front of the sun, and I shiver, thinking of my thermos of soup and packed lunch. I move on through the moraine-lumped and water scoured hillside towards the shieling at *Tom Clach Diontaichd* (the hillock of the defence stone).

This brief account opens up the richness and complexity of 'place.' Through my experience of Glen Strae, many overlapping and intricately related ideas, subjects and facets of this place can be seen. The geology shapes the glen, reaching back in extreme timescales (Highton, 2007), but still affecting it now through soil fertility and weather systems moving over the hills. The ecology, history and landuse interweave. Humans shape and have been shaped by their lives in this place, moving in and out, leaving clear or indistinct traces: place-names, woodlands, shielings. Clearly different people have different experiences in the glen: from Donald who lives there, to myself who works there occasionally, to the visiting walker or hunter. My account itself is a story, one of many possible stories, and inevitably as much

about myself as about Glen Strae. How I feel in my body, what thoughts I am having, what I notice, or remember from previous visits, these things help shape my experience. Many threads from other places and times are tied into my experience on this day.

Time, location, physical and social environment, self, experience. All these things seem to be part of my being in Glen Strae. Is this what place is? How can we think about such a complex and multifaceted phenomenon? How do different types of facts which I have accumulated: geological, ecological, topographical, interrelate with different feelings: exertion in my body, sadness at past injustice, joy in being out on a sunny day? Does the difference between fact and feeling, object and subject hold up when we are asking what place is? My experience seems to not just be about culture, and not just about nature, so what do I need to take account of as I work there into the future?

My work in education narrows the question of place. This thesis is about experience of place as much as it is found through education and particularly the experiences of educators. My time in Glen Strae has been as a leader, teacher, facilitator, or researcher. The questions raised above about the nature of place are sharpened with a focus on education. These queries move beyond my experiences and are relevant to teaching and learning: if this place is a venue for learning, outside the classroom, what is learnt about, and how is it learnt? It is possible to experience here many of the things that are generally taught through text books, or in classrooms, so how does that direct experience shape the learning? How does learning about geology, history, plant or place-names in this place connect with other places? What would be the aim of learning in this place? What outcomes could there be?

This brings into focus the first question of my thesis: what role do experiences of place have in education? In this introduction, I have raised many different queries around learning and place to introduce the complexity of the topic, and also anchor it in a specific time and place. These

queries will be clarified throughout Section A, where the relevant literature will be explored, and the research questions refined.

1B – A crisis of being

Having opened up some of the themes of this PhD through the exploration of a single contextualised example: Glen Strae, and stated my educational research focus, I will now take an alternative approach. Looking at the bigger picture, the ‘environmental crisis,’ will shed light on questions of place: the ways that we are in place, and the ways we think about places. This will provide an introduction to the philosophical ideas at the heart of this inquiry, and allow me to state the philosophical focus for the research.

That we are in the middle of an environmental crisis is increasingly acknowledged: global warming, species extinction, ecosystem collapse, water and topsoil degradation are just a handful of the elements of this crisis (IPCC, 2007; Stern, 2006; Worldwatch Institute (<http://www.worldwatch.org>); Millenium Ecosystem Assessment (<http://www.maweb.org>)). While there are many who would debate the exact nature of these phenomena, and more who would disagree on what is to be done about them, crucially all these issues are part of everyday debate in Scotland (as seen for example in the UK media), and have a presence in global politics (for example Copenhagen (COP-15), in 2009, and the more recent United Nations Climate Change conference in Bangkok in April 2011). The ‘environmental crisis’ sums up all these problems, challenges and potential catastrophes, and forms the central motivation for this research. I understand myself as an individual, as an educator and as a researcher trying to make a positive contribution to the amelioration of this crisis.

Neil Evernden’s book *The natural alien* (1985) explores the nature of the environmental crisis in a revealing and challenging way, exposing the key philosophical questions of this thesis. For Evernden, the very existence of the phrase ‘environmental crisis’ is indicative of the problem: we would not have a conception of ‘environment’ if we were not already deeply separated from the natural world around us.

...there can only be environment in a society that holds certain assumptions, and there can only be an environmental crisis in a society that believes in environment, (Evernden, 1985, p. 125).

Crucially it is our separation from the world around us which creates these multiple problems.

Evernden argues that we assume the 'environment' is all that is not human, not cultural, and thus separate from us. These things: mountains, rivers, forests, animals, are only important in as much as they serve us, and are easily destroyed. Recasting the problem in this way sees the environmental crisis not as a series of practical challenges to be met, as might be implied at the start of this section, but as a question which goes to the very heart of who we are:

It is not a question of our encountering the crisis and resolving it through technology. The crisis is not simply something we can examine and resolve. We are the environmental crisis. The crisis is a visible manifestation of our very being, (*ibid.* p. 128).

We are the environmental crisis. The way we are in the world is the problem. This position calls for a re-examination of what it means to be a human in a world full of 'more-than-human' beings and systems, as well as practical measures to reduce carbon, or protect species. The phrase 'more-than-human world' was coined by Abram (1996b), and will be used throughout this thesis, often as an alternative to the problematic 'environment.' It is as value-laden as words like 'nature' or 'environment,' but rather than implying separation and conquest, as Evernden argues the former words do, 'more-than-human' suggests we are embedded in a wider world which has significance beyond us.

Crucially for Evernden, and for my argument, there are several philosophers who help us understand this 'crisis of being.' The question of 'being' or how and what we are in the world, is an ontological question. Ontology is a philosophical term for ideas about what is, what kind of things we are, what kind of thing the world is. There are many ways of approaching ontology, but one particular school of philosophical thought is highly relevant here: phenomenology. Phenomenology examines our everyday experience of

being in the world (Mautner, 1997). The contribution of phenomenologists Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger to the environmental debate has been acknowledged widely (Abram, 1996a, 1996b, 2007; Brook, 2005; Brown and Toadvine, 2003; Cannatella, 2007; Casey, 1997; Cataldi & Hamrick, 2007; Cooper, 2005; Dillon, 1988; Langer, 1990, 2003; Macauley, 1996; Seamon & Mugerauer, 1985), and Evernden draws on their work to elucidate what he means by the crisis of being.

Both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty critique a view of the world, an ontology, of subjects and objects, people and things to be used by people. Heidegger discusses the way technological approaches to the world make us see things merely as resources to be used (1977). Merleau-Ponty argues that the division of the world into subjects and objects, thinking people and external physical things, is a way of seeing the world which is produced only when we reflect on it, separating ourselves off from our experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). When we are immersed in experiencing the world, Merleau-Ponty argues that such distinctions collapse: we are all part of the "flesh" of the world (*ibid.* p. 123). Ourselves, other people, and the trees, stones and sky are involved in a complex and intimate 'intertwining' (1968). These arguments will be returned to in more detail in Chapter 3.

Returning to the environmental crisis as a crisis in our way of being, these philosophers help us see what it is about our current ontology that is so destructive to the natural world around us, and put forward an alternate vision. The problem with an ontology which divides the world up into things and people, as opposed to what could be called an 'immersive ontology' which sees us immersed in the world around us, is that it produces the idea of the environment as a thing separate to us.

This is not merely a philosophical problem. One of the key methodological tenets of this thesis is that the way we think and the way we act are two sides of the same coin. Evernden sums this up emotively, arguing that our current ontology, our idea of the world as separate subjects and objects, has physical consequences:

...the extermination of other forms of life - is simply the physical manifestation of a global genocide that is long since accomplished in the minds of us all, (1985, p. 136).

By thinking ourselves separate we have created a world of separation, where all those things which are not human are used and abused. Further, as we look around this world we have had such an impact on, we see the separation that we have assumed, and it reinforces our ontology, strengthening this crisis of being. The environmental crisis then becomes only a facet of a bigger question, an ontological question: what are humans? How do we live in the world? This is a question of 'being,' as Evernden and Heidegger would call it.

We are now in a position to see how the idea of place could offer an alternative way of being, and an element contributing to a way out of this crisis.

If we encounter nature as natural resources, then we deny it any of the character of worldhood. And we simultaneously deny ourselves access to it as home. It is characterized by space, not by place, (*ibid.*, p. 66).

For Evernden, this placelessness is a fundamental characteristic of being human: conscious of the world around us, forever out of step with the more-than-human world. However there is a considerable literature which is more positive about our ability to find our place (e.g. Casey, 1993; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Hunter, 1995; Malpas, 1999; Massey, 1994; Snyder, 1990). This literature forms the core of my research, acknowledging our instinct to explore and make meaning of where we are.

This thesis can be seen as taking on some of questions raised by Evernden's work (and many others including Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty). How are we in places? How can we move towards a way of being in place which is more healthy for us and for the world around us? Is place a way of thinking about ourselves that does not separate us from the rest of existence?

Evernden's 'natural alien' helps introduce many philosophical themes of this research: the phenomenological approach, and the understanding of the

environmental crisis as a crisis of being, a crisis in the way we place ourselves in the world. But there is a further implication of Evernden's thought: the critique of our current destructive ontology also calls for new ways of thinking which do not separate us from, but embed us into, the world.

This section introduces the second research question in this thesis: what is the ontology of place? Different queries around the role of place in our ways of being and our relationship to the more-than-human world have been introduced. These will be refined through an examination of relevant literature in Section A. The third and final research question has also started to become apparent at the end of this section: how does place affect thinking and learning? This question will be examined further in the next part of the introduction.

1C – Placing the research

Returning to Glen Strae, there is now a philosophical or ontological thread to the research: what kind of thing am I that walks and feels this way, in this glen? What kind of thing is the glen, if I and it are in this mutual and complex relationship? If place is an ontological question, a question of who I am and how I am in the world, what does this mean for developing education in Glen Strae? What ways of being are possible in the glen? What ways of being are educational, and what value might this form of education have?

The two streams of this introduction, educational and philosophical, can interact and interrogate one another. It is possible to ask whether Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty's understanding of place and ontology can shape educational projects: what would such projects look like? How do abstract philosophical ideas take shape in practical ways? And following the opposite line of inquiry: how would pedagogical experiences in a place like Glen Strae impact on understandings of 'being'? How can individual educational experiences change or shape philosophy? These exchanges

between the educational and philosophical questions can be understood as 'praxis.'

Praxis as a term was first explored in depth by Aristotle, as a practical way of being. The third in a triad of Greek terms which Aristotle used in a technical sense, including *theoria* and *poiesis*, *praxis* complemented theoretical and creative pursuits with one focused on action (Aristotle, 1905). Praxis has several modern meanings related to this ancient one, but in this inquiry the approach to praxis I develop is the reciprocal dialogue between theory and practice. This understanding is supported by many thinkers and writers in education some of whom are particularly relevant to this thesis, (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Carr, 2006; Collins, 2004; Fagan, 1996; Freire, 1986; Grange, 2004; Griffiths, 1998; Gruenewald, 2003b; Warren & Loeffler, 2000). Reason and Bradbury put it succinctly:

... action without reflection and understanding is blind, just as theory without action is meaningless, (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 3).

Furthermore, Fagan argues that praxis is distinctly local (Fagan, 1996), where action and reflection occur in a grounded local context.

Evernden makes the point, that will be examined in depth throughout this thesis, that a new way of thinking is needed that does not separate us from the world, that the way we think and the way we act are interrelated. One way of acknowledging this is to constantly explore the relationship between practice and theory, between action and thought, through praxis. However, in the context of this PhD praxis is a little more complex than simply juxtaposing education as a practical discipline, and philosophy as a theoretical discipline. Philosophy, whilst largely engaged in creating theories and understandings in some ways aims to shape and be shaped by experience. This is especially so within phenomenology, the particular philosophical approach taken in this thesis, where, for example, Merleau-Ponty writes: "Experience anticipates a philosophy and philosophy is merely an elucidated experience," (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 73). Equally while education, and more specifically within this inquiry, place-based education, deals with practical actions: providing educational experiences of place, it

too has some theoretical content. These include understandings of what it is that is happening in the experience, and concepts such as ‘sense of place.’

Praxis in this inquiry is thus rooted in experiences of place, and involves the interaction of two particular ways of thinking about and shaping those experiences: educational practice and understandings, and philosophical inquiry. The educational approach under scrutiny is ‘place-based education’ (Smith, 2002): as written about by others, as examined through practical research, and as understood by my research participants and myself. The second, philosophical, focus is the question of place, ontology and being in the world. This is explored through the work of phenomenologists, as a question for research, and through educators’ and my own experience of place and place-based education. At various points these two concerns are pursued separately, at others they come together to explore their implications of one for the other. This is shown in the diagram below, the current section highlighted in red.

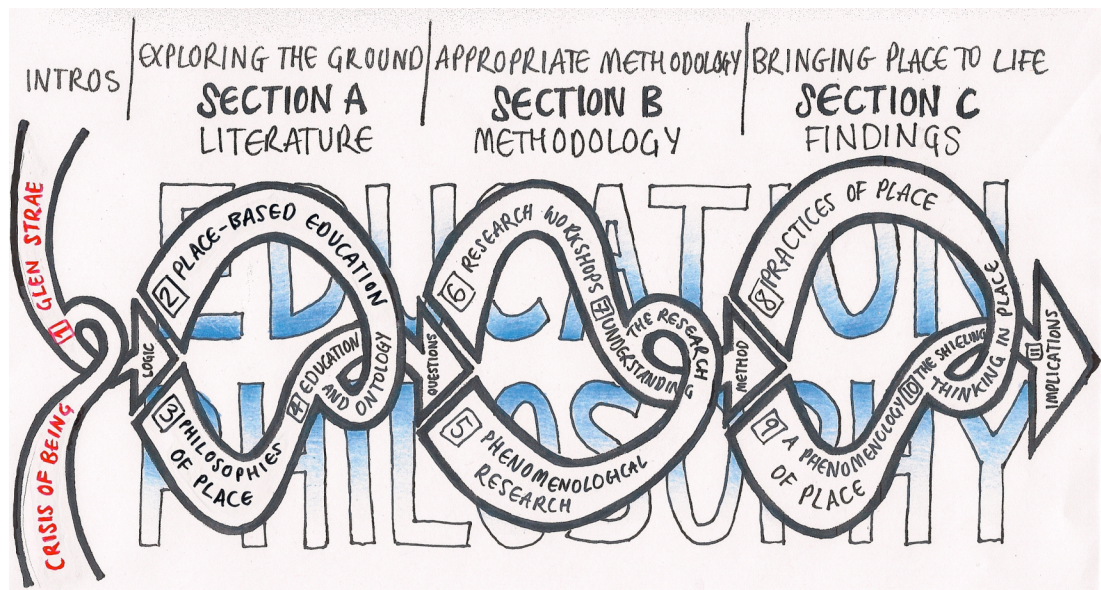


Figure 2. Conceptual map of thesis

There is an explicit need for this contact or praxis, as Nicol puts it:

The philosophical challenge for educators is to provide a framework of understanding where the world of ideas is rooted in the same

world in which people carry out their multi-sensory lives, (Nicol, 2003, p. 15).

The combination of the educational and philosophical questions leads to a third question: how does place affect thinking and learning? This third strand asks how we *think* about the pedagogy of place, and how do we *embody* the ontology of place. These questions are explored further here in the introduction. But they also take various forms all the way through the thesis: as a concern for ways of thinking seen in the literature in Section A, as an investigation into what researching *in place* (not just *about* place) might mean in Section B, and the development of the idea of 'thinking through place' in Section C.

'How does place affect thinking and learning?' raises an important point for this thesis. The content of the thesis is focused on place, but how can the process of the thesis also be placed? As some of the literature will show, it is possible to study the philosophy of place without ever discussing any particular place, and further it is possible to educate in place without ever thinking 'what is place?' The aim of this PhD however, is not simply thinking about place, but thinking in / with place. This is a challenge to 'objective' thinking, where thoughts (and thinkers) are assumed to be extricable from specific contexts. This question is posed by Evernden and others (Capra, 1997; Kidner, 2001): what does it mean to be in a world in which the inter-relation of thought and action is acknowledged? More specifically, and in my context, what would it mean to do a PhD in this way? And if, as will be pursued in the PhD, place is understood as a way of being which is embodied and intertwined with specific places: what might it mean to do this PhD in place?

These debates raise difficult questions, in many ways too large for a PhD. However, others have addressed these methodological concerns: Pivnick (2003) poses the question in a similar way, asking what it might mean to do research from within an ecological worldview (understood as a new worldview moving on from the environmental crisis of being (Capra, 1997; Sessions, 1995)). Pivnick's question brings us back to Glen Strae: how might

I place the thinking in this thesis in Glen Strae? And how might I think the place that is Glen Strae? Pivnick sees similarities in the approach to research as in the approach to place:

I began to wonder if there was something about the way in which we come to know 'place' which has a commonality whether it involves a naturalist's relationship with the land or a researcher's relationship with a topic. Is there any way in which naturalists come to know the land which could in fact form a framework for more broad forms of research? (Pivnick, 2003, p. 147).

Pivnick's concerns about researching environmental education are mirrored by Malpas' concern about creating a philosophy of place: he urges a "topographical approach" to philosophy, a series of explorative journeys into the questions, (Malpas, 1999, p. 18).

Taking on these ideas, the research for my PhD can be seen as a series of journeys exploring the landscape of the inquiry: the first section attempts to find a place for my two questions of pedagogy and ontology within scholarly literature. This takes the questions 'what role do experiences of place have in education' and 'what is the ontology of place?' and develops them, finding 'edges' in the literature where these questions remain unclarified or unasked. Key terms and concepts are also described in this section. The second section asks how the foci I have developed might be researched, how to research in place philosophically and educationally. This develops the methodologies of the PhD. The third section explores what the educators I researched with thought of place-based education, what this meant in terms of an ontology of place, and how philosophy and practice might be brought together in a phenomenology of learning in place.

My argument can be summarised as follows. Place-based education is an extant discipline from the United States which deals with education in place, and supported by dialogue from Australian and Canadian outdoor education. It is only just being explored in the United Kingdom. I argue, specifically drawing ideas Merleau-Ponty (1968) and Malpas (1999), that place can be understood ontologically as the ground of subject and object. Combining these educational and philosophical insights, the focus of the

PhD becomes an inquiry into what place-based education, and what I will call an 'ontological approach to place,' might mean in my context and the contexts of other educators in Scotland. To research these two questions in Glen Strae I used a phenomenological methodology, developing a collaborative and experiential approach with the use of ideas from action research. I organized and facilitated two series of workshops of three weekends each, with practicing educators from a variety of different contexts, to ask my research questions.

The final section explores the two groups' understanding of place-based education in their working situations, and a phenomenological inquiry into the ontology of place involved. The findings of the research indicate the importance of time, home and different ways of learning in place. I argue that place is not something external with which we make a relationship, but a continual process which we can uncover, or 'bring to life,' to use one participant's phrase. My research shows how revealing our immersion in this part of the world, here and now, can happen in many different ways, and is contingent upon person and context. Most significantly I put forward the idea of 'bringing mind to place.' This suggests that mind is a scaling phenomenon which can engage with wider (abstract) scales, but when we are thinking and learning on the same scale as our embodied awareness, phenomenologically the distinction between mind and body collapses. This contrasts with more abstract or classroom based experiences of learning, where mind and body are often working on contrasting scales.

I examine how the educational and philosophical findings interweave, and use a specific context (Glen Strae and the shieling at *Tom Clach Diontaichd*) to aid in this process. I draw on the ontology and pedagogy which emerge from the research and argue that my findings reflect not just on place-based education but also on this research process as well. These findings explore the deeper significance of place-based education and reveal an ontology of being in place. After setting out my conclusions I point out some of the implications of the research for methodologies and disciplines which were discussed during the thesis.

Section A – Exploring the ground

The first section of this thesis examines a wide variety of literature, largely academic, from other researchers' and scholars' work on place pedagogy and place ontology. The approach to this literature review is not to create a series of definitions, of place-based education, and ontology, which can then be tested or examined through research. Defining a concept necessarily distances it from its context and practice, it displaces it. As Kidner argues:

Defining a term unambiguously, through selected connections to other established concepts, is to ground it within an ecologically and ontologically impoverished reality – a process analogous to pinning a butterfly into one's collection. In both cases, we capture something – but the original reality we hoped to grasp has somehow disappeared, converting the flitting, the unpredictable, the dynamic, into something measurable but without vitality... when we try to isolate this 'thing' from its context (which includes us), it disappears! (Kidner, 2001, p. 294).

These ideas are further supported by Merleau-Ponty's claim that we can never step outside of life to look back into it, we always theorise from inside: "an exhaustive treatment [of life] is out of the question," (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p. 320). Or put another way:

...there is no inner man [sic], man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself," (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xii).

Thus the idea of attempting to fix meanings or definitions externally to my context, life, or place(s) is counterproductive to my approach.

The way that educators, philosophers or geographers have researched place is as important as their understanding of place, as well as the context (place) and conceptual framework within which their ideas sit. Using Kidner's analogy, this is the full 'ecology' of their work, and to simply take an idea from this work in isolation is like trying to understand a butterfly dead, dissected and removed from its web of life. As stated in the introduction, my approach to the scholarship is through the metaphor of place: I want to try to explore the research and thinking of others in context (as much as it is possible, still fluttering around!). The use of a praxis approach to examine the philosophical underpinnings and the possible educational implications of

the literature will go some way towards revealing the wider context of the scholarship.

The first chapter in this section examines ways of educating in place. Place-based approaches to learning are few and far between in the UK, and mostly located in the emerging discipline of 'outdoor learning,' (LTScotland, 2010). However 'place-based education' in the United States (e.g. Gruenewald & Smith (2008)), and 'place-responsiveness' in Australia (e.g. Cameron (2003)), amongst other educational thought, provide useful research and thinking through which to refine the practical element of my PhD inquiry. In many ways this chapter is introductory, but the initial exploration of this territory will show that much of this scholarship lacks theoretical depth. Having explored the philosophical question of the thesis in Chapter 3, it will be possible to return to this educational literature with a more critical eye in Chapter 4.

Examining the ontology of place through phenomenologists Heidegger (1977) and Merleau-Ponty (1968), and philosophers of place Casey (1993; 1997) and Malpas (1999), in Chapter 3, will result in the development of a theoretical position on place. This is then brought into dialogue with the educational debate in the first part of Chapter 4. The introductions to the two sides of the inquiry will then give way to more in-depth critique, as each implies questions for the other.

The rest of Chapter 4 briefly examines the contributions of wider scholarship on place to the emerging questions of the research. Bioregionalism (e.g. Snyder (1990)), geography (e.g. Massey (1994), Relph (1976) and Sack (1997)), psychology (e.g. Kidner (2001) and Roszak, Gomes & Kanner (1995)), and other disciplines, are discussed. This wider literature gives a second opportunity to critique the ontological and pedagogical position set out in the Chapters 2 and 3. Through these journeys into the literature, thought, and research around place, questions which are relevant to the context of my research will be critiqued and examined. This process will lead at the end of Section A to clarification of the inquiry into a set of research foci.

Chapter 2 – Place-based education

The introduction put forward three research questions for my inquiry: ‘what role do experiences of place have in education?’ ‘what is the ontology of place?’ and ‘how does place affect thinking and learning?’ This chapter will explore the educational literature in the UK, and globally, examining where and how other educators and researchers have posed the first, practical and educational, research question. This chapter (highlighted in red) can be seen in the logic of the whole thesis, on the conceptual map below.

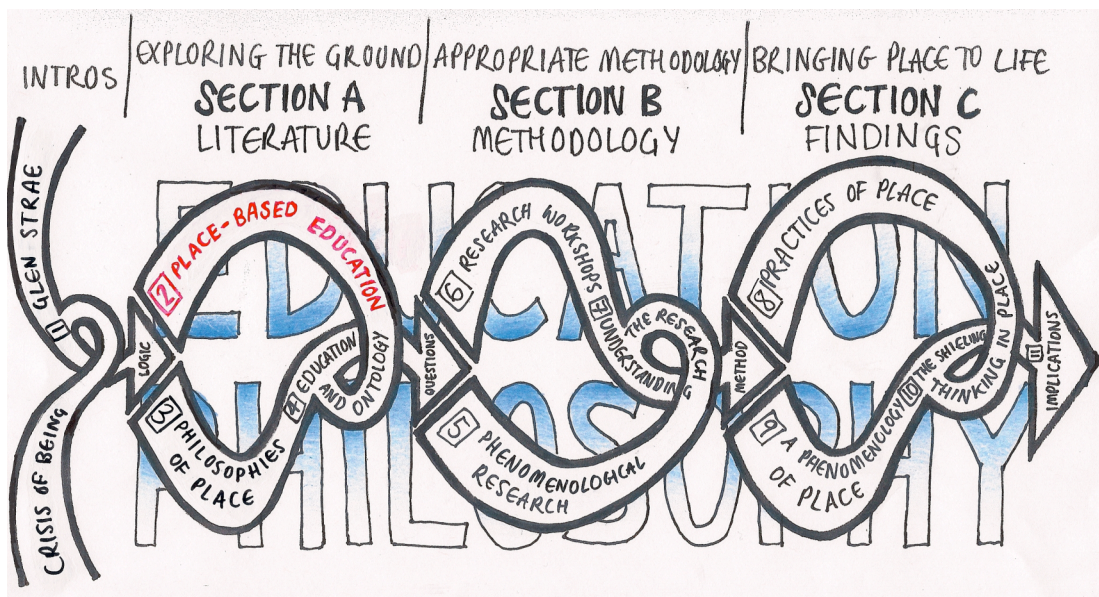


Figure 3. Conceptual map of the thesis for Chapter 2

2A – Place-based approaches in the United Kingdom

There are various documented and researched approaches within the United Kingdom which might initially seem to help with my research: ‘outdoor education,’ and ‘environmental education.’ Yet both will prove to be unhelpful in exploring place pedagogy. ‘Outdoor learning,’ which is an increasingly important strategy in Scotland’s new curriculum (LTScotland, 2010), offers a small amount of scholarship which can help refine my inquiry.

Outdoor education has been characterised as a mix of outdoor activities, personal and social education, and environmental education, (Higgins, 1995) (the diagram below which expresses these elements has undergone revision since it was developed e.g. Higgins (2003b)).

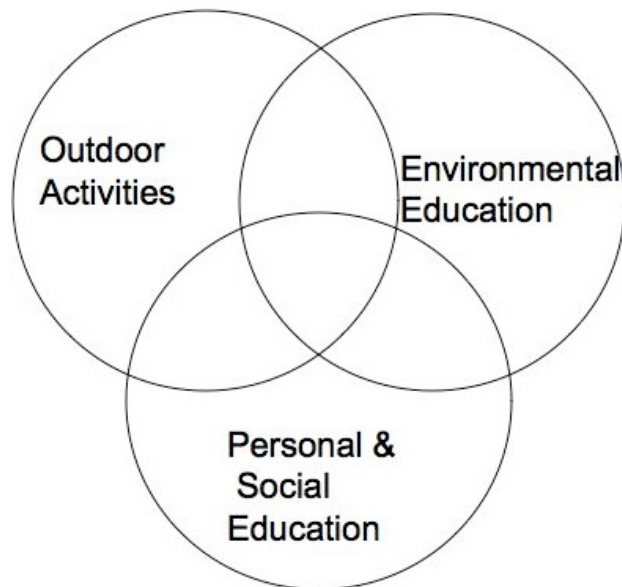


Figure 4. Higgins' outdoor education diagram

Research has show that these three elements imply ways of being in place: for example kayaking (Payne, 2003), working as a team through a ropes course (Brookes, 2003a), or learning about plants or human environmental impacts (Higgins, 1996a, 1996b; Payne, 1997). All are different, if often unconscious, ways of interacting with a social and physical environment; being in place. Yet, as will be clear below, UK outdoor education scholarship and research into the role of place in these three elements remains either unvoiced or only examined retrospectively. Explicit focus on place, as an experience in itself, is under-represented. If this research can be taken to adequately represent outdoor education as a field in this country, the implication is that place remains implicit. In developing this argument, I will deal with environmental education first, and then outdoor activities.

Environmental education

From the discussion of the environmental crisis in the introduction, environmental education might seem to be the most amenable of Higgins' three elements to a focus on place. However the approaches to environmental education within the UK can replicate Evernden's problem with 'environment,' (1985) as explored in the Chapter 1. For example, Takano contrasts UK and indigenous North American outdoor environmental education finding that the UK version was "displaced" and "uncritical," (Takano, 2004, p. 202). Nicol and Higgins highlight the complexity and externality of conceptions of environment in outdoor education in this country (Nicol & Higgins, 2007), and the need for this educational discipline to find ways to explore being part of rather than separate to nature, see also (Nicol, 2003).

These writers highlight one or more of the problems put forward by Evernden: environment is seen as something out there, separate from us which we go out into, problems are 'out there' to be solved. Often human cultural elements of the places used are obscured in favour of 'nature.' This nature is global, the environment is generic, or at best divided into ecosystems, rather than distinctive and local. Furthermore the learner is often profoundly displaced from home and everyday ways of being. The problem here is that 'environment' in UK environmental education is not a place through which we live, but an external concept explored by the use of different techniques in different venues.

Despite these problems, many possibilities for focus on place can be glimpsed within environmental education and the related concept of sustainability education (Bonnett, 2002, 2006; Fagan, 1996; Higgins & Kirk, 2006; Huckle & Sterling, 1996; Nicol & Higgins, 1998; Smyth, 1998), but they have not been explored further in this research. UK environmental education literature and research are not helpful in elucidating place-based approaches simply because they do not currently work with place as their focus. This is a crucial point in my research: I am not researching the ways of being-in-place implied by different forms of outdoor education. Rather I am

taking the opposite approach: exploring learning in the outdoors as a way of being in place. The aim is not to retrospectively understand the ways in which, say kayaking, or conservation activities, shape experience of place, but to understand how educational experiences can explore place, and the role these experiences can play in education. Place, rather than environment or adventure, is the explicit aim.

Retrospective place in outdoor education

John White's research (1998; 2005), highlights similar problems with 'outdoor education' as a discipline within which I might pursue my research. The issue here is the type and focus of the outdoor activities which are a part of outdoor education. White attempts to ask why outdoor educators do not acknowledge (certain aspects of) place. It is an important piece of research, and apparently novel within the UK. White contrasts the experience of place of Gaelic speaking 'locals' from the Isle of Skye, with that of outdoor educators who work on the island. The first group work in the outdoors, often in the fishing industry, while the focus of the second group is on providing outdoor activities. Some of these are overtly educational, others being recreational; they include activities like sea-kayaking or mountain-climbing. Despite tidal, or geological knowledge, White found that the outdoor practitioners neglected the local place-names, stories or distinctive features of the venues they used.

Initially White's research might seem to be helpful, showing how certain elements of place are obscured or brought forward by different ways of working, or being. However, the problems with White's research highlight the difficulties of what I term the 'retrospective' approach to place, as seen above in the context of environmental education. White sets up a clear dualism between 'insider' and 'outsider.' With the emphasis on place as local knowledge, including things like heritage and place-names (which are mostly in the Gaelic tradition), it is not surprising when the Gaelic speaking 'locals' are found to know the 'place' better. Further, with aims being activities such teaching sea-kayaking, or leading groups safely up a

mountain, rather than exploring the place-names or local stories, the outdoor practitioners and educators White interviews understand these elements of place merely as “added value,” (White, 2005, p. 49).

White’s research does not allow place to be a process. Exploration of what place is is not undertaken as part of the research by the ‘locals’ or the outdoor educators. Place is defined by the researcher before the research (using Raffan (1993)), and then used to analyse testimony retrospectively. If the outdoor practitioners had been delivering an experience which centred on the exploration and inquiry into the many different facets of the place they worked in, rather than (or in addition to) delivering adventurous activities, then the research might have been very different. Also, while there are different forms that sense of place can take in the research, the range of options is fixed and polarised: White argues that time needs to be spent for the outdoor educators to become ‘inhabitants.’ Seemingly this is their only (best) option. The implication for my research is that place has been used here as an external concept laid on top of experiences for interpretation. Despite initial promise, neither the practical question of how to educate in place, nor the philosophical question of how we explore place as our way of being are investigated in White’s research.

There are further points which show how ‘outdoor education’ is unsuitable as a literature within which to explore my questions. Higgins highlights the way in which UK outdoor education is increasingly moving towards short ‘adrenaline filled’ activities (Higgins, 2003a). Research in the UK and beyond such as that undertaken by White (1998; 2005), Payne (2003) and Wattchow (2006; 2007; 2008) may explore the place-experiences of people within this trend, but the trend itself suggests the lack of opportunity for comprehensive long-term engagement with place ‘from the ground up’ in UK outdoor education (Beames, Atencio, & Ross, 2009). Twelve years since Higgins and Nicol pointed out the “conspicuous absence” (1998, p. 53) of place-based approaches and research within this field, the situation remains the same (Harrison, 2010c).

Outdoor learning and place

There is, however, another approach to education in the outdoors in the UK which holds more potential for this research: 'outdoor learning.' Focus on place is explicit within this field, and while still few and far between, there exists some research and writing on the topic. This examination of outdoor learning starts in my national context: Scotland. Scotland has its own education system and curriculum. Since 2004, the Curriculum for Excellence (LTScotland, 2004) has been phased into primary and then secondary schools. Outdoor learning is a clear priority within this curriculum (LTScotland, 2007, 2010). Outdoor learning is, simply, learning outdoors. Examining research into some different approaches to outdoor learning in the UK will shed further light on my question about education in place. It will become clear that while outdoor learning has the potential to focus on place, this is largely unfulfilled.

'Forest schools' is an education movement which involves regular learning experiences in local woodland. Originating in Scandinavia, it came to the UK, to Bridgewater school, in 1995 (Davis & Waite, 2005), and has spread widely since then. While forest schools might initially seem to have the potential to give scope and educational form to the importance of exploring local place, the evaluation and documentation of forest schools often takes a very instrumental approach to the outdoors. Forest schools are seen as places for improving physical and mental well-being, achievement, learning and behaviour. (This is in common with much of the current debate about the outdoors, which centres its usefulness in reaching certain outcomes, personal or environmental (e.g. Muñoz, 2009; RSPB, 2010)). Reports such as Borradaile (2006), S. Massey (2005), Maynard (2007) and Murray & O'Brien (2005), barely inquire into the impact of forest schools on children's 'being in place,' and at best see it in terms of generic understanding of 'the environment,' as opposed to any specific place.

Other forest schools research inquires a little more deeply into the idea of place (e.g. Davis & Waite (2005) and Murray (2003)). Robertson et al. (2009) provide the clearest indication of the potential forest schools holds to explore

place. In the appendix the authors spend some time writing about ‘sense of place’ as “learning about and connecting with the local community, culture, history, work and use of local resources,” (*ibid.* p. 42). They highlight the possibilities of developing this sense of place in the children’s locality, urban or rural, using experiential and creative ways to develop connections to the place, and the need for educators themselves to engage in this process.

Beyond forest schools, the clearest understanding of the role of place in documented outdoor learning approaches can be found in two examples from Scotland. They are regular localised learning projects: ‘Growing up with Loch Leven’, and ‘Outdoor Journeys.’ Growing up with Loch Leven is a project delivered in collaboration with several conservation bodies including the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (Scotland), to provide outdoor learning to a school local to the Loch Leven National Nature Reserve, throughout the pupils’ school lives (Scotland’s National Nature Reserves, 2010). The approach is specifically place-based, drawing on aspects of natural and cultural heritage in the reserve. This project shows a rationale and structure in which place, time and locality are explicit concerns, (Gilbert, 2009).

Outdoor Journeys (Beames, 2008; Beames, Atencio & Ross; 2009, Beames, 2010; Beames & Ross, 2010) is a simple structure for outdoor learning, recently trialled in various educational establishments. Learners explore the locality around them, generating their own questions to research, study and share. In a recent paper examining the approach (Beames et al., 2009), the authors locate the development of this programme in critique of outdoor education, similar to my own voiced above, (*ibid.* pp. 32 – 33), and efforts to reduce barriers to outdoor learning.

However there is a deeper reason for locality here. Outdoor Journeys is explicitly place-based, arguing that children should know more about their locality, and that focusing on place allows cross-disciplinary work:

The underlying assumption is that directly interacting with ‘place’ will foster an appreciation of, and an ethic of caring for, the land and

its inhabitants (in every sense of the word). Outdoor learning can become a meaningful part of pupils' lives by being rooted within a familiar socio-cultural context, (Beames et al., 2009, p. 39).

The creation of, and research into, Outdoor Journeys can be seen as one answer to the practical question of this thesis: what role do experiences of place have in education? It raises questions and themes that will become important in this research: locality, time, barriers to outdoor learning, pedagogy, ethics.

Outdoor Journeys, in common with Growing up with Loch Leven (and forest schools), is a simple pre-designed structure which can be taken on by teachers. This leaves open an alternative strategy, pursued in this PhD, which is to allow teachers and educators to investigate and develop their own structures. A recent research project 'Teaching in Nature,' (Mannion, Fenwick, Nugent, & I'Anson, forthcoming), has relevance here, as a study which supported teachers inquiring into the use of National Nature Reserves for outdoor learning. While the study was focused on 'nature' and nature reserves, the concept of place, again retrospectively, is significant within the research. The researchers argued that teaching strategies could be 'place-ambivalent,' 'place-sensitive,' or 'place-essential,' (Mannion et al., forthcoming). While the teachers in the study did not take part in developing this typology, it indicates, in concert with Outdoor Journeys and Growing up with Loch Leven, a growing concern, in Scotland at least, with place within outdoor learning.

Exploring outdoor and environmental education, and then focusing on outdoor learning through forest schools and localised learning projects, has shown the limited amount of attention given to place within UK educational scholarship. There are other examples of place-based approaches, for example *www.placebasedlearning.co.uk*, supported by Carnegie UK (2007, 2009), and there may also be other approaches in the UK which have not been widely reported or researched. But clearly more research needs to happen. I will now examine American and Australian research. Much of the

UK literature draws heavily on this literature, which will be explored in next two parts of this chapter.

2B – Place-based education in the United States

‘Place-based education’ is a term coined in the United States, and is widely used there. Recent books such as *Place-based education in global age: Local diversity* (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008), and *Place- and community-based education in schools* (Smith & Sobel, 2010), show the breadth and development of the field. This approach came out of the US environmental education movement (Sobel, 2004), from programmes such as ‘Foxfire’ (Puckett, 1989), and from wider American movements such as ‘bioregionalism’ (Berry, 1985) and ‘ecological justice’ (Bowers, 2002). Place-based education has strong advocates in both rural and urban schools (Russell-Ciardi, 2006; Shamah and MacTavish, 2009).

While there is a longer history of place-based education, it has become more prominent in the last two decades through the work of Gruenewald (2003a; 2003b), Woodhouse & Knapp (2001), Orr (1992), Smith (2002), Sobel (2004) and Thomashow (2002). The presence of a dedicated education and research organisation is indicative of the strength of this field in the US: the Place-based Education Evaluation Collaborative (PEEC) <http://www.peecworks.org>, works to promote and research place-based education in the USA (PEEC, 2008).

If there is a single core understanding of the aim of place-based education it encapsulates various themes: strengthening local identity and economy, contextualising education in the everyday experience of children, celebrating the uniqueness and diversity of places, and developing a ‘sense of place’ which leads to care, responsibility, and sustainable futures (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008). The argument is that focusing on the local can counteract the idea that everything good is somewhere else:

...I wanted students to discover that the people who live in this small community, which often seems so boring to them, have had vibrant

lives of accomplishment and sadness, lives of large and small victories as well as failures, (Bishop, 2004, p. 67).

Both Greenwood (formerly Gruenewald) and Sobel are clear that place-based education aims to deal with the interdependence of cultural and environmental issues within places (Gruenewald, 2008; Sobel, 2004).

Equally, both of these writers argue that place-based education is an alternative strategy to what Sobel calls “catastrophe education” (2004, p. 9). The thesis is that grounding in, and love for, places needs to be developed before people are asked to ‘save’ things (see also Gruenewald (2003b) and Sobel (1996)). Part of the logic here seems to be that people’s agency happens in places, their shopping, recreation, and energy consumption converge on their home. Thus understanding and acting within this scale is beneficial. This clearly connects to wider issues and scales: food often comes from around the world; energy and waste often travel large distances. Thus learning about the locality does not have to be parochial, impact in one place spreads out to others, and other places can be understood in relation to the one in which we find ourselves (Orr, 1992).

The actual process of American place-based education takes many forms, and is largely school based. Greenwood defines it as ‘natural history’ (an extant discipline in the United States which deals with biology, ecology, and geography), ‘cultural journalism’ and ‘action research’ (Gruenewald, 2003a). Smith has an alternative summary of the elements of place-based education: cultural studies, nature studies, real-world problem-solving, internships and entrepreneurial opportunities, and induction into community processes, (Smith, 2002). Much of the American literature is practical rather than academic in focus, describing the process, design and execution of specific projects. In addition to Greenwood and Smith’s definitions, this literature shows the diversity of forms which place-based education can take: from entrepreneurial attempts to provide skills and knowledge for sustainable rural economies (Shelton, 2005), place-based approaches to teaching English (Bishop, 2004; Hodges, 2004; Lindholdt, 1999), or social studies (Resor, 2010), to indigenous education (Emekauwa, 2004; Gay, 2004; Takano, Higgins, &

McLaughlin, 2009), localised environmental justice for communities (Senechal, 2008), and whole schools founded on place-based principles (Sorensen, 2008), for example the Watershed School in Alaska (www.thewatershedschool.com). Despite the different forms it is found in, in most cases place-based education is cross-curricular.

Place-based education has influenced the UK educational approaches to place seen in the first part of this chapter, and seems to hold a high potential for shaping this research. The question then arises as to how to interact with the discipline. Place-based education literature is a testament to the localised diversity of an idea: each place-based project is itself a placed realisation of the approach. In this way, a wholesale import of one particular form of place-based education into my research would go against the whole ethos (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008). For example, if I were to take a project described by Sobel or Greenwood and simply apply it in Glen Strae, I run the risk of de-contextualising the place before I even start. American teachers and educators have responded to their distinct situations and implemented projects which fit, and succeed to a greater or lesser extent (as seen for example in Powers' evaluation (2004)). (The question as to what would differentiate American from UK approaches to place-based education, which might involve the contrast between two (large-scale) places, is interesting but left aside in this research). Despite the different 'placement' of this approach, there are important understandings to be taken from place-based education literature.

Lucas' (1979) definition of environmental education can be adapted to help sum up the practical ethos of place-based education (Harrison, 2010c). Place-based education can be understood as posing three questions to an educator such as myself:

- how do I educate *in* a place? (getting outside, doing different activities, starting projects, engaging with the community and environment)

- how do I educate *about* that place? (what stories, politics, history, ideologies, facts and feelings are part of this place?)
- how do I educate *for* that place? (what needs to happen here, what is sustainable for the culture, community, land, individuals?)

Clearly these questions provoke a different response in Glen Strae, than in rural Alabama, inner-city Chicago or an isolated Alaskan community. The implication for this inquiry is that educators in the UK, and those who might be involved in this research, can follow these questions and find ways of contextualising place-based education within their own educational venues.

On a more philosophical level, place-based education is a pedagogy which is sensitive to ways of being in place. Place-based education as a discipline shows awareness of Evernden's 'crisis of being,' and attempts, educationally, to meet the challenge of finding new ways of being in place (Gruenewald (2003a; 2003b; 2008) offers the most direct and in-depth treatment of this).

These ways of being aim to be practical, sustainable, seeing the whole reality in which we are embedded, not separating 'nature' from 'human,' not dividing environmental education from community education.

Thomashow's *Bringing the biosphere home* (2002), provides an example of how understanding ways of being in our local places, can be linked to wider global issues. For Thomashow, this is hugely enhanced by the use of digital technology (2002; 2010), (see also Triggs (2009), for an example based in the arts rather than sciences).

American place-based education shows how an explicit focus on exploring place educationally can happen in a variety of different guises. Key components of all these projects are: locality, extended periods of time, and collaboration between community and the school. A non-instrumental approach is also important: while some place-based education literature acknowledges that it can boost achievement (Emekauwa, 2004; Gibbs & Howley, 2001; Powers, 2004), living better in place (Orr, 1992) is the key aim. This develops further some of the themes which emerged from the examination of the UK literature. Furthermore I will use 'place-based education' as a label for the type of outdoor learning that I will be exploring.

This discipline will be returned to with a more critical eye in Chapter 4, having introduced the other literature relevant to the inquiry.

2C – Place-responsiveness in Australia

The role of place in Australian outdoor and environmental education has recently come under sustained scrutiny. Authors such as Brookes (1998; 2002a; 2002b), Cameron (2003; 2005; 2008; 2010; with San Roque 1997), Gough (2008), Preston (2004; with Griffiths 2004), Somerville (2007; 2010), Stewart (2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2006a; 2006b; 2008; with Müller 2009), Wattchow (2006; 2007; 2008), Wattchow & Brown (2011), and Payne & Wattchow (2008; 2009), have all contributed to this debate within the last decade. (This interest is also increasing in New Zealand, for example (Brown, 2008; Hill, 2008; Legge, 2008)). Much of this work has been motivated by the authors' desire to de-colonise and re-contextualise outdoor and environmental education practices. These are perceived to have been directly imported from other countries, including the UK (e.g. Brookes (2002a), and Stewart (2004b)). This argument might imply that such practices are in place within the countries they come from. However, the discussion in part 2A of this chapter, as well as arguments from 2B, resonate with the Australian critique of the placelessness and universality of outdoor and environmental education, and the need to *place* place-based education.

The educational techniques that are mostly examined and critiqued in the Australian literature are not school-based teacher-led outdoor learning, but outdoor education projects in schools or education centres, or university teacher education courses. The projects usually take groups for one-off periods of time, and often the course takes place far from the participant's home. Brookes' critique of 'character building' in outdoor education (2003a; 2003b) implies the need to consider the context, location, and connection to everyday life of outdoor education courses. Wattchow's work shows how canoeing trips, which often form part of these courses, shape certain experiences of place (Payne & Wattchow, 2008; Wattchow, 2006, 2007, 2008).

In a similar approach to White (1998; 2005), Wattchow's research uses a particular concept of place to critique the 'placelessness' of some outdoor education techniques, and suggests the potential for them to be more responsive to the places they use. (As one of the very few examples of systematic phenomenological research into place-based education, Wattchow's thesis (2006) and subsequent papers will be a continual reference point throughout my thesis.) Furthermore Wattchow and Brown suggest a variety of ways in which place is denied in education, including romantic ideas of nature, and the use of adventure activities (Wattchow & Brown, 2011). This fits, albeit from within a different context, with my argument that UK outdoor education and environmental education literature is not particularly helpful for my inquiry (see p. 30).

Payne (1997), in a similar critique to Evernden, but with a specific focus on environmental education, criticises current conceptions of environment, and puts forward a 'critical ecological ontology.' Australian practitioners and researchers could be understood as exploring this ontology in different ways, creating 'place-responsive' programmes which explicitly focus on how we are in the world, or more specifically, in places. Stewart explores the practical possibilities of expeditions on the Murray River, taking account of many of the different environment, cultural, historical, and personal dimensions of the river-place (Stewart, 2004b, 2008). In some way this offers a positive response to Wattchow's critique of the narrowness of place-experience in the dominant style of encountering Australian rivers through white-water expeditions.

Alongside motivation to re-place outdoor and environmental education, there are similar 'environmental' concerns within the Australian research to those seen in the UK and US. These motivations revolve around the role of place in developing local sustainability, critical understandings of culture, ecology and history, and strengthening sense of place and belonging to an area. Cameron writes of the possibilities for place-education to stimulate an ethic of care for local places (Cameron, 2003). Slattery explores how outdoor education can actually obscure the environmental history of places,

suggesting re-localization and a shift of focus away from 'wild' and 'pristine' places (Slattery, 2001). Yet one of the key features of Australian life, highlighted by Stewart and Brookes is that the vast majority of the population are city dwellers (Brookes, 2002a; Stewart, 2006b). Both point out the connection between urban lives and lack of environmental knowledge, which implies the need to get out into 'wilder' places to develop this knowledge.

The contrast between caring and understanding for the far away places visited for outdoor or environmental education, and our relationship with our home places is explored within this literature (e.g. Stewart (2003) and Young (2002)). Time is a central issue, both speed and duration. Payne and Wattchow suggest that place-based education is necessarily a 'slow pedagogy,' (2009). While the work of Stewart and Wattchow is about developing an understanding of a place visited once, Preston (2004) (also with Griffiths, 2004) and Brookes (2002a) develop projects which return to places over considerable time. Thus, in a way that American place-based education does not, Australian place-responsiveness poses the question of what it means to care for places we are in only briefly, and also the temporary nature of all our 'placement.' This is congruent with Wattchow and Brown's case studies (2011), which strongly feature movement: journeys, or camps away from home, reflecting the development of place-responsiveness out of more traditional outdoor education practices (in contrast to US place-based education, which developed from classroom education).

Wattchow and Brown's recent book (2011) sums up these various considerations and trends within Australian, and New Zealand, 'place-responsive' education, examining critical perspectives, philosophical underpinnings, and case studies of projects. They suggest four signposts which can guide place-responsiveness: 1. being present in and with a place, 2. the power of place-based stories and narratives, 3. apprenticing ourselves to outdoor places, and 4. the representation of place experiences, (*ibid.* p. 182).

2D – Implications

Both American and Antipodean literature on place and education have many implications for the UK. These include critiques of ‘place-less’ forms of education, investigation into the ways in which current educational forms shape experience of place, questions of indigeneity and more. The particular dimension I am exploring is the possibility for education to be responsive to particular places, and to explore the different qualities and dimensions of that place. American and Australian place-based education thus provide a literature within which to situate my practical research question.

What emerges from the literature review so far is an indication of the ways in which exploration of place might have educational importance, a question that will be pursued further as my inquiry develops. The literature shows how place provides a scale on which learning can be experienced in everyday locations, contextualised, and wider connections drawn. The scholars examined here argue that a focus on place allows education to be critical of current globalising trends, and ask what can be contributed to the well-being of the places explored. The three questions put forward in part 2B of this chapter: how to educate ‘in,’ ‘about’ and ‘for’ places, can start the process of embedding place into educational practice.

Beyond American and Australian schools of thought (between which exchange is beginning to occur), place in outdoor learning features in other countries e.g. in Thailand (Sahasewiyon, 2004) and in Norway (Cohen & Milne, 2007). Language is a barrier for my wider exploration here, in particular through the use of the term ‘place’ and its connection into the wider (western and English-speaking) geographical, anthropological and philosophical literature (examined in Chapter 4). (Another example of the restriction of language would be the use of the word ‘education’ which implies formal learning settings, this significance is not carried by some Scandinavian concepts, particularly *friluftsliv* (Nielsen, pers. comm.)). Given these points, projects could focus on place and education without actually using those words.

Despite these limitations it is clear that local indigenous culture and its role in education, as explicitly linked to place-based education by Takano et al. (2009), is a strong international theme (see for example van Damme & Neluvhalani (2004), Lowan (2009), Shiva (1993) and Reid, Teamey, & Dillon (2002)). The 'friluftsliv' approach to outdoor life in Scandinavia, which draws on cultural and adventurous activities in the outdoors could also be seen in a similar context to place-based education (Cohen & Milne, 2007; Gelter, 2000; Henderson, 2001; Sandell, 1993). There are also Canadian writers who deal with similar issues around place, emerging out of outdoor and environmental education literature (Alsop, Dippro, & Zandvliet, 2007; Asfeldt, Urberg, & Henderson, 2009; Beames, 2006; Brody, 1997; Curthoys, 2007; Curthoys & Cuthbertson, 2002; Raffan, 1993; Wason-Ellam, 2010), with a particular recent emphasis on indigenous education (Lowan, 2009; Swayze, 2009).

Throughout the rest of this thesis I will use the term place-based education to denote all approaches discussed in this chapter, for ease of terminology, acknowledging that there are probably as many versions of place-based education as there are places. Seen in the diversity of approaches outlined so far, place-based education is an open and flexible term, and as such provides a simple hook on which to explore experiences of place in education.

Australian scholars such as Brown feel that 'place-responsive education' better expresses the fluidity of place experiences, as opposed to 'place-based education' which for them implies a possible parochialism (Brown, forthcoming). The argument that place and place-based education must not be parochial or essentialist is developed further in the next two chapters, and is thus for me a key understanding of what *place experience* is, rather than the particular educational emphasis. This moves the argument onto the meaning of 'place' rather than 'responsiveness.' In addition the word 'place-responsive,' rather than being *based* in the ongoing process of place, might imply a lack of intimacy and agency at home.

I will focus on outdoor learning in Glen Strae as the 'home' context within which place-based education will be examined in my research. The existence of place-based education as an extant set of techniques, questions and

debates, especially in Australia and the United States, and the lack of a similar well-developed debate within Scotland, and in the UK as a whole, implies the need for exploration of place-based approaches to learning in this country. This PhD research constitutes a small effort in that direction. The fact that both American and Australian approaches, in addition to others from other countries, developed their own characteristics in their own contexts, implies that place-based education will need to be 'placed' in context in the UK. Nevertheless certain themes are already clear from this initial literature review: locality, time, interdisciplinary approach, and sense of place. Clearly it will be important to consider these themes in my inquiry.

Chapter 3 – Philosophies of place

In the previous chapter I explored the precedent for my practical question ‘what role do experiences of place have in education?’ It was clear that there has not been much published research around this question in the UK, but the discipline of outdoor learning is starting to consider place. American and Australian debates on this issue occurred in greater number and depth. A series of issues and areas of inquiry were suggested in the previous chapter, including: time, locality, and home. In this chapter I will turn to the philosophical question ‘what is the ontology of place?’ This will address the philosophical side of my research, as seen (highlighted in red) on the conceptual map below, before combining the two concerns in the final chapter of this section.

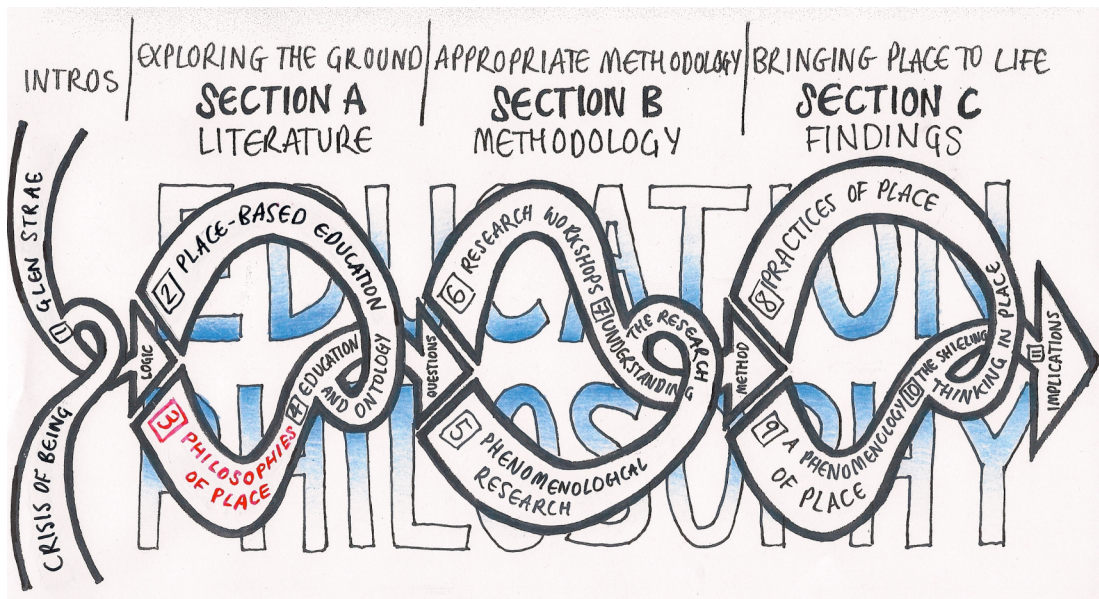


Figure 5. Conceptual map of the thesis for Chapter 3

3A – Beyond dualism

The philosophical challenge posed in the introduction was to envisage an ontology, or a way of being, which places us in the world, rather than separating us from it. Place-based education, as a mode of learning in place,

has been put forward in the previous chapter as a pedagogical focus for this challenge. In the current chapter, I will explore the philosophical debate around place and our interdependence with the world around us. Four key thinkers on place will be considered: Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Casey and Malpas. These philosophers are the most commonly referred to in the place-based education literature, and the wider literature on place (see Chapter 4).

The philosophical thread of this inquiry started with Evernden's thesis that the very word 'environment' betrayed our separation from the more-than-human world around us, and thus that the environmental crisis was a 'crisis of being,' (Evernden, 1985). The implication is that the destruction of habitats, species, and eco-systems occurs through our realisation of ourselves as entirely distinct from 'nature.' One of the frequently used labels for this ontological position, that non-human entities are merely things, is 'Cartesian dualism.' This points to the work of influential philosopher René Descartes as the originator of this division between the subject (thinking humans) and objects (everything else: trees, animals, rocks etc).

Descartes, a seventeenth century philosopher, used a method of doubt to try to establish unshakable, indubitable foundations for what existed (Descartes, 1996). He found that he could not doubt that he was thinking, hence the famous saying 'I think therefore I am.' This resulted in a division between thinking things, as the essence of what is true and human, and non-thinking matter: our bodies, other animals, objects and the physical world. Inherent in this division was also a valuation, which can be stated bluntly: minds (humans) and ideas are good, while the world and our bodies are bad. Despite the fact that Cartesian dualism, through the use of Descartes name, usually gets put firmly at this philosopher's door, it is symptomatic of wider thought in this era. In the seventeenth century Francis Bacon was suggesting that nature is entirely for the use and benefit of humankind, and Isaac Newton was putting forward ideas that could be understood as reducing the physical world to mathematical principles and the interaction of matter (Capra, 1997). Cartesian dualism thus grew out of the enlightenment era as a whole, and formed a paradigm for scientific investigation.

Before exploring what this ontology means for ideas of place, it is interesting to note the philosophical methodology used by Descartes. Descartes' method was to shut himself off from the 'distractions' of the world outside his study. With a limited use of real world examples, such as a piece of wax (Descartes, 1996), he devoted his attention to ideas, and logical and rational thought processes. The aim was not to be deceived by everyday experience of the world, the method requiring:

...a mind which is completely free from preconceived opinions and which can easily detach itself from involvement with the senses, (*ibid.* p. 5).

This prioritisation of the mind, and assumption that pure thinking should and could be distanced from body, sensuous experience, or world, already assumed the very dualism, the separation of ideas and mind from matter and body, which came to be associated with Descartes.

The key point here, which runs through this thesis, is that methodology matters as much as content. The approach to an investigation will have power over the outcomes, as much as the choice of what is investigated. In this case, Descartes' assumptions about the nature of good philosophical thought as objective and disembodied, predisposed him to a line of inquiry which found the mind and body to be utterly separate (Fox, 1995b). The interwoven and cyclical nature of thinking and being is clear, and holds no less for my own thinking as it does for Descartes'. Descartes' way of being a philosopher, shut off from the world, in his own head, influenced his thought. I will use 'place' as an alternative to Cartesian ontology, yet it will be as important to put forward a different methodology of thinking, an alternative way of doing philosophy, as it will be to suggest a new ontology. The question here is: if I want to think about place, what is the best (placed) way to do this?

In terms of methodology, a Cartesian approach to my PhD would involve no interaction with people or places at all, rather I would remain in my office! Equally the dualism between mind and matter, implied in this position, makes it very difficult to understand how people (principally minds, in the

Cartesian approach) interact with their physical surroundings. For example, as I walk down the Landrover track in Glen Strae, I feel and respond to the uneven pebbled surface underneath my boots. Assuming the physical world of climate change, rain showers and rocky paths is real, how does it give me this feeling? In other words how do objects, like pebbles and paths interact with subjects, like my mind and feelings? If, as we commonly think, feelings and ideas are non-physical things, and the world is made of physical stuff, how do these two relate? It is not possible to open up my brain and point to these feelings. Even if a neuro-surgeon points to some electrical pulses, these are not feelings as I experience them. Thus the question remains: what is the relation between what is assumed to be physical, and the mental? This brief example shows how much Cartesian dualism is present in the way we think about the world and ourselves, and shapes the very problem it presents. It also highlights the realist position I have taken from the start, an understanding which assumes that the physical reality of Glen Strae, melting icecaps, and roaring stags are not dependent on me for their existence.

This question of the interaction between the physical and the mental is the 'mind-body problem,' a classic philosophical question (Mautner, 1997). The implication for understanding place, is that the two parts of my experience of a place (the path and my feelings of roughness and imbalance), are irreconcilable. My subjective feelings - thoughts and ideas - and the objective physical surroundings - the path and pebbles, land and sky - seem to exist in two different spheres. The mind-body problem is complex and is one of the key philosophical questions, but it is only one dimension of the crisis of being that is our dislocation from the world around us. Beyond the difficulties of understanding ourselves as separate minds and bodies, Cartesian ontology separates the human world from the natural world. (As Evernden would perhaps point out, the understanding of these two words 'human' and 'natural' as diametrically opposed is symptomatic of the problem itself).

Evernden's diagnosis of disembodiment and displacement from nature is shared by many (Birkeland, 2005; Kidner, 2001; Orr, 1992; Snyder, 1990).

Environmental thinkers have pointed to Cartesian dualism as the root of this way of being (Abram, 1996b; Brown & Toadvine, 2003; Capra, 1997; Payne, 1997), and thus the cause of the environmental problems we face. One of the schools of thought which puts across this view is 'deep ecology.' Examining some deep ecological ideas will help clarify the need for an alternate ontology, as well as a different approach to thinking, and the role that 'place' can have in these developments. This will sharpen the line of inquiry of my thesis.

3B – Deep ecology

'Deep ecology' was a phrase coined by Arne Naess (1973), in contrast to 'shallow ecology.' The latter is an approach to environmental problems concentrating on species protection, pollution reduction and other practical, technological and political solutions. Clearly these are necessary, but having examined Evernden's thought, a response to these solutions is already clear: they do not get to the heart of the problem. This is also Naess' perspective and shapes the whole deep ecology movement (Fox, 1995b; Sessions, 1995). Deep ecology, as opposed to shallow ecology, focuses on changing our way of being in the world at a fundamental level.

Fritjof Capra sums up deep ecology in this way:

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the major problems of our time cannot be understood in isolation. The threat of nuclear war, the devastation of our natural environment, the persistence of poverty along with progress even in the richest countries - these are not isolated problems. They are different facets of one single crisis, which is essentially a crisis of perception, (Capra, 1995, p. 19).

This change in perception deals with epistemology (how we know things), ontology (what there is), and ethics (what it is right to do). Deep ecologists do not reject practical solutions, but argue that they must occur within this wider 'paradigm shift,' (Capra, 1984, 1997).

In common with the foregoing analysis, Cartesian dualism is seen by various deep ecologists to be at the root of the crisis (Capra, 1995, 1997; Fox, 1995b; La Chapelle, 1988). However what is interesting is the scope and reach of the

deep ecological solution to this crisis. In his original 1973 paper Naess puts forward a series of ethical injunctions, for example the need to fight against pollution and resource depletion, and to promote local autonomy and decentralisation. Included in this ethics are statements about the value of all life: “biospherical egalitarianism,” and also about the fundamental reality of the world as an interdependent web of life (Naess, 1973). These ideas became the ‘deep ecology platform’ (Sessions, 1995), which helped to elucidate the core of deep ecology while allowing for different worldviews and interpretations within the approach.

From the deep ecology platform it is clear that one deep ecological response to Cartesian dualism is to point to ecological science as indication of the interconnectedness of humans and nature: the ways in which our food, health, and other basic physical needs are entirely dependent on the natural world. Further, the ethical dimensions of deep ecology aim to restore the value of the more-than-human world, counteracting the negative valuation of the physical world implied by Cartesian thought. There are also psychological dimensions here: Capra draws on the work of Gregory Bateson (1972) exploring how the mind extends beyond human bodies into ecosystems, to reject the Cartesian assumption that mind is solely human (Capra, 1997).

One deep ecological approach to re-embedding ourselves psychologically and epistemologically in the world is found in Naess’ own particular world view: ‘ecosophy-T,’ (named after his cabin at Tvergastein in Norway). The heart of this philosophy is that human self-realization occurs through ‘identification’ with wider and wider places around us, until we feel that the whole world is part of our identity (Bodian, 1995; Fox, 1995b; Naess, 1989). This then blurs the distinction between human and non-human. As our ‘self-realisation’ rests on the realization of the potential of the more-than-human world, ethical acts follow without need for injunctions. Our ‘ecological self’ is co-extensive with the rest of the world. Clearly this vision rests on a different ontology, or view of what humans and the world are, than Descartes idea of thinking (human) minds and inert nature.

Placing deep ecology

There are two problems with the approach to Cartesian dualism put forward by the deep ecologists discussed above. These problems reach beyond the critique of Descartes' ontology and impact on the wider deep ecological project of averting environmental crisis through changing our way of being in the world. The two problems are place-lessness and ontology. The two are, unsurprisingly, connected. Deep ecology often counters our Cartesian alienation from the world through partnerships with other disciplines: bioregionalism as a local and ecological politics is often seen as practical deep ecology (Davidson, 2007), as is ecopsychology as an understanding of our psychological connections to nature (Hillman, 1995; Thomashow, 1998). The ethics of deep ecology are well formed in the 'platform,' and a way of knowing (epistemology) of our wider place in nature is put forward as an educational project in *Thinking like a mountain* (Seed, Macy, Flemming, & Naess, 1993).

Yet all these elements of deep ecology expose an ontological gap. (This gap is particularly clear in Naess' ideas on identification and the ecological self. Debate continues on whether Naess' ideas define deep ecology or are simply one variant of it (Davidson, 2007; Fox, 1995b)). If I am a being which is part of wider ecological systems, both physically, ethically and psychologically, what kind of thing am I? What kind of thing is the world? Or, put another way, if I am in and with the world how do we interact? Deep ecology seems to be saying that I am an animal, with its strong reliance on ecological science. Yet Cartesian dualism was arguably part of the birth of modern science, including ecology. While Cartesian ontology might not allow us to identify our animal body as ourselves, there is no problem with understanding our (body's) physical interdependence with natural systems in this worldview (Evernden, 1985, p. 22). Thus the ontological position of deep ecology needs to go further than stating that we are animals, especially if it wants to explain how our minds engage with the natural world, and how we might move towards a deep ecological way of being.

This problem highlights an ambivalence in deep ecology, and wider environmental writing, about the nature of science (Evernden, 1985; Korfiatis, 2005; Nicol & Higgins, 2007). On one hand, through its Cartesian roots, science is seen as a way of being in the world which separates us from that world, through the scientific method and types of knowledge, particularly the ideal of objectivity (Abram, 1996b; La Chapelle, 1988). On the other hand it is science which contributes much of the knowledge about the nature of the crisis we face (Thomashow, 2002). Data on climate change, biodiversity loss etc. is often generated through the very scientific methods which some environmentalists argue distance us from nature.

Capra draws on cutting edge science: systems thinking, complexity and Gaia theories, to attempt to close this gap (Capra, 1997). For Capra this new systematic science overcomes our isolation from the world:

To overcome our Cartesian anxiety, we need to think systematically, shifting our conceptual focus from objects to relationships. Only then can we realize that identity, individuality and autonomy do not imply separateness and independence, (*ibid.* p. 287).

However even within this well-developed scientific view, the ontological problem remains. The critiques of science put forward by environmentalists still stand because science is not the best method for solving the crisis of being. It is not enough to know, or to 'prove' scientifically that we are in relationship with the world, we need *to be* in relationship. Objectively we are part of the world otherwise our actions would not be causing environmental problems, but we act as if we are not. What may be needed is more than an external understanding of our ecological interdependence, but an internal inquiry; a lived inquiry into what it means to be part of the world.

Yet when deep ecologists engage with this lived inquiry, or way of being, it is often in a globalised place-less way using ideas like 'nature' and 'environment.' Despite connections with bioregionalism, and encompassing different cultural milieus (Naess in Norway and Sessions in the USA), deep ecology generally focuses on nature as a whole, on global ecology. Little attention is given to locales where humans and nature have been intertwined for millennia, like Glen Strae, or urban locations (Booth, 2008). This is

particularly apparent in Naess' philosophy, where the ultimate goal is to move away from identifying with our local places and identify with the universe, (as seen in conversation with Bodian (1995, p. 27)). This globalising tendency is also seen in Fox's understanding of deep ecology (1995a, 1995b). An approach to nature and self which focuses on global problems and biosphere ethics, obscures the pressing ontological question of this thesis: how and what am I right here? (a problem echoed by Cheney in Fox (1995a, p. 273)). This problem means that despite Naess' claims that place is "important," (Naess, 1989, p. 144), (see also Drengson, 2001), place and locality might be 'missed out' in the deep ecological project, where focus could be always on the 'bigger' issues.

Again, this is not simply a philosophical problem: the lack of situated ontology is mirrored in the practical elements of deep ecology. For example, the 'council of all beings' as an educational approach to deep ecology is about 'nature' and 'the earth' as a threatened other that we need to relate to and through (Seed et al., 1993). The fact that even deep ecology has not shed Evernden's crisis of being is seen in the use of the words 'nature,' and 'environment' still with a sense of duality and otherness.

The collapse of the distinction between human and environment may be what Naess' has in mind with his idea of the ecological self, but debate within deep ecology indicates that it has not yet put forward an ontology which truly embeds us in the world. I feel that this may in part be due to the over-emphasis on 'nature,' when the question of my being in the world is initially a human question, then becoming a question of relationship between person and world. This ontological problem is magnified in Naess' own ecosophy-T. Identification with larger and larger places, from locale to globe to universe, takes us out of our bodily experience in the world and into a conceptual world of science. We move away from the question of human being and back into a world of abstraction and ideas; our separation from the world is maintained. This line of reasoning is echoed in eco-feminist critique of deep ecology, for example in Salleh (1984) and Kheel (1990) and also by

Kidner, who argues that identification subsumes the whole world into self without acknowledging difference (2001).

The environmental crisis is first and foremost a human problem, as Evernden states: we are the crisis. Moving away from our everyday experience in places seems to be unhelpful within the wider deep ecological project, and retains shadows of Cartesian duality and philosophical method. The various strands of deep ecology and associated disciplines such as eco-psychology and bioregionalism are doing much to meet the challenge of a paradigm shift in being, yet this analysis has shown one particular area in need of further work: ontology.

There are however alternatives to the 'ecological self.' There are other ways we can realise our embeddedness in the world which are grounded in our everyday experience, acknowledging the difference and uniqueness of our lives rather than aiming for one undifferentiated whole (myself as universe). Beyond deep ecology there are many other critiques of Cartesian ontology, and some of these thinkers put forward an alternative way of understanding our being in the world based on examining experience. Heidegger (1971; 1977) and Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1968) are both prominent figures in this respect and have been used to develop ideas within the environmental movement. These thinkers, plus others (e.g. Malpas (1999)) can be understood as taking what I call an 'ontological approach to place.' The next section will examine this, and explore the potential 'place' holds in revealing our being in the world in a way which is embodied and contextualised.

3C – Embedded ontologies

Despite well-developed ethical, psychological and epistemological positions, deep ecology as a possible solution to the environmental crisis has an ontological weakness. Having explored this, it is now possible to examine other ways of thinking about being in the world, with regards to place and the more-than-human, with a more critical eye. The chapter has thus far shown two deep and interwoven problems with Cartesian dualism, the

separation between mind and body, and between human and nature. This ontology is strongly implicated in the environmental crisis, and our general approach to thinking. Two particular critiques of Cartesian ontology, by Heidegger (1971; 1977) and Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1968) resonate with the understanding of the environmental crisis developed here, being focused on new understandings of the way we are in the world.

From the examination of deep ecology, it is clear that the way of being we need to engage with to overcome our alienation from the world will not be found in a scientific ontology alone. A new philosophical method becomes, again, as important as the content of the inquiry. Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty share a common philosophical methodology: phenomenology. Phenomenology, originating in the works of Husserl (1973), is explicitly focused on examining experience as it is lived in everyday contexts. The focus on lived experience (of place) provides a new starting point within this investigation for critique of Cartesian dualism, and brings back to the surface my third research question 'how does place affect thinking and learning?'

Phenomenological critique of Cartesian dualism

Both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty founded their philosophical legacies on critique of Descartes' dualistic ontology (Cooper, 2005; Langer 1990; Priest 1998). For Merleau-Ponty approaching the world through Cartesian eyes is deeply problematic. If the 'reflective,' or mental side of the dualism is followed we find ourselves isolated from the world, and unable to understand our perception of it. Equally if we examine the material or physical world we are also unable to account for our experience. These points are set out in the *Phenomenology of perception* (1962) and *The visible and the invisible* (1968). The opening sections of these two works are both dedicated to showing how neither idealism (seeing the world as only mind), materialism (seeing the world as only matter), nor dualism (as an attempt to combine the two positions) are suitable for understanding our being in the world. Merleau-Ponty rejects these positions for an embodied understanding of self and world (Priest, 1998).

Merleau-Ponty put it thus:

The first philosophical act would appear to be to return to the world of actual experience which is prior to the objective world, since it is in it that we shall be able to grasp the theoretical basis no less than the limits of that objective world, restore to things their concrete physiognomy, to organisms their individual ways of dealing with the world, and to subjectivity its inherence in history. Our task will be, moreover, to rediscover phenomena, the layer of living experience through which other people and things are first given to us, the system 'Self-others-world' as it comes into being, (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 66).

Returning to experience thus restores the balance between subjective and objective, and allows Merleau-Ponty to move beyond the mind-body problem by setting forward a thesis of how the two interact.

Merleau-Ponty's thesis will be examined later in this chapter, but first it is important to raise again the question of philosophical methodology.

Merleau-Ponty does not just reject Cartesian thought and ontology as unhelpful in understanding the world, he puts forward an explanation of why it seems so easy to fall into the trap of dualism. He is aware of the intimate relationship between the way of philosophising and the products of that philosophy:

...the philosopher is always implicated in the problem he poses, and there is no truth if one does not take into account, in the appraising of every statement, the presence of the philosopher who makes the statement, (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 90).

For Merleau-Ponty it is the "philosophy of reflection" which gives rise to our division of the world into subjects and objects, (*ibid.* p. 43). The reflective distance from our everyday being in the world, the re-examination of our experience in a rational logical way after the event, allows us to think dualistically. This poses a problem for philosophy: how do we think at the same time as we experience? If, when I am walking through Glen Strae, I attempt to think about my walking on the path, my experience changes, and I am no longer 'in' it. Merleau-Ponty acknowledges the impossibility of fully describing lived experience, but counsels holding this contradiction (1968). In this way philosophy changes from the effort to stand outside ourselves and describe life exhaustively. Merleau-Ponty's critique of Cartesian

dualism implies that such a philosophical project is misleading. Rather philosophy is a process of examination from in the midst of life, and by implication for my research, in the midst of place.

The phenomenological methodology which Merleau-Ponty puts forward does not aim to define and analyse what can only be experienced through living. But he also argues that there is more to do than simply acknowledge that we are, we exist: philosophy can aid in our being in the world through a process of 'interrogation:'

Philosophy therefore does not seek to analyse our relationship with the world, to undo it as if it had been formed by assemblage; but it also does not terminate by an immediate and all-inclusive acknowledgement of Being, of which there would be nothing more to say... rather, it remains a question, it interrogates the world and the thing, it revives, repeats, or imitates their crystallization before us, (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 100).

As mentioned in the introduction, Merleau-Ponty is arguing that we cannot stand outside the process of life, we are always in it, we are:

...dense, open, rent beings of which an exhaustive treatment is out of the question, (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p. 320).

Thus philosophy is an incomplete lived process.

Heidegger also starts his philosophical project with challenges to Cartesian dualism. In a similar critique to Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger claims that our objective understanding of the world around us only emerges when we move back from our engagement with the world, (Cooper, 2005). However Heidegger goes further than Merleau-Ponty in examining the dangerous realisation of Cartesian ontology. Heidegger examines the way of being in the world that sees nature merely as "standing-reserve," as objects solely for our own exploitative use (Heidegger, 1977, p. 18). For Heidegger, 'technology' is the mode through which this exploitation is accomplished, and Dreyfus calls this a "technological understanding of being," (Dreyfus, 1993, p. 304).

Evernden draws heavily on Heidegger's thought, and in the ideas of the technological 'enframing' of the world, and the damage this does to both ourselves and the world itself, we see Evernden's crisis of being:

As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as an object, but does so, rather, exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve. Meanwhile man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth. In this way the impression comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself, (Heidegger, 1977, pp. 26 - 27).

This is not an outright rejection of technology, but rather Heidegger is exploring the mutual damage that a technological ontology wreaks both on humans and the world: the earth is damaged, and people themselves cease to be human, but merely objects available for use by myself as I encounter nothing but my own needs and ego in the world. Authors argue that Heidegger feels that this devastating picture is the 'culmination of modern metaphysics,' hence bringing us back to Descartes and the ontological nature of the problem, (Cooper, 2005; James, 2002). As Dreyfus puts it:

The danger, then, is not the destruction of nature or culture but certain totalizing kinds of practices - a levelling of our understanding of being. The threat is not a problem for which we must find a solution, but an ontological condition that requires a transformation of our understanding of being, (Dreyfus, 1993, p. 305).

This returns to the central theme of this chapter: the need for a new ontology. And it is possible to see the parallels between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, both of whom locate that new ontology in a phenomenological examination of our way of being. Yet Heidegger provides a more in-depth analysis of the ontological crisis we are in. His discussion of technology and the way we see nature simply as objects for our use, is more overtly aligned with environmental concerns than Merleau-Ponty, and this has made him one of the principal philosophers drawn on in environmental thinking (Langer, 1990; Macauley, 1996). Heidegger also addresses the methodological issue:

the need to re-examine our ways of being, in the light of technology, and find other ways of being in the world.

Heidegger on technology and place

James argues that Heidegger's new way of being is in 'releasement towards things,' (James, 2002). Here we see things as they are, rather than merely as they could be used by us, and this reveals usually overlooked aspects of our place. James argues that this is not so much a 'frame of mind,' as a 'frame of body:'

...releasement is exemplified not by the environmental philosopher serenely pondering the possibilities of reawakening a respect for things, but by the skilled craftsman attuned to the materials with which he or she works, (*ibid.* p. 4).

Beyond this arguably romantic image, Heidegger puts forward a more specific critique which brings the idea of place back into the debate, as an alternative ontology.

James sums this up as follows:

Heidegger maintains that the dominance of the technological understanding of the world manifests itself as an estrangement from the world, an existential sense of homelessness. Technological man, swept along in the blind currents of fashion, fluid money markets and job flexibility, is portrayed as being no longer in touch with the earthiness of things. His is an all-too-human world, a world of moulded plastic, asphalt, and air-conditioned offices, in which there is no sense of 'the earth.' Moreover, distracted by mobile phones, televisions, and the Internet, his attention is constantly elsewhere. Technological man has lost his connection with the ground beneath his feet; Heidegger claims that he has lost his rootedness in the world, (James, 2002, pp. 2 - 3).

Cooper and Pattison have similar interpretations, (Cooper, 2005; Pattison, 2000).

Heidegger can be seen as implying that the Cartesian dualistic ontology, our way of being and thinking ourselves separate from the world, has made us placeless. And further, our placelessness is at the heart of the environmental crisis. These ideas have also been associated, less commonly, with Merleau-Ponty (Cannatella, 2007; Langer, 1990). Heidegger is the key philosopher

who makes the connection between placelessness, ontology and environmental crisis.

However, when he moves from critique to new understanding, Heidegger's thought becomes less useful to this inquiry. Heidegger's exploration of what it means to be *in* place, rather than out of it, in terms of 'dwelling', is problematic and obscure. His other ideas on place as a 'clearing for things,' as 'building,' and as the culmination of the 'fourfold' of 'earth and sky, divinities and mortals,' (Heidegger, 1971) are romantic and nostalgic. This has already been seen in the romantic contrasts between technology and pastoral life seen in Heidegger's critique. As will be discussed further in the next chapter, Heidegger's ideas of dwelling in place can imply a lost paradise, or a fixed, unchanging and exclusive state. The key point at this stage of the discussion is that Heidegger's concept of dwelling is not an ontology which helps us understand the ways in which minds and bodies, sentient beings and physical environments, interact. Dwelling is a symptom of the environmental crisis, a way of life that we cannot have and thus romanticise, rather than a potential solution or way forward. What is needed is a renewed understanding of how we are embedded in the world. Thus while Heidegger shows how our ways of being have been reduced by modern thought and modern life, a different approach is needed to find solutions.

Merleau-Ponty's ontology

Merleau-Ponty on the other hand, while having less to say about the physical manifestation of Cartesian ontology, puts forward a detailed analysis of the ways in which we are intertwined with the world. As a new way of understanding that moves us beyond the mind-body problem, exploring the subject and objects' interwoven but distinct nature, Merleau-Ponty's thought is very important (Abram, 1996a; Brook, 2005; Clarke, 2002; Dillon, 1988; Johnson & Smith, 1990; Langer, 1990; Macauley, 1996; Priest, 1998), and thus pertinent to the ontological inquiry in this thesis. With a specifically

environmental focus, Merleau-Ponty's ontology has the promise of helping us understand how we relate to the 'other,' to the more-than-human world.

Langer, who suggests that Merleau-Ponty's ontology can aid the deep ecology movement, puts it this way:

At issue here are not only our relations with 'the other' - more specifically, with the nonhuman other - but also the entire ontology that underpins our dominant Western conception of alterity [otherness]. An appropriate response to 'the environmental crisis' thus requires no less than a rejection of our present, predominantly Cartesian ontology, and the development of a radically different ontology... For Merleau-Ponty, self and nonself, human and nonhuman, intertwine in a mutual enfolding, such that comprehension itself becomes a relation of 'embrace' with the other, (Langer, 1990, p. 115).

So what is Merleau-Ponty's ontology? His critique of Cartesian dualism, and attempts to understand how perception melds us into the world feature throughout his philosophical career, but Merleau-Ponty's ontology comes towards fruition right at the end of his life, (Cataldi & Hamrick, 2007).

Unfinished at the time of his sudden death, *The visible and the invisible* (1968), gives the fullest articulation of Merleau-Ponty's ontology.

In *The visible and the invisible*, Merleau-Ponty argues that we, as embodied beings, and the world as we experience it are all the same 'flesh:'

...because our flesh lines and even envelops all the visible and tangible things with which nevertheless it is surrounded, the world and I are within one another... Each landscape of my life, because it is not a wandering troop of sensations or a system of ephemeral judgements but a segment of durable flesh of the world, is qua visible, pregnant with many other visions besides my own...When I find again the actual world such as it is, under my hands, under my eyes, up against my body, I find much more than an object: a Being of which my vision is a part, a visibility older than my operations or my acts, (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 123).

Here we see our immersion into the world is made possible by the fact that we are 'segments' of that world, we are among others: the world contains other 'visions.'

Yet Merleau-Ponty is not saying that 'it is all one.' He holds the seeming paradox of being part of, but separate from the world, through two complementary processes or ideas. *Chiasm*, and *écart* (or 'dehiscence'), are his words for the intertwining and the separating of subject and world. Chiasm is the "reciprocal insertion and intertwining" of subject and object, (*ibid.* p. 138), yet:

...this does not mean that there was a fusion or coinciding of me with it [the world]: on the contrary, this occurs because a sort of dehiscence opens my body in two, and because between my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things, (*ibid.* p. 123).

What Merleau-Ponty is trying to do here is complex for many reasons: he is aiming to describe the essence of experience, from outside that experience, and he is struggling with a language that is deeply Cartesian (Abram, 1996b). He is also attempting to put forward something fundamentally new (Brook, 2005). The section of *The visible and the invisible* called 'The intertwining – the chiasm' reads more like poetry and metaphor than orthodox philosophy. Yet Merleau-Ponty is working from a very simple lived example: our body. We can be both touched and toucher, and this reversibility, the fact that we are both subject and object in experience is the cornerstone of his ontology:

That means that my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is a perceived), and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world reflects it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world, (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 248).

There are two important implications of this ontology for the environmental crisis. The first and most obvious is the way in which Merleau-Ponty elucidates our interdependence with the world around us:

...recognizing [our] own embodiment as entirely internal to, and thus wholly dependent upon, the vaster body of the Earth - the only possible course of action is to begin planning and working on behalf of the ecological world [we] now discern, (Abram, 1996a, p. 82).

For Abram, implicit within Merleau-Ponty's thought is the possibility of sentience in the more-than-human world, breaking down the Cartesian privilege accorded humanity as the only thinking things (this is also something explored by Evernden (1985)). Abram's interpretation of

Merleau-Ponty's thought for the question of non-human sentience is contested by other scholars (Brook, 2005; Clarke, 2002; Dillon, 1998).

Merleau-Ponty on place

Beyond his rich descriptions of our interdependence with the world, the second implication of Merleau-Ponty's ontology, is less obvious, but more important for this thesis. This is the interpretation of his ontology as an ontology of place. Merleau-Ponty himself did not say very much about place, but he pointed out that phenomenologically we are not in abstract space:

Space is no longer... a network of relations between objects such as would be seen by a witness to my vision or by a geometer looking over it and reconstructing it from outside. It is, rather, a space reckoned starting from me as the zero point or degree zero of spatiality. I do not see it according to its exterior envelope; I live in it from the inside; I am immersed in it, (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p. 309).

Low interprets this by pointing out that:

Space is always experienced by an embodied, situated observer. As it is so perceived, space is experienced as a non-Euclidean voluminosity that gradually bends around the perceiver, (Low, 2000, p. 45).

In the clearest definition of the role of place in structuring our experiences, Merleau-Ponty talks about:

...this indestructible tie between us and hours and places, this perpetual taking of our bearings on the things, this continual installation among them, through which first it is necessary that I be at a time, at a place, whatever they be, (1968, p. 121).

Understanding 'place' as 'embodied space,' Merleau-Ponty can be seen as making a point in parallel with his critique of Cartesian dualism. Place is how we experience the world before we reflect on it, the conception of space as well as the division between subject and object arises after the event, in reflection. Put another way, place is embodied, lived from the 'inside,' and the concept of space only emerges with objective thinking. Place as the 'originary interrelatedness with the world,' as Clarke puts it, draws out the implications of Merleau-Ponty's work for this inquiry into place (Casey, 1991, 1997; Clarke, 2002; Macauley, 1996). It is also worthwhile to note the argument that place is experientially prior to space, also held by

philosophers Casey and Malpas. This allows my inquiry to sidestep much of the discussion of the relationship between space and place, see for example (D. Massey, 2005).

We are finally in a position to bring together the various threads of this chapter. In Merleau-Ponty's ontology we can glimpse a non-Cartesian, embodied, and deeply interdependent understanding of our being in the world. We are intertwined, yet distinct and distinctive elements of a whole, with all the psychological, political and ethical implications this brings. The 'environment' out there, and us 'in here,' cease to be useful ways of understanding, rather we are 'emplaced' in the world (Lukenchuk, 2006). Merleau-Ponty's analysis shows how the very act of perception implies a meeting and intertwining between us and our surroundings. This is not with the world as a whole, but specifically with where we are, our place, our "landscape," (2004, p. 294), where we are 'installed.' Casey sums this up:

Merleau-Ponty helps us to realize that space is ever different from place to place, and from body to body: and one because of the other. For my flesh is finely meshed with the world's flesh - and thus with the places presented and sedimented within the world: a place-world in which I can live and move and have my being, (Casey, 1997, p. 238).

3D – Place philosophies

As is clear from the foregoing discussion, I will be using 'place' in quite a specific way throughout this thesis. Place for me is an ontological process whereby we realise our unique integration and interdependence with the world around us. I will call this an 'ontological approach to place.' This understanding arises from the issues discussed in this chapter: the need for an ontology which moves beyond Cartesian dualism, which commits us back into the social and natural world. Merleau-Ponty's idea of flesh is crucial here, as Casey puts it:

In such flesh, the fibres of culture and nature compose one continuous fabric. Interwoven thus, these fibres are inseparable in experience even if they are distinguishable upon analysis or reflection, (Casey, 1993, p. 256).

Place is the context for our being, and anchors us to where we are rather than to an abstract deep ecological universe. In the next chapter I will contrast my

ontological approach to place with the many other interpretations of place: e.g. geographical and psychological. However there are two key modern philosophers of place, Casey (1993) and Malpas (1999), who help clarify and support the current philosophical discussion.

As Casey points out in his book *The fate of place: A philosophical enquiry*, (1997) by its very ubiquity, place has often been ignored by philosophers. His work *Getting back into place: Toward a renewed understanding of the place-world*, (1993) and Malpas' *Place and experience: A philosophical topography*, (1999) provide recent exceptions to this dearth. In *Getting back into place*, Casey takes a linguistic and experiential approach to place, exploring place through meanings in our language and the way we live our lives. He examines 'up,' 'down,' 'wilderness,' and other placial concepts. He sees place as a relationship between "body and landscape," (1993, p. 29), explores the ultimate unity of culture and nature through places, and argues that place stands before such things as time and space, body and mind. These ideas help understand and give form to the implications of Merleau-Ponty's ontology.

However, despite the relevance of Casey's work, his methodological approach to philosophy of place can sometimes actually seem displaced. While he does explore location from an embodied viewpoint, his discussions of 'natural' places are always as a tourist or visitor, and he mainly explores place through the meaning of words, language and literature. While there is examination of place through his own way of being in the world, Casey is often drawn away from experience into absolutes: stating the "six" traits of wild places, (1993, p. 122), or exploring location through a limited number of linguistic dyads such as 'behind' and 'in front,' 'below' and 'above.' While he draws on phenomenologists, such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, he does not embrace the methodological challenge of a phenomenological philosophy of place. The content of Casey's work is interesting, yet the methodology stands in the way of understanding our emplacement here and now.

Casey does not work on the metaphysical and universal level of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, or Malpas, but neither does he commit to the uniqueness of his experience or the one particular location, culture and time he is in, as seen in the work of Snyder (1990), or Hunter (1995). In this way, while his work has many implications, it is not overly useful to my particular inquiry.

Malpas' work *Place and experience*, on the other hand is useful. Malpas, takes on the ideas of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty as seen above, (among others such as Donald Davidson (1980; 1984), Gibson (1979), and Proust (1932)) and explores their implications for an ontological approach to place:

In Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, it is not merely human identity that is tied to place or locality, but the very possibility of being the sort of creature that can engage with a world (and, more particularly, with the objects and events within it), that can think about that world, and that can find itself in the world, (Malpas, 1999, p. 8).

This quote helps understand, again, how Casey's work on place falls outside the philosophical inquiry of this thesis: Casey explores the ways human identity, movement, and culture is tied to place, rather than how place structures the very possibility of people and world.

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Malpas uses a "topographical approach" to philosophy, (*ibid.* p. 18), to explore the ontological territory.

This consists of a series of journeys through the questions, building a map of his understanding of place, rather than attempting stand-alone definitions.

Malpas examines the ways in which our emplacement allows us to understand what objects are (by moving around them), and what we are as subjects (by encountering our self and others). He moves on to discuss how action, memory, identity, and time are possible through place:

To have a conception of oneself, then, and to have a sense of one's own identity... is to have a sense, not of some simple, underlying self that is one's own, but rather of a particular place within the world. While having a sense of place consists in having a grasp of a conceptually complex structure - a structure that encompasses different forms of spatiality, concepts of self, of others, and of an objective order of things - it is also a sense of place that is necessarily articulated linguistically, (Malpas, 1999, p. 152).

Through his arguments, Malpas builds a picture of the fundamental nature of being in place. Through our embodiment in a certain part of the world we

can move to other parts, discovering objects, other subjects, and ourselves. We bring about actions, create memories and narratives of ourselves through the places we are in and have been in. In this way “place is integral to the very structure and possibility of experience,” (*ibid.* p. 32). Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of intertwining was derived specifically from the act of perception, with examples of touching/being touched, seeing/being seen. Malpas work can be seen to compliment and develop this by exploring other elements of human experience and their fundamental dependence on being in a place: movement, identity, time. These two philosophers, at this stage of the argument, come the closest to exploring my original philosophical question. They provide a theoretical understanding of my experiences of place, as described in the introduction.

At the end of this chapter, it is possible to see the shape of the philosophical thread of this thesis, developing the research question ‘what is the ontology of place?’ I have examined philosophers who meet at the intersection of phenomenology, environmental philosophy, and place-based education (areas where they are commonly referenced or their ideas have had impact (see Chapter 4)). Critique of deep ecology, of Heidegger and Caseys’ ideas on place, and exploration of Malpas and Merleau-Ponty’s work (on which specific critique will follow in the next chapter) start to build a picture of the need for a phenomenological inquiry into the ways in which place structures our experience. Equally it is possible to start to see the potential that such an inquiry might hold, shedding light on a non-Cartesian way of being in place.

Many new queries arise: how does this view of place relate to place-based education? In what ways might educational practice impact on this philosophy? How might the ‘high theory’ of phenomenology be contextualised in one particular place, for example Glen Strae? What philosophical methodology is appropriate for thinking about place; is it possible to take a placed (rather than universal) approach?

Clarifying these questions in the wider literature on place will form part of the next chapter. Having briefly journeyed through the territory of my

research, through the work of others, in separate educational and philosophical forays, I will now go back to that territory contrasting and mixing both sides of the debate. In addition, wider work on place from disciplines such as bioregionalism, geography, architecture and history will give more depth to this journey, stimulating critique, and honing my research questions.

Chapter 4 – Place-based education and ontology

In Chapter 3 the question of place ontology was explored through deep ecological and phenomenological literature. The understanding of place which will be taken forward in this thesis is ‘ontological,’ where place is the structure through we find ourselves and where we are in the world. The impact of this understanding of place on ways of being and environmental issues was also discussed. This developed the philosophical research question ‘what is the ontology of place?’ but also impacted on the question ‘how does place affect thinking and learning?’ The previous chapter showed how phenomenology presents a way of thinking and researching in place (in contrast to more abstract or Cartesian approaches). In this chapter I will bring these two questions back together with the educational research focus ‘what role do experiences of place have in education?’ These questions will be examined through praxis and also through a brief exploration of the wider literature on place. At the end of the chapter it will be possible to clearly define my research questions. This stage of the process (highlighted in red) can be seen on the conceptual map below.

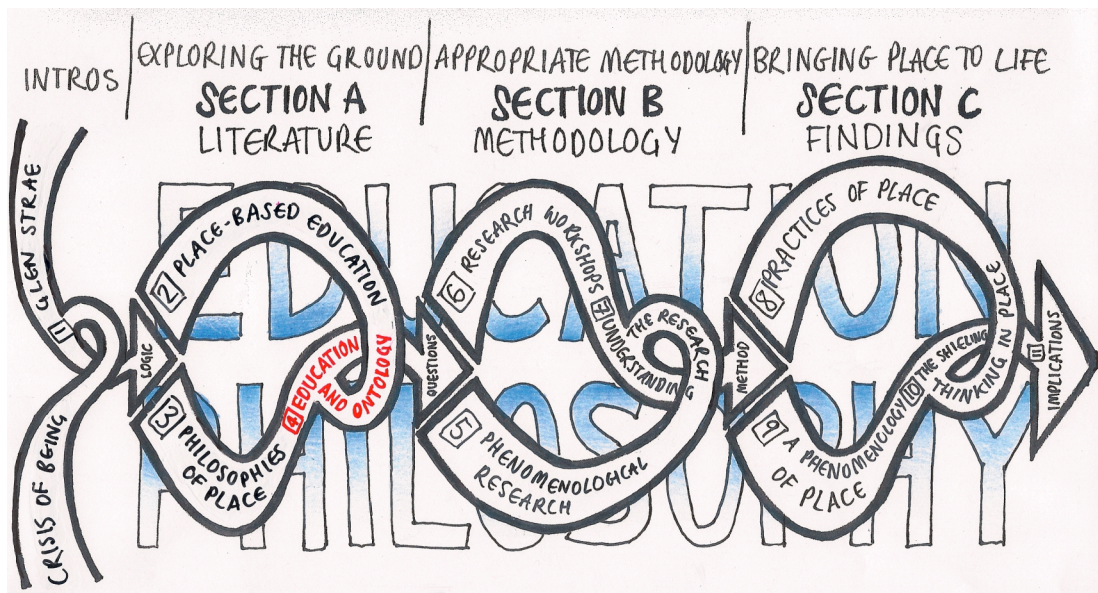


Figure 6. Conceptual map of the thesis for Chapter 4

Using Glen Strae as an example once more, it is possible to see the relevance of the ideas explored in Chapters 2 and 3. Learning focused directly on the different aspects and interconnections between: the history of the MacGregors, the geology of the erratic boulder I walked past, the way the land is farmed by the estate, and the one perfectly shaped heap of glacial moraine (drumlin) in the floor of the glen, could be understood as place-based education: in, about and (possibly) for that place. Within the context of the United Kingdom, this approach sits better within the field of outdoor learning, than outdoor education. Critique of de-contextualised, universal and human-nature dualising outdoor and environmental education, from within the UK, but even more strongly from within Australian discourse, highlights the possibilities of a localised and holistic outdoor learning experience in Glen Strae. American examples of place-based education show the potential of regular interactions with the glen over time from the local school, and raise the challenge of making positive changes there. All the literature examined puts forward the argument that such experience could promote care for the glen, the student's home places, and wider global issues. There is a clear research need to understand what scope and form place-based education such as this could take: how it would work, what its outcomes might be.

Philosophically, an ontological approach to place starts to articulate the ways in which being in the glen might influence many aspects of an educational experience. Using the experience described in the introduction, moving through the rough ground on the hillside can be understood as an unfolding process of exploring my embodied self in and through the world. Walking towards the shieling ground at *Tom Clach Diontaichd*, I am negotiating the ground, encountering the trees, waterfalls, I glimpse the response of a deer. This experience shapes my understandings of those more-than-human elements, as well as shaping my sense of who I am then and there. Other places and times are "folded" (Malpas, 1999, p. 173) into this experience, bringing wider connections into my narrative of the glen, and its role in my life.

The final chapter in this section of the thesis brings together these two emerging understandings to further define the edges of the debate where research will be most useful. There are many interesting questions posed by the juxtaposition of the two strands of the inquiry. If place is a ubiquitous ontological structure of my experience in Glen Strae, how can it be said that I know or do not know or only partly know the place? Or, more educationally, how is an educational experience, where new knowledge, understanding or perspectives are gained, possible? How educationally would you deal with the 'flesh of the world' or the idea that places structure our thought and identity? The ontological approach to place is prior to separations of culture/nature and mind/body, so how would it be possible to work with this? Clearly place-based education will not just be about facts, or feelings, but both, and also needs to take account of the distinct personal experiences each individual will have.

The theories of Malpas and Merleau-Ponty are abstract despite their attempts to account for different and unique experiences. They are universal theories, arguing that place structures all our experiences in certain defined ways, yet both are the theories of middle-aged white men living in developed countries. Is it possible that place, gender, and identity have influenced their theories, which might be more contingent than universal? Both philosophers focus largely on the individual: how would an educational group or class, sharing their experiences, shape being in place? And equally what are the specific ways in which Glen Strae is encountered through my interaction with it (as, amongst other things, a white male researcher living in Scotland). What would the general theory put forward by Malpas and Merleau-Ponty look like in a single concrete educational example?

Practically, the cross-disciplinary approach to education moves beyond Merleau-Ponty's bodily approach to place, and perhaps also beyond Malpas' understanding of place-structured time, space, objectivity and subjectivity. How do scientific and factual understandings of place fit with this ontology? Are they secondary to the embodied essence of place explored by these philosophers, as they involve more abstract ways of knowing? How will

educational experiences meet the deep potential of being in place, rather than simply replicating Evernden's crisis of separation from the world? How would students or educators know that such an experience has taken place, and what are its effects? If much of place-based education practice has developed with only marginal linkage to philosophy (through various levels of interpretation e.g. philosophical to geographical to educational), what role can praxis play to bring philosophy and education into more direct contact? The more complex understanding of praxis (introduced on p. 20) is clearly at work here, where a simplistic characterisation of educational practice and philosophical theory does not accurately represent the interaction between pedagogy and ontology, experience and understanding, in the discussion so far. The questions highlighted here will be posed through a renewed examination of the philosophical and educational literature, followed by the wider literature on place.

4A – Praxis

Looking at place-based education literature to see how it deals with philosophy and the associated questions raised above, it is clear that there is little in-depth theoretical dialogue. Despite recent work (e.g. Ardoin (2006), Lim (2010), and van Eijck & Roth (2010)), the North American literature tends to rely on theoretical concepts such as sense of place without exploring their wider presence in the literature on place. Examples such as Sobel (2004), and Greenwood & Smith's edited collection of papers (2008), show the practical invention, but lack of deeper philosophical thought or critique present in much of place-based education literature. Greenwood acknowledges this:

...the significance of the relationship between education and local space remains undertheorised and underdeveloped, (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 642).

Two key theoretically developed approaches to place-based education can be found in Greenwood (2003a; 2003b; 2008) and, in Australia, Cameron (2003; 2005; 2008; 2010). Cameron also states that little has been done to join up place theory and place education, (2003).

One of the implications of my research so far, indicating perhaps why sustained praxis between philosophy and education has not occurred in research on place, is that the focus has always, ultimately, been on educational practice. A philosophical question and inquiry, as well as an educational one, allows for a more balanced interaction between the theory and practice. My philosophical inquiry, exploring the 'ontological approach to place' raises questions for both Cameron and Greenwoods' theoretical positions, as well as others, for example Wattchow and Brown (2011). These queries centre around how to theorise the complexity of learning experiences in place, and the role of embodied experience in education. I will briefly look at Cameron and Greenwoods' ideas, and then discuss the problem in more depth.

Cameron (2003) draws on Malpas' thesis that place structures our experience of the world, but tends to focus solely on one element of that structure: narrative. (He is not alone in this focus within place-based education, see for example Lim (2010), Piersol (2010), and Wattchow & Brown (2011)). Malpas argues that narrative facilitates our sense of identity by allowing us to connect up mental states, memories and experiences, through their structuration in places (Malpas, 1999). In other words, we tell stories of who we are based on memories, feelings and things we did, all of which happen through place.

This insight is used by Cameron to justify narrative as the "central organising principle of place and identity," (Cameron, 2003, p. 99) (and also (2005)). However this seems to take one element of Malpas' analysis and privilege it above the others, in support of the dominant theme of 'story' in Australian critical outdoor education. (For the strength of this theme, see also: Gough (2008), Somerville (2010), and Stewart (2008)). The implications of Malpas' other elements, which might seem to be linked more directly to embodied experiences, such as movement, time, different experiences of space, are left untreated, although acknowledged by Cameron (2010).

Greenwood's theoretical explorations also show the difficulty of getting a theoretical grasp on such a complex and multifaceted phenomenon such as place. For him experience "happens in places" (Gruenewald, 2003a), and places are pedagogical, so a focus on local place allows us to learn from our everyday experiences:

... as centres of experience, places teach us about how the world works and how our lives fit into the spaces we occupy. Further, places make us: as occupants of particular places with particular attributes, our identity and our possibilities are shaped, (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 621).

Whilst this fits with the ontology of place as foundational to experience, it does not articulate how such pedagogical experiences of place work. Since we have always experienced place, what is the difference between everyday life and place-based education?

A possible solution can be seen in Greenwood's five dimensions of place: (a) the perceptual, (b) the sociological, (c) the ideological, (d) the political, and (e) the ecological (Gruenewald, 2003a). These dimensions provide areas through which to focus experience and critical awareness, to transform everyday experiences into pedagogical ones. Greenwood argues that we can critically examine our experiences as "texts" to examine our relationships in and with the world (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 5).

However, neither Greenwood's nor Cameron's position seems to get to grips with the problems raised by the experiential element of place-based education. This can be understood through considering my own experience of Glen Strae. The description of my experience in Glen Strae with which this thesis started is a story, and it attempts to tell something of an experience I had. Yet it is far more 'portable' than the experience itself. The experience of walking in the glen that day is unrepeatable, accessed now only by memories, photographs etc. But the story, while each telling might be a unique experience, seems to have the ability to be abstracted away from the experience and place. In a similar way the sociological, ideological, political and ecological dimensions of place in Greenwood's theory, could also be detached. Only the perceptual seems necessarily tied to a particular

experience of place. Put in more overtly educational terms: stories, political analyses, and ecological experiments can be told and undertaken in classrooms far away from the places that they might be about. So where does the experience of place fit in, what does it bring to this form of education?

The ontological approach to place developed in the previous chapter faces a similar problem from the opposite angle. If, following Merleau-Ponty and Malpas, place structures our experience, what about educational experiences in which the students are placed in the classroom but the topic is about somewhere else? Or more relevant for my particular focus on learning experiences in particular places out of the classroom: how does direct experience of a place interact with things learnt about that place which could be understood in isolation? For example I could easily learn about the geology of Glen Strae whilst no-where near the glen, so what is different about the phenomenology of learning in that place, what does being there bring to the learning experience?

Social construction and abstraction

One particular solution to this question seems common: social construction. Many researchers working in place-based education argue that we socially construct meanings and knowledge around our experiences of places (Gruenewald, 2003a; Somerville, 2010; Stewart, 2004a; Wattchow, 2006; 2008). Wattchow's work is a good example of this. He draws on the phenomenological tradition, citing thinkers such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Tuan, Relph and Seamon (Wattchow, 2007), and this scholarship is used to explore the significance of body in place, and the concept of placelessness. This leads Wattchow to argue for the pedagogical benefit of a direct sensuous immersion in place which is prior to the "technical, cultural, environmental and social lifeworlds," (Wattchow, 2008, pp. 14 - 15). Implied here is a simple unitary experience of place, and the (secondary) construction of all other elements of this experience. While these constructions, or

'stories,' are important (Wattchow & Brown, 2011), the question which arises is: how do they relate to embodied experiences?

Initially the focus on the ways in which we construct elements of our experience can seem to help explain the problem at hand. The line of thought could go as follows: embodied experience of place is direct and other dimensions such as scientific facts, place names, stories or political questions are social constructions which arise from those embodied experiences. These constructions can thus have life outside the fleeting and ongoing experiences of place. Merleau-Ponty's argument that scientific knowledge can ultimately be traced back to sense perceptions (1962) gives one example of how these constructions might be linked to experiences of place. Specifically this claim could be understood in the case of my geological knowledge about Glen Strae: some of what I know is based on a scientific paper by geologists who completed field studies around the area (Highton, 2007).

This approach maintains a level of realism, constructions such as scientific knowledge are rooted in direct embodied experience of the world: but the same question remains. What is the relationship between this (socially constructed) knowledge and experiences of places which that knowledge might be 'about?' Does this apparent dualism between mind and body, accurately represent the learning experience in place? What is added by learning about geology in Glen Strae, rather than in a classroom? Or, recasting this question within the philosophical thread of my inquiry: what is the phenomenology of learning both *in* and *about* a place? Understanding 'learning about place' broadly here as encompassing both Cameron's place stories and Gruenewald's sociological, ideological, political, and ecological, the question remains. Regardless of how this knowledge is formed, what is the significance of contextualising, or re-contextualising it in specific places? Does all place-based education follow this structure, or are there elements of the learning experience which can't be so easily constructed and displaced?

This question holds its significance within the literature examined so far. This can be seen in a philosophical and an educational example. I will examine the educational debate first. The unmet need to understand the relationship between learning and embodiment in place is particularly clear in Wattchow's work (2006; 2007; 2008), already briefly mentioned above. For Wattchow (almost) inexpressible sensual connection with places is a very important part of the learning process (2006; 2008). Other elements of the experience: ecological, cultural or technological, are constructed afterwards and sometimes seem to have less significance for Wattchow. This conceptual framework was developed researching expeditions to remote places, where 'constructions' such as local knowledge or land ethics might be less binding and important to visitors. But how would a new piece of knowledge about the impact of climate change on a place effect the embodied experience of someone who lived in that place, and was experiencing that change? Does embodied experience of place really stand apart from (new) knowledge?

The tension between constructions and 'direct experiences' manifests in a philosophical frame as well. As has been seen, the basic idea of the social construction of meaning and knowledge from experiences (with various different emphases) is common in Australian place-based education. It is also present in Australian critical outdoor education as a whole (see Grange (2004), Gough & Price (2004), Gough (2008), Payne (2003), Senechal (2008) and Stables & Scott (2002)). These scholars have been strongly influenced by ideas of the social construction of nature and place (two commonly referenced works in this context are Braun and Castree (1998) and Cronon (1995)). Yet the question about the relationship between these social constructions and what they might be 'about' is still present in these works.

Cronon's book *'Uncommon ground: Toward reinventing nature'* (1995), comes from a research seminar which aimed at "rethinking the meaning of nature," (*ibid.* p24). The approach suggested by Harraway at the seminar is revealing. Instead of going outside the conference room to experience places, or even bringing natural objects into the room, Harraway suggests using human

artefacts which interpret nature to prompt discussion about nature. One of the members of the conference sums her discomfort with this method:

...I also remember our discussions as so abstracted from the 'nature' in which we were living, which I was feeling so intensely but perhaps not expressing verbally. Sometimes the talk seemed so disembodied. I regret that we didn't fully engage with the tangibility, the 'reality,' of nonhuman nature. I wonder how different our conversations might have been if they had not taken place under fluorescent lights, in a windowless room, against the whistling whoosh of the building's ventilations system. Our discussions deepened my awareness of how nature is and has been culturally constructed, but now more than ever I feel it crucial to reassert the reality of nonhuman features and phenomena, (Spirn in Cronon, 1995, p. 448).

Spirn argues for the reality of the more-than-human world, something which seems to be in doubt in some of this work (see also: Braun & Castree, 1998). But more importantly for the current debate, she implies that a discussion about nature in more 'natural' places might have yielded very different results.

This debate highlights a key area in need of further development at the meeting point between the phenomenology of place and critical and theoretically aware place-based education. The role of the sensing body has been acknowledged educationally, and was the key understanding used by Merleau-Ponty to explore our being in the world. Yet place-based education as seen in these discussions involves more complexity than just bodily experience. Through Malpas' work, other people, memories, identities, stories, can be understood as being part of our 'place-ment.' But what about the more abstract(able) knowledge of place-names, geology, history, ecology, how do these fit into an ontology of place? How can the process of learning about places while being in them be described phenomenologically, and what is its educational merit?

With these more critical understandings of place-based education and ontology, and a developing set of research foci: in education, ontology and through praxis, it is now possible to turn to the wider discussion on place with a specific aim and questions which will help narrow down what is useful within this enormous field. The themes isolated within place-based

education and ontology so far will be drawn out and explored further in the light of wider debates on place.

4B – Literatures of place

The more conceptually developed educational literature on place often draws on wider scholarship on place, from schools of thought such as geography and bioregionalism. But this is not always the case: Rosenthal's literature review of scholarship relevant to place-based education, included on the Place-based Education Evaluation Collaboration (PEEC) website, mentions both 'place-attachment' and 'place-lessness' without referencing any of the key thinkers from environmental psychology or geography (explored below) who developed these concepts (Rosenthal, 2008).

Yet the influence of philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger can often be felt indirectly in place-based education scholarship. This is due to their influence for example on geographical or bioregional thinking, which in turn influences the more critical approaches to place-based education, which then influences practitioners. The wider literature on place from geography and other disciplines thus sits in between the two poles of my research, influenced by philosophy and influencing education, and a brief exploration of some of its themes and key ideas will help further clarify the inquiry.

Bioregionalism

Bioregionalism is an American movement with various aims which could be summed up around the theme of 'localisation.' Returning to agrarian lifestyles (Berry, 1985, 1992), 'reinhabiting' and putting roots down in the places we live (Snyder, 1990), redefining politics and ethics along bioregional or watershed lines (Alexander, 1990; Berthold-Bond, 2000) are all elements of bioregionalism. Themes such as place (Vitek & Jackson, 1996), community, culture in nature, and identity (Metzner, 1998) are strong in this school of thought (see also Barnhill (1999)).

Bioregionalism offers a varied literature and practice which calls for exploring and rooting ourselves in the places where we live. This supports and develops place-based education as one element of this 'return to place,' describing political, ecological and spiritual imperatives for understanding where we are. For Snyder this involves a localised way of being:

Bioregional awareness teaches us in specific ways. It is not enough just to 'love nature,' or to want to 'be in harmony with Gaia.' Our relation to the natural world takes place in a place, and it must be grounded in information and experience. For example: 'real people' have an easy familiarity with the local plants, (Snyder, 1990, p. 39).

Some of the issues and challenges of bioregionalism are useful in developing an understanding of place-based education (which has been influenced by bioregionalism (Curthoys, 2007; Gruenewald, 2003a; Thomashow, 1995)). For example, how relevant is the American context from which bioregionalism and school-orientated place-based education comes from, to the context of Glen Strae in Scotland? Colonialism and the legacy it leaves to the indigenous population, descendents of settlers and immigrants to America, may form a sense that a localised culture needs to be created or re-created, through bioregionalism or indigenous education, both of which have a role in place-based education. Is that the case where I am? The question of distinctive Scottish issues, and Glen Strae, will be returned to below.

Greenwood's two dimensions of the 'critical pedagogy of place:' 'decolonisation' and 'reinhabitation' (2003b), develop some of these bioregional themes:

If reinhabitation involves learning to live well socially and ecologically in places that have been disrupted and injured, decolonization involves learning to recognize disruption and injury and to address their causes, (*ibid.* p. 9).

These two elements of place-based education help understand both the need for localisation, but also the context for that need: the colonization of those places by powers, ideologies, and economies which may not be healthy for our culture/nature relationship. In this critical way, place-based education becomes not simply about being in place, but developing a critical

understanding of wider structures that shape that being. Greenwood's idea that place-based education can be both experiential and critical has recently seen some healthy debate see for example Bowers (2008), Greenwood (2008), McInerney, Smyth & Down (2011), McKenzie (2008), Smith (2008), and Stevenson (2008). This debate also reiterates the need to consider direct experience *and* what might possibly be characterised as less experiential elements (such as politics, power structures and ideologies in this case), in any ontology of place.

The key understanding that American culture has become displaced, and is thus in need of bioregional 'awareness' or a critical pedagogy of place, challenges an ontological approach to place, where place is a ubiquitous structure which always shapes our experience. If place is a constant how has it been lost? Is place always positive? Is it possible that it has become unconscious, or that the ways we are in place have simply changed? Are there romantic overtones in the idea of returning to place, where place is always 'natural' and 'good?' These questions are best dealt with through examination of geographical literature on place, in which these debates play a central part.

Geographers of place

The idea and experience of place is most thoroughly explored in the discipline of geography: concepts of region, local and global, inequalities, migrations and movement through places are all important geographical themes (Agnew & Duncan, 1989; Bender & Winer, 2001; Davidson, Bondi, & Smith, 2005; Herod & Wright, 2002; Holloway & Hubbard, 2001; Johnston, 1991; Read, 1996; Urry, 1995). However, the key question of relevance for me in geographical scholarship is the ontology and experience of place. Here writers such as Massey (1991; 1994; 2005), Relph (1976; 1996; 2009), Sack (1997), Seamon (1980; 1993; 2000; with Mugerauer 1985), and Tuan (1974; 1977) and are important. It is also here that Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger's philosophies of place have had most impact. Equally geographical ideas of

place have had the strongest effect of any academic discipline, albeit often second hand and selective, on place-based education.

As Cresswell points out in his 'short introduction' to place (2004), place started off within geography simply understood as a specific location, a region of space. This idea can still be found in place-based education, where to educate in place is simply to be in a particular location (for example elements of this idea can be found in Sobel (2004) and Beames (2008)). Place-based education as something that happens in the local spaces around the school might seem to be a simpler approach, and initially be unproblematic: after all this is typically how the word 'place' is used. However, this approach can maintain the very split between people and the world, that is symptomatic of the environmental crisis. Place as a simple location does not challenge who we are, how we act, or what binds us into/through places. There is no theoretical imperative to spend time and energy exploring the ways in which we respond to such a location, or delve into how environments are changed through our actions, or vice versa.

The idea of a simple location, although overtly moved beyond in geographical thinking, (Cresswell, 2004), often still remains latent. Instead of deeply questioning the separation between human and context (as implied by Merleau-Ponty's work), writers such as Relph and Tuan explore the experiences of place that occur in locations (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1974, 1977). Rather than seeing a mutuality between place and experience, these writers tend towards seeing place-experience as a construction, a human response to a physical (separate) world. Place is simply the location of the experience. In this view the world is thus a physical space which we are (somehow) in, and human experience and meaning give it life, creating the experience of place. In this approach to place, the Cartesian problem discussed in Chapter 3 is still present.

The influence of Heidegger's romantic idea of dwelling (1971), as an idyllic pastoral state (already alluded to in Chapter 3 above), is particularly felt in Relph's seminal work *Place and placelessness* (1976) (often the only

geographical work referenced by place-based educators). Being in place for Relph is something that has largely been lost through modernisation, globalisation and urbanisation (a view inspired partly by the work of Augé (1995)). Place, for Relph is the experience of something unique and local:

Places with settings which are not only distinctively local and reflect a continuity of style and tradition, but also constitute profound centres of care and existence, are indeed part of an old cultural order; and although we may look back to them nostalgically they have no active part to play in the new landscape. The new landscape is characterised not by its profound meanings and its symbols, but by rationality and absurdity and its separation from us. It is characterised too by its everydayness as the ordinary and unexceptional background to our daily lives, by its confusion that results from a lack of focuses, discrete regions, or any familiar pattern, and by its simplicity and obviousness, (Relph, 1976, p. 139).

Relph works from this viewpoint to analyse experiences of place in terms of outsidership and insidership, in varying degrees.

While Relph's ideas might seem helpful, supporting the case for place-based education through the idea that we need to work against placelessness and support being in place, in fact Relph's work is problematic. Relph himself acknowledges the duality he created between good past places, and bad modern 'placelessness' (Relph, 1996). Place becomes an essential 'lost' way of living, which is always good. However, a narrow essentialised idea of place can breed parochialism and nationalism. This can be seen in Heidegger's support for Nazism, which gives a good example of the destructive possibilities of place-based ideas (Brook, 2003; Brookes, 2002a; Malpas, 1999; Schama, 1995, Wattchow & Brown, 2011). The fact that place can be narrow and damaging, calls for a more complex understanding than that put forward by Relph. A further point here is that the modern locations Relph argues are placeless, are in fact places to the people who live there. In contrast to the romantic view, there are defined unique characteristics in cities, 'malls', and airports, and experiences of place there (Bender & Winer, 2001; Massey, 1991; Massey, 2005; Massey & Jess, 1995).

Practically, the idea of placelessness, tracing its roots through Relph, to Heidegger, can have a negative effect on place-based education, (Cameron,

2003). The idea of some ways of being as dwelling 'in place' and others out of place, some locations as being places and others non-places, instead of helping understand and improve our ways of being in place, set up exclusivities and dualisms. This is visible in some of the literature, where 'natural' places are good, and urban are bad (e.g. Horesh, 1998). Brookes argues against romanticising senses of place found in the past:

...the association between the past, place, and political ideals is by no means benign. Arguably in Australia the past is mostly occupied by the roots of contemporary environmental problems; there may be little to be gained by returning there, (Brookes, 2002a, p. 12).

Furthermore, as will be seen in the context of Scottish literature on place, the dualism between insiders and outsider can form a deep political divide, and an approach to place which reinforces this, although perhaps useful for critique, does not move the debate forward. Thus the ontological approach to place, as argued for in this thesis, needs to avoid putting one simple value judgement on place, acknowledging its openness and potential.

Similar criticisms of the dangers inherent in a nostalgic and fixed idea of place, such as Heidegger's idea of 'dwelling,' are put forward by Massey, who instead argues for a 'global sense of place' (Massey, 1991; Massey, 2005). Her version of the problems stated above focuses on the static nature of such conceptions of place. Massey argues against:

...exclusivist claims to places - nationalist, regionalist and localist. All of them have been attempts to fix the meaning of particular spaces, to enclose them, endow them with fixed identities and to claim them for one's own, (Massey, 1994, p. 5).

In *A global sense of place* Massey argues that place should not be a reaction against global connectivity, which then inevitably becomes fixed and essentialised, but rather the locus of a myriad of connections. Places will have different character for different people, depending on many things: e.g. gender, social difference, community.

For Massey, place is a process, it is necessarily unfinished and evolving, involving connections, disconnections and contestations with other places, hence its ultimately global nature:

The identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple. And the particularity of any place is, in these terms, constructed not by placing boundaries around it and defining its identity through counterposition to the other which lies beyond, but precisely (in part) through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections to that 'beyond.' Places viewed in this way are open and porous, (*ibid.* p. 5).

This fits well with the ontological approach to place as developed so far through the work of Merleau-Ponty and Malpas, helping bring out the continually open and evolving nature of place. Massey helps show how place as the structure of our experience, as the way we find the world and ourselves, must necessarily be varied, interconnected and ongoing. It invites the idea that everyone can have ideas, feelings and senses of place, in all types of places. This is equally helpful to place-based education, where learning about place can form part of an ongoing process of connection and interconnection, rather than the pursuit of a lost archetype. Global connections and urban lives are no barriers to being in place (exemplified in the work of Thomashow (2002) and Senechal (2008) for example).

The Highlands

The literature reviewed in this section of the thesis has mostly come from America and Australia, however there is also a large amount of work on place originating much closer to Glen Strae, and on particularly rural issues. Beyond the conceptual geography seen above, there many examples of specific cultural experiences and interpretations of place, which explore how place shapes and is shaped by humans. These fall into both anthropological and geographical fields (Basso, 1996; Feld & Basso, 1996; Ingold, 2000; Kohn, 2002; Szerszynski, 2006; Tilley, 1994). Scholars working in place-based education make wide use of more concrete geography such as this, indicating the possible use of an exploration of Scottish literature on place within this inquiry. In this field it is possible to find Scottish Highland understandings of place and associated issues which might be relevant to Glen Strae. A small selection of this work is examined here.

From a modern geographical perspective Mackenzie has researched the changing nature of places in the Highlands where communities have been

involved in defending, developing or buying the land they live on (Mackenzie, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2006a, 2006b). Throughout her research Mackenzie theorises the ways in which senses of identity, community processes, and the changing landscape form an ongoing process of place, as seen in times of radical change, such as community buy-outs. Giving specific form to the concerns voiced above about essentialized and exclusive ideas of place, Mackenzie reveals the strong tensions in Highland Scotland between native Gaelic culture, and incomers, external governmental or environmental agencies. She argues that place as an ongoing process has the power to break down some of these oppositions.

Mackenzie's research is particularly helpful to understanding the cultural context of place-based education in Glen Strae. Mackenzie acknowledges tensions which are obvious in my local communities, and suggests that community processes, such as artwork (2002; 2004) and local activism (2006a; 2006b), can challenge and move forward some of these very entrenched positions, working towards social and environmental justice. By implication place-based education might also have an effect on these particular Highland issues. This is supported by Greenwood's argument that place-based education can play a dual role of 'decolonisation and reinhabitation,' (Gruenewald, 2003b), and fits Mackenzie's understanding of Highland places as colonized and contested. Place, for Mackenzie can be a 'culture of resistance' against globalizing and colonizing forces (Mackenzie uses Said's (1994) concept here).

Mackenzie's exploration of the fundamental interdependence of culture and nature in the Highlands, is a theme also explored by McIntosh (1999; 2001; 2008). Echoing the bioregional sentiments seen above, McIntosh points out the potential for people to come to belong to a place (1999), this is summed up in conversation with Thorpe:

A person belongs in as much as they are willing to cherish and be cherished by a place and the complexity of its people, (McIntosh in Thorpe, 2006, p. 324).

This implies that belonging to a place is an ongoing process of action and reflection rather than a static state of affairs (seen also in Kohn (2002)).

McIntosh describes some of the ways this belonging can develop in contexts from urban regeneration, to the community buy-out of the Hebridean island of Eigg. These ideas are set out by McIntosh in his 'cycle of belonging,' where sense of place leads to sense of identity, to values and then responsible action, which reinforces the whole cycle (McIntosh, 2008, p. 50). McIntosh's work also fits with Mackenzie's in showing the potential that working for place holds in bringing together communitarian and environmental ends.

Hunter's seminal work on culture and nature in the Highlands: *On the other side of sorrow: Nature and people in the Scottish Highlands* (1995), reinforces the key theme of the Scottish literature examined in this chapter, that cultural and environmental problems are two sides of the same coin. This sheds light on much of the place-based education literature, which despite discussing the cultural elements of landscapes and places, often sees environmental (rather than both environmental and social) justice as the key goal. Global warming, ecosystem damage and biodiversity take precedence over poverty, equality, cultural survival or other social issues. However, following the writers in this section a whole series of cultural issues seen in the Highlands, such as out-migration, sustainable jobs, identity, language etc, can be seen as relevant to place-based education.

Hunter explores how romantic views of 'wild' Scottish landscapes, built on the premise of no humans, or at most a doomed culture from the past, have shaped recent environmentalism in this country. His analysis shows how close attention to Highland culture through specific places, rather than a romantic external view, can bring human issues back into the heart of environmentalism, and vice versa: bringing environmentalism back into the concerns of those who live and work in the Highlands.

The interwoven quality of culture and nature in these writers' explorations of Highland Scotland help broaden the understanding of the 'crisis of being' put forward by Evernden (1985), which is at the heart of this research. The

idea of culture and nature as separate can also be seen to be an indicative element of the environmental crisis, or rather the 'crisis of being.' The understanding of nature as 'pristine' (i.e. without people) and the nostalgia of 'lost' traditional culture are both challenged here. The ontological and pedagogical possibilities of place in shaping new cultural/environmental ways of being in the world are clear from the writing of Mackenzie, McIntosh and Hunter. The potential that place-based education could hold for cultural survival is acknowledged in some of the scholarship (Barnhardt, 2008; Emekauwa, 2004; Sorensen, 2008; Swayze, 2009; Takano et al., 2009).

Having argued above that place needs to be freed from romantic conceptions of being 'native,' this part of the chapter helps deepen the argument. It echoes some of the bioregional ideas, as well as geographical ones, arguing for an evolving idea of place in which our actions can be a meaningful part of our belonging: we are not simply (and forever) natives or incomers. This insight implies that responsiveness to home places will not be the same as to places visited once. This has a strong impact on place-based education, challenging views such as that held by Henderson, that any place we visit can feel like home given the right education approach (2001).

The arts

All three of the writers considered above in the context of Scotland draw on the Gaelic concept of *dúthchas*, which has various meanings from heritable rights to work the land, to sense of place, ancestry and heritage. As Murphy puts it, *dúthchas* can be understood as "an existential sense of being in place," (Murphy, 2009, p. 15). Despite being increasingly re-interpreted in a modern context, much of the understanding of *dúthchas* is historical, expressed in the Gaelic arts. This is particularly evident in Hunter's methodology which is to explore Highland understandings of nature through poetry and prose (1995), and in Michael Newton's recent work *Warriors of the word: The world of the Scottish Highlanders* (2009).

The importance of Celtic arts and Gaelic language and place-names in expressing Highland sense of place is clear from these works, and implies the need for the inclusion of creative and toponymic approaches to place-based education, for example in Glen Strae. The wider point here is that art has a strong role in expressing what it might be like to be in place, and this is not just historical. The 'geopoetic' work of Kenneth White (2003), and the Gaelic poetry of Sorley MacLean (1999), continue the tradition of place and nature poetry seen in eighteenth century poets Duncan Ban MacIntyre (1912) and Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair (Thomson, 1993), who in turn maintain a much older tradition (Hunter, 1995; Newton, 2009).

More generally, the role of place in the arts has received some attention (for example Casey (2002), Heaney (1980), Kwon (2004), Lippard (1997), Schama (1995), and Snyder (1990)), and especially in the discipline of architecture (see for example Hough (1990), Norberg-Schulz (1980), Seamon (1993), and Thwaites and Simkins (2007)). Again the wider literature, in this case dealing with art and architecture, links into my inquiry. Malpas explores the role of narrative and art in place (1999), Cameron uses this in practical educational ways (2003), and Wattchow & Brown suggest that the arts seem to hold the potential to explore some of the more complex emotive experiences of place (2011).

Psychology

The final school of thought which I will briefly examine in this chapter is psychology. Within two radically different branches of this discipline, environmental psychology and eco-psychology, place is an important factor. Environmental psychology explores place-attachment (Altman & Low, 1992), place-identity (Hernandez, Hidalgo, Salazar-Laplace, & Hess, 2007; Proshansky & Fabian, 1983), and sense of place (Korpela & Hartig, 1996). Despite the promise of research highly relevant to the questions of this PhD, for example comparing 'native' and 'incomer' sense of place (Hernandez et al.) and the mental health effects of favourite places (Korpela & Hartig), this

discipline largely employs quantitative statistical measures to understand place.

This methodological approach to place, seeing place as an external category which can be counted and compared, is criticised from within the discipline by Sarbin (1983). He argues that place is better understood as it is lived, and that statistical analysis of questionnaires will leave our understanding of place “opaque:”

I propose that the scholar who would penetrate the labyrinth of self and its components follow the lead of poets, biographers, autobiographers, and dramatists... How a particular where am I question is answered and then rendered into the ongoing story is more akin to poesis than to reporting, (*ibid.* p. 340).

This critique fits with the phenomenological and lived approach to place taken in this thesis, and particularly the role of creative arts, as seen above. Schroeder puts forward a similar critique, and explores place through a phenomenological approach (Schroeder, 2007). However the existence of a well developed discipline with a radically different approach to place, indicates, in common with much of the geographical writing, that place can have very different meanings.

With an overt aim of understanding the parallels between ecological and psychological problems, eco-psychology (Roszak et al., 1995) should be well positioned to contribute to this thesis. However much of the thinking in this discipline is uncritical, and possibly due to the close connection between eco-psychology and deep ecology, the writing is often placeless (e.g. Clinebell (1996)). Romantic ideas of nature as good and unpolluted by (modern) humans are often found in eco-psychology (e.g. Roberts (1998) and Horesh (1998)).

Educationally this means that many of the practical strategies for understanding the links between self and place put forward by eco-psychologists are very subjective. As Thomashow points out of his experience of eco-psychology:

...as I observe and participate in a sampling of these gatherings, I notice the glaring absence of any attention devoted to basic ecology and natural history. People who are delighted to open their sensory awareness to a beautiful tree or landscape often have an extremely limited understanding of the natural history of the site, thus totally lacking an ecological context for what it is they are looking at. The risk here is that their impressions of the landscape and ecosystem are projections and fantasies, filled with whatever idiosyncratic or group constructed unconscious contents are at their disposal. This may be great for cultivating the spirit of imagination or opening the gates to deep personal issues, but it is ultimately anthropocentric, neglecting the rich natural history tapestry that nourished a deep sense of place, (Thomashow, 1998, p. 284).

Eco-psychology prompts a variation of the ontological question at the centre of this research: what kind of things are we if our mental health is so inter-related with the health of places? What kind of thing is a mind if it is embedded in its context? Largely this question goes unasked in eco-psychological literature, though responses sometimes take the form of a deep ecological assumption that self can expand to encompass wider ecological processes (e.g. Shepard (1995), Cahalan (1995), and Conn (1995)).

However two thinkers, from with systems thinking and psychology respectively, have bearing on this question. Bateson (1972) and Kidner (2001; 2007), spend considerable time trying to understand the ontology of mind. Bateson and Kidner both put forward different understandings of how the mind, or subjectivity, interacts with systems wider than the body. Arguing the mind-body problem is “wrongly posed,” Bateson analyses the systemic nature of ‘immanent’ mind which encompasses the world and ourselves (Bateson, 1972, pp. 315 - 320).

Kidner (2001), in an investigation which inspired many questions in my research, explores the ways in which industrialism has caused the separation of human and nature, which leads to mutual harm:

It is not simply, therefore, that 'internal' repressions parallel the elimination from the natural world of patterns and species inconsistent with industrialism, implying that solutions would leave intact the boundaries between self and world. Problems in both these areas stem from the historically fabricated opposition between self and world on which industrialism relies... we need a concept of

subjectivity that is ecological rather than individual, and so recognizes the continuity and overlap between these two forms of repression, (*ibid.* p. 8).

This new concept of subjectivity, for Kidner, is understood through the metaphor of resonance:

...if I live in an 'environment' whose aliveness reflects and complements my own at a more than superficial level, then my 'individual' subjectivity will constantly overflow into the world, discovering resonances and complementarities within it and creating a sense that 'I' am much more than my egoic self, and that there is part of me that owes its existence to what, conventionally, is 'outside' me. My behaviour is therefore likely to reflect this felt sense of involvement in the world, becoming simultaneously self-enhancing and responsible, (*ibid.* p. 299).

Reflected in this passage is an idea congruent with the ways of being explored in this research. While Kidner only peripherally deals with the idea of place, his account implies the possibilities of mutuality between mind and place, complementing Merleau-Ponty and Malpas who largely focus on body-as-place.

The idea which I will call 'thinking in place,' seen in different ways through the work of Bateson and Kidner, is also mentioned by Snyder (1990) and Capra (1997). Educationally, Cameron draws on Aboriginal ideas of the way places structure thought to shape his approach to place-based education, (Cameron, 2005; Cameron & San Roque, 1997). These thinkers take up the challenge raised in the part 4A of this chapter to understand both embodiment and forms of knowledge which might be understood as constructions or stories. The implication of this last section is that our mind as well as our body may be rooted in place. This draws out elements of my ontological approach to place, where place might structure not just our physical being, but our mental being, perhaps seeing this very dichotomy as false. Educationally it poses the question, what does it mean to think in Glen Strae, and how might this shape what is learnt? The theoretical nature of much of this writing, invites further exploration in practical contexts.

The key developments in this chapter so far have been to reinforce the need to examine an ontological approach to place, where place is an ongoing process in which we are thoroughly immersed. Also highlighted is the imperative to move forward from romantic static ideas of place in both theory and practice. It is clear that this thesis has a place in a wider sense, in that it responds to and finds edges in the current wider literature on place, as well as the philosophical and educational literature. This also enables the research to have much more integration between place-based education and critical and conceptual scholarship.

4C – The research questions

Having examined the wider literature on place, and the particular educational context and philosophical position of this research, it is now possible to locate my research questions within these fields. The educational need is to see what place-based education might mean in working contexts in Scotland. The examination of the literature on place-based education shows themes and points of common interest: concepts of belonging, time, experience, knowledge, the global and the local. Assumptions about nature, culture, native, incomer, human and more-than-human, and elements such as journeys, stories, creativity and local knowledge seem to be important. Will these be equally important in my context, and how will they be more clearly understood? Further, while guidelines or signposts on place-based education have been developed (Gruenewald, 2003a; Harrison, 2010c; Wattchow & Brown, 2011), Chapter 2 showed the need to explore place-based education with practitioners as it emerges in specific contexts. These considerations gives rise to the first, educational set of questions:

1 – What role do experiences of place have in education?

- 1A - How can place-based education be developed in specific contexts, such as Glen Strae?
- 1B – What are the distinctive features of doing place-based education in these contexts?
- 1C - How does place-based education affect experiences of place?

The sub-questions will be addressed through the research findings in Chapter 8. The main question will also be addressed here, but given further definition in Chapter 10 through interaction with the philosophical findings. The philosophical debate so far in this thesis has raised questions about the ontology of place, and our ability to theorise it in a *placed* manner. As Malpas (1999) and Orr (1992) point out place is so complex it is often only theorised in one aspect. Simply theorising place as narrative, place as sensuous experience, or place as social construction does not allow all its aspects to be understood. Place as sensuous experience draws attention to bodily presence in places, but can devalue understandings of cultural or environmental histories, and the role of home. Place as social construction might possibly help understand the different ways of knowing, ecological, historical, geographical, but does not explain what it means to learn in place. Section A has clearly shown the challenge to create a richer philosophical base which might account for all of these elements within what I have called an 'ontological approach to place.' Place here is not simply a location but a process where we are enmeshed in and through the world. This produces a further set of questions:

2 – *What is the ontology of place?*

- 2A – How can an ontological approach to place be described in a specific context, for example in Glen Strae?
- 2B - How are we (always) in place?
- 2C - How is it possible to account for the different facets of place experience: physical environments, bodies, thoughts, experiences, knowledge?

I have started already to address these questions in Section A, but will respond in greater depth to them through the findings of my phenomenological inquiry in Chapter 9.

The interaction between the educational and philosophical literature in this inquiry has produced a third strand of questioning. As discussed in part 4A of this chapter, my praxis approach led to questions such as 'why go to a place to learn about it?' and 'how can we understand the experience of being *and* thinking in place?' Praxis leads to a secondary or 'meta' level of

questioning: 'how does place affect thinking and learning?' This explores the approach of the thesis as a whole, and the mutual implications of the education and philosophical inquiries:

3 – How does place affect thinking and learning?

- 3A - What is the phenomenology of learning in place?
- 3B - How does place affect the scope and structure of this inquiry?

The main question has been explored already in Section A, and will continue to be addressed in Section B, the methodology, as well as Section C which presents my findings. Questions 3A and 3B will be addressed specifically in Chapter 10.

Section B – An appropriate methodology

I am back walking along the east side of Glen Strae, headed again for the shieling. It is a cold clear March day in 2010. The plants covering the slopes are brown and red, newly exposed from under the snow, but not yet ready for their spring growth. I am not alone. With me are five other educators: a primary school head teacher, an education officer from a national park, a high school art teacher, an outdoor educator and ranger, and a co-ordinator from a university 'transition' group. (The transition movement aims to foster community action to deal with peak oil and climate change (Hopkins, 2008)). We all make our way slowly through the tussocks, taking different paces and holding many conversations.

One member of the group is teaching another about the names and medicinal uses of plants, pointing out the bog myrtle whose brown leaves still cling to the tough short bushes. This is something she does with her groups when walking in the hills. A pungent smell can be raised from crushing the leaf. It was and still is used as a midge repellent. Later, in one of the group discussions the arts teacher who had learnt this discusses the importance and potential of learning more than just names of things. He argues that the stories and folklore around the bog myrtle could draw learners into a deeper understanding of the plant in context, and would likely help this knowledge stick in their minds.

The group stops at the erratic boulder. Perched so impressively on the slope, it seems to draw people in to rest. We discuss briefly the timescales and processes by which this boulder ended up here, and the art teacher shares his knowledge about the Devil's Matchstick lichen that is growing in a niche on the face of the rock. The upright stems with small cups at the end distribute the spores of this lichen. The wind moves around the cup and blows out the spores onto the air. This insight triggers new discussions about the potential for design projects in the outdoors, where children design their own plants, exploring the ways in which seed could be distributed or structures formed.

Bodies are rested and clothes are adjusted, and with these new ideas to discuss, or others to return to, we walk on towards the shieling.

The initial section of this thesis put forward a set of questions, these address edges in the global debate on place and place-based education, and large gaps in UK educational research. The description above is of the first weekend in a series of three research workshops which constituted part of my attempt to address these questions. I had already started another, pilot, series the previous November. Section B of this thesis documents how I came to decide that these workshops were the best strategy to answer my questions, who attended, what process I used, what questions were discussed, the methods of recording the discussions, and the ways in which the findings were generated. These choices and processes make up my methodology.

Chapter 5 explores phenomenological research, and to a small extent action research, which formed the methodological base from which my research questions were pursued. Chapter 6 outlines how I ran two series of research workshops: who came, what processes we used, and how findings were generated. This also shows the ongoing development of the ideas voiced in Chapter 5 through the workshop process and after, as I came to fully understand what it was that I was doing. Chapter 7 returns to methodological discussions, arguing that my workshops are best understood under the term 'collaborative phenomenological research.' In this chapter I also explore questions of validity and generalisability, and analysis.

Chapter 5 – Phenomenological research

Section A explored and developed three sets of research questions. Place-based education and an ontological approach to place emerged as key areas of the investigation. Questions about placed thinking and learning emerged from praxis between the educational and philosophical strands of the inquiry. This third strand of questioning; how to think and research in place, puts additional focus on Section B, where the educational and philosophical methodology needs to not only respond to my questions about place but in some way also be placed itself. In this chapter I will focus on phenomenology as an approach to addressing my research questions, and action research as a complimentary methodology which offers opportunities for more a collaborative research strategy. In the final part of this chapter I discuss action research into relationships with the environment (Reason, 2005) and place-based education (Preston, 2004; Preston & Griffiths, 2004), as a way of moving my research into a more participative frame. This can be seen (highlighted in red) in the context of the whole thesis, on the conceptual map below.

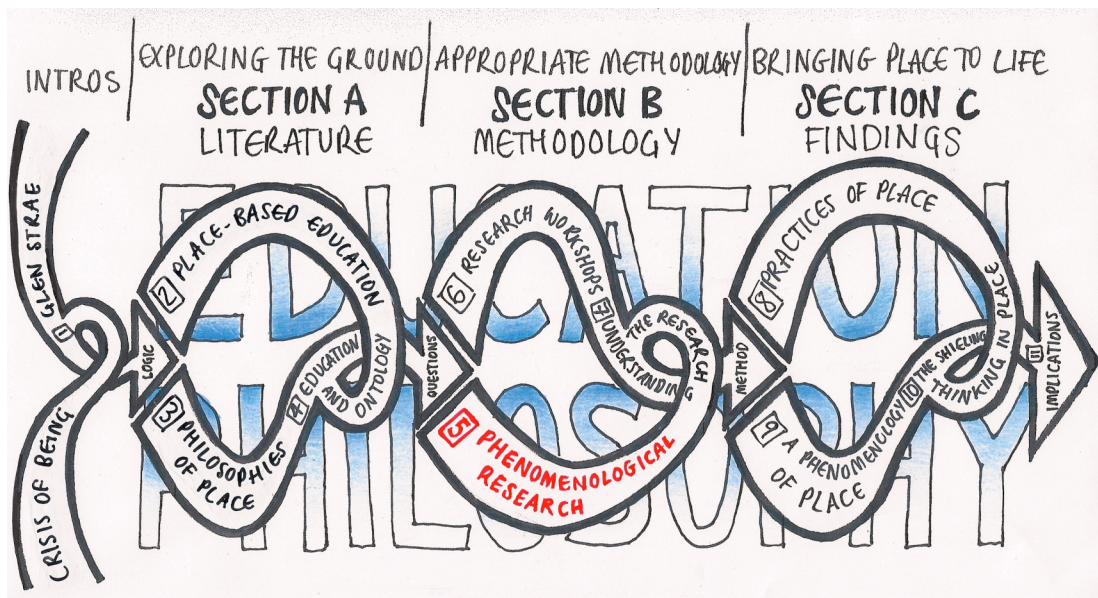


Figure 7. Conceptual map of the thesis for Chapter 5

Why phenomenology?

This chapter describes and critiques phenomenological research (Giorgi, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990b), and its relationship with phenomenology as a philosophy. This relationship is explored through the example of Merleau-Ponty's approach to phenomenology (1962), as he has already played an important role in the development of this inquiry. Phenomenological research is understood as a way of revealing qualities of lived experience. I argue that this would benefit from a more collaborative and experiential relationship with the research participants.

Before exploring the specifics of phenomenological research, and the possibilities of collaborative approaches within it, I will put forward the reasons why I focus on phenomenological research as opposed to the plethora of other research methodologies which might be appropriate (for example 'grounded theory' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) or a case study approach (Corcoran, Walker, & Wals, 2004; Dillon & Reid, 2004; Kyburz-Graber, 2004; Stevenson, 2004)). There are three reasons for my choice: the phenomenological nature of my inquiry from the start, the prevalence of that approach within the wider literature, and what might constitute useful and illuminating responses to my research questions.

Using a phenomenological methodology continues the thread of questioning with which this thesis started. The nature of the experience of place, both pedagogically and ontologically, has been the focus of the inquiry throughout. This can be seen in the initial discussions about the experience of educating in Glen Strae and the potential of place as a way of being, and throughout Section A in debate about the phenomenology of place and the educative value of the experience of place itself. As a philosophy and methodology which explicitly focuses lived experience (Giorgi, 1985; Husserl, 1973; van Manen, 1990b), phenomenology is the 'home' of this inquiry. In contrast with, for example, 'grounded theory' or 'case study' approaches, a phenomenological research methodology has the potential to link the educational and philosophical, and as such is congruent with the praxis orientation of the whole inquiry.

Phenomenology is also a frequently used methodology when studying place: from geographers (Relph, 1976; Seamon, 1980), to anthropologists (Ingold, 2000; Tilley, 1994), to philosophers (Casey, 1993; Malpas, 1999) and educators (Cameron, 2003; Wattchow, 2006). The approach taken within the small amount of place-based education research also engaged with theoretical questions is particularly revealing within this line of argument. While Greenwood draws on many theoretical traditions (Gruenewald, 2003a), his work is not overtly linked to any empirical research, however both Cameron (2003) and Wattchow (2006) link empirical research with theoretical development using phenomenology. Both use interviews and texts from their students to examine phenomenological questions.

The most important argument for a phenomenological methodology comes from my research questions themselves. It may seem that a mixed methodology as seen in Powers' (2004) report on place-based education, which included interviews with teachers, students and parents, and analysis of exam performance, might be appropriate for examining the role of place within educational experiences (see also Meichtry & Smith (2007) for a similar approach). Or that techniques from environmental psychology, which combine interviews and questionnaires with statistical analysis, such as the study into the restorative qualities of favourite places (Korpela & Hartig, 1996), might be effective. Both approaches blur the contested distinction between qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and draw conclusions about the role of place, yet neither methodology reveals the qualities of the *experience* of place or place-based education itself, nor do they have a strong presence in scholarly philosophy.

Section A described a number of different scholars' ideas on the role of place in promoting environmental care, or belonging, and more specifically educational strategies which might lead to these outcomes. There were many claims about what place and place-based education might do. But my research questions focus on *what it is like*. What is the nature of that experience: what is it like to do education *in* the place that is being learnt about, what is 'being in place' like? To respond to these questions requires a

methodology that inquires into the nature of experiences as they are lived, and is capable of drawing both practical and philosophical conclusions. Furthermore the underlying context of my inquiry is to examine ways of thinking and being which embed us into the world in specific ways and locations, this requires research from the 'inside,' rather than the 'outside,' (a quality that is lacking in both Powers' (2004) research, and most environmental psychology studies). As will be seen in the following discussion, phenomenology is well-suited for this task, and to addressing my research questions, with its descriptions of living through the research (e.g. van Manen, 1990b), rather than 'stepping outside' a phenomenon to examine it.

5A – Phenomenology and research

As the key figure in the birth of phenomenology, Husserl's (1973) dictum 'back to the things in themselves' is a useful place to start exploring phenomenology as a methodology. For Husserl, things are 'in themselves' when we experience them in everyday life. Husserl started the phenomenological tradition of exploring lived experience in the "life-world," (1970, p. 105). This is the everyday world where we experience ourselves, what is around us, and our relationships with people and places. However Husserl's approach to philosophy retains a very Cartesian flavour. His focus was on 'essences' and consciousness, privileging the mental over the physical (or rather not challenging that dualism). It was Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger who brought phenomenology back out into the world, with a more existential focus (Finlay, 2008; Abram 1996b).

Tracing the line of argument of this thesis, through the 'crisis of being' at the heart of our environmental problems, to the idea of place as an understanding of ourselves intertwined with the world around us, through to the particular ontological and educational challenges posed by this position, phenomenology has played an important role. The question that now arises is *how* phenomenology can be used to respond to my research

questions, providing insight into the pedagogical and ontological dimensions of place.

Phenomenologists such as Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger were philosophers, and applied themselves to philosophical questions in areas such as ontology, epistemology and ethics. Phenomenology has more recently been formed into a research methodology which has been applied to psychology (Giorgi, 1985), pedagogy (Groenewald, 2004; van Manen, 1977, 1990b, 1995, 2007; Wattchow, 2006) and other practical contexts (Finlay, 2008; Moustakas, 1994). Giorgi highlights the difference between philosophical phenomenology and applied phenomenological research, arguing that it is the duty of the researcher to interpret and adapt phenomenology for the situation it is in, to pursue practical rather than philosophical questions (Giorgi, 1985). Given that my investigation has both philosophical and practical educational elements, I will need to consider both roles of phenomenology. First I will explore the philosophical method of Merleau-Ponty, before moving on to applied phenomenological research methodologies in Part B of this chapter.

Merleau-Ponty's particular approach to phenomenology will form the basis for the exploration of phenomenology as philosophy and as an applied research method. As argued already in this chapter, one of the reasons for this choice was the importance of Merleau-Ponty's arguments in shaping this inquiry. It is fundamental to my idea of praxis to continue working with Merleau-Ponty both methodologically, and in the final section presenting my findings, to explore how a philosophy can both shape and be shaped by (educational) research and experience. Furthermore Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is specifically drawn upon by Giorgi (1985) and van Manen (1990b), whose work I use to understand applied phenomenological research. There are however many other approaches to phenomenology as a philosophical method following for example Gadamer, Husserl, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Levinas, or Nietzsche. These different approaches emphasise different elements of what might collectively be called phenomenological thought, engaging with a variety of techniques: hermeneutic (cyclical

exploration of texts), heuristic and existential (reflecting on researcher experiences) or conceptual (focusing on essences of experience), (Erlich, 2003; Finlay, 2008; 2011; Moustakas, 1994).

Merleau-Ponty's four principles of phenomenology

As stated earlier in the thesis, Merleau-Ponty argued that “there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself,” (1962, p. xii). This can be understood as implying that phenomenology is not about isolated thinking, but about context, and the understanding that arises through context. Yet the statement betrays a universality that might prevent the difference between specific contexts from being understood: the words ‘man’ and ‘world’ imply that the importance of gender and any particular region of the world might have been neglected. Langer raises some of these questions in the context of gender and time (2003). This brings to the fore a question that was raised in Chapter 3: does abstract and universal philosophy actually help in understanding (particular) places?

Examining Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological method will shed light on this issue, and the ability of philosophical phenomenology to address my questions. First and foremost Merleau-Ponty's approach to phenomenology is descriptive (1962, p. ix), describing our experience of being in the world. But how do we step ‘outside’ of experience to describe it, given Merleau-Ponty's claims that we are always in the world? His solution, in common with other phenomenologists is ‘reduction:’ to suspend our usual assumptions:

Not because we reject the certainties of common sense and a natural attitude to things – they are, on the contrary, the constant theme of philosophy – but because, being the presupposed basis of my thought, they are taken for granted, and go unnoticed, and because in order to arouse them and bring them into view, we have to suspend for a moment our recognition of them, (*ibid.* pp. xiv – xv).

In this statement, Merleau-Ponty can be seen to be arguing that our everyday experiences are revealed to us when we do not take them for granted, when we do not ‘recognise them’ as the normal things they are.

Merleau-Ponty points out that a complete reduction is impossible. In his own words he sums this up:

If we were absolute mind, the reduction would present no problem. But since, on the contrary, we are in the world... there is no thought which embraces all our thought, (*ibid.* p. xv).

This point sets Merleau-Ponty apart from more Cartesian approaches to philosophy where the separation of thinking mind from body and world is assumed to be possible. I am inevitably part of the research as I am in the world, in place, and can't escape that. Reduction, which could be understood as openness to phenomena, is thus a key methodological implication of a non-dualistic ontology, and an important guideline for validity in this research (issues of validity and generalisability will be discussed in Chapter 7).

The third element of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological method, alongside description and reduction, is the search for 'essences.' This is the attempt to make generalisations and form concepts about experience. Rather than simply describing experiences in particular, an essence may say something more general about those types of experience, or reveal specific qualities that were unseen. For Merleau-Ponty forming these ideas about life, allows us to understand it better:

... our existence is too tightly held in the world to be able to know itself as such at the moment of its involvement... it requires the field of ideality [ideas or concepts] in order to become acquainted with and to prevail over its own facticity, (*ibid.* p. xvi).

Or put differently, essences will help "in rediscovering my actual presence to myself," (*ibid.* p. xvii).

The fourth and final element of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is 'intentionality:' that we are always conscious of something, there is no 'pure' consciousness. In a similar way to the claim that we can never fully step outside our experience, intentionality means we can never step outside our intentions and meanings. As Merleau-Ponty puts it "we are condemned to meaning," (*ibid.* p. xxii). This idea allows everyone, and every point of view,

its own value. Thus philosophy in Merleau-Ponty's view does not have the right to analyse things, only to reveal them:

Our relationship to the world, as it is untiringly enunciated within us, is not a thing which can be any further clarified by analysis; philosophy can only place it once more before our eyes... (*ibid.* p. xx).

These four points: description, reduction, essences and intentionality, can be summed up in less technical terms as: describing experience, openness, conceptualisation and inherent meaning. Described by a key philosopher in this thesis, Merleau-Ponty, these principles are found in various forms in many phenomenological methodologies (Finlay, 2008; Giorgi, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990b). But how would they structure my research as they currently stand? Describing the experience of teaching place-based education in various contexts, and the ontology involved is clearly called for in my research questions, yet the type of description offered by Merleau-Ponty is often highly abstract and universal (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991). It does not deal with specific contextualised viewpoints but rather, for example, the phenomenon of a (any) hand touching itself (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). This brings up the question of scale: can descriptions, say of an educational experience in Glen Strae, reveal universal concepts, and if so do they obscure the placed specifics of that experience?

The principles of openness and inherent meaning seem to be less problematic for my research foci, but conceptualisation, or the search for essences, holds similar problems of scale. Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation of the world as flesh (1968), similar to his descriptions of touching and being touched, are universal and general, and the uniqueness and difference of place and place-experience seem to call such abstraction into question. If all the world is fundamentally 'flesh,' what makes any particular part of it hold any special attachment for us? This highlights a tension between the idea of place as the unique grounding of self and experience, and universal general concepts. In addition to the problems of scale and generality, Merleau-Ponty does not offer further guidance on how to maintain openness, or whose experience to describe, and how that description might occur. Moving from philosophical phenomenology, as seen through Merleau-Ponty, to phenomenology as an

applied research method helps answer some of these queries. Examining the applications of phenomenology in specific research contexts will clarify the relationship of my research to philosophy such as Merleau-Ponty's: I am engaging in phenomenology but exploring the limitations of scope and scale implied by place experiences.

5B – Researching lived experience

In the 1970s various research strategies were developed out of philosophical phenomenology (Groenewald, 2004). Ehrlich (2003) states that two schools came to dominate the phenomenological research field: the Duquesne school typified by the psychological work of Giorgi (1985), and the Utrecht school, exemplified in a pedagogical context by van Manen (1990b). Finlay draws attention to the other phenomenological methodologies which also emerged: heuristic, hermeneutic and relational (Finlay, 2008). However, following the argument voiced above (p. 102), tracing Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology into applied contexts, the psychological work of Giorgi (1985) and pedagogical focus of van Manen (1990b) will form the main focus here. It is important to note that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology has been used in many other research contexts beyond psychology and education, for example nursing (Thomas, 2005), and geography (Seamon, 1980).

Phenomenological psychology

As a key thinker in the development of phenomenological research, Giorgi's work (1985) presents an important start point for exploring applied interpretations of phenomenology (Ehrlich, 2003; Findlay, 2008; Groenewald, 2004). Giorgi draws heavily on Merleau-Ponty's four elements of phenomenology, but argues that it is the researcher's job to interpret phenomenology for their own use, so it does not remain at a philosophical level (1985). He points out that the 'level' at which scholars are talking sometimes remains obscure and needs clarifying, and that non-philosophers seeking to use phenomenology often become mistaken about the philosophy or reject it out of hand:

Those who really understand phenomenology are philosophers, and they articulate the genuine meaning of phenomenology as a philosophy... Thus, phenomenology, to be helpful to psychology, must not remain just a philosophy; it must be expressed in a way that makes it proximately helpful to psychological praxis, (*ibid.* p. 46).

In the sphere of psychological research, Giorgi does just this. He uses Merleau-Ponty's four principles, and develops a structure to analyse testimony from research 'subjects.' Speaking on a particular issue, for example gift giving, the interview between psychologist/researcher and 'subject' is recorded and transcribed, and then a four step process is carried out by the researcher. Initially the whole transcript is read through, taking the meaning as a whole, then again finding specific 'meaning units' through the thread of the testimony. The meaning units are then rendered into psychological insights, and finally these insights are formed into one general statement (Giorgi, 1985).

This methodology offers several solutions to the problems raised in the previous part of this chapter. For Giorgi it makes sense to generalise about psychological phenomena, but this is done within the context of the psychologist's knowledge and expertise. Thus the scope and scale of the phenomenological investigation is dictated by the nature of the psychological inquiry. Giorgi spends considerable time exploring the ways in which 'meaning units' are chosen, and what is the relevant level of generalisation to take. For example in his analysis of a father giving a chess set to his son, Giorgi explores the context and decides that it is not the particular type of gift, of a chess set, but the fact that it is a gift, of any type, that warrants a conceptualisation of gift giving. Making these choices requires "reflection and imaginative variation," (*ibid.* p. 18). Giorgi also argues that testimony from many different people (in some cases) can aid the process of theorization:

The more subjects there are, the greater the variations, and hence the better the ability to what is essential, (*ibid.* p. 19).

Giorgi's approach allows the researcher to judge what is the appropriate level of generalisation. Furthermore, in a step away from the typical solitary philosopher, experiences other than the researcher's are seen to be of value. However, one major problem with Giorgi's phenomenological methodology is that for Giorgi, as a psychologist, the expertise rests with the researcher in interpreting the experience for the subject. It is not the researcher's psyche that is in question. However, this PhD was seeded by reflections on my own work as an educator, and the inquiry has prompted further reflection. If this reflection is beneficial to me, it seems reasonable that it might also be useful for the participants in the research. In other words, why not involve the 'subjects' in the analysis and reflection?

In contrast to Giorgi, van Manen's approach to phenomenological research is overtly pedagogical (1990b), moving it closer towards my context. He also argues that the purpose of phenomenological research for the educator/researcher is to improve their own practice. There are other interpretations of phenomenological research with the field of education, for example: Groenewald (2008), Latta & Buck (2008), Payne (1997). However, beyond the importance of van Manen's work in phenomenological research as a whole (p. 106), his methodology is particularly useful for my inquiry because it is possible to examine one very relevant interpretation of his work in Wattchow's research on place and education (2006). As will be seen below, van Manen's methodology does include strategies to include interviewees in the examining their 'testimony,' and examines a more relevant subject matter: education. But I will argue that van Manen's approach does not go far enough to collaborate with the research participants.

Phenomenology and pedagogy

Van Manen describes his phenomenological research methodology in his book *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*, (van Manen, 1990b). Strongly anchored in pedagogy, for van Manen, this approach to research involves interrogating how we are in the world:

From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. And since to know the world is profoundly to be in the world in a certain way, the act of researching - questioning - theorising is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully a part of it, or better, to become the world, (*ibid.* p. 5).

In contrast to Giorgi's methodology, this highlights the possibilities inherent in phenomenological research for a different relationship between researcher and research participant.

Van Manen's research process is akin to Giorgi's: to find and analyse texts which capture a certain experience, to find the key themes which create understanding of that experience, and write about the essence of these experiences. Equally it follows similar phenomenological principles as those set out by Merleau-Ponty. More concretely, for van Manen there are six stages of phenomenological research:

- 1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world
- 2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it
- 3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon
- 4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting
- 5) maintaining a strong and orientated pedagogical relation to the phenomenon
- 6) balancing the research context by considering the parts and whole, (*ibid.* pp. 30 - 31).

Testimony from people in various different forms including poetry and prose constitute what van Manen calls 'texts,' and are the basis for thematic analysis, where "phenomenological themes may be understood as the structures of experience," (*ibid.* p. 79). Van Manen suggests various 'lifeworld existentials' to guide reflection:

...lived space (spaciality), lived body (corporality), lived time (temporality) and lived human relation (relationality or communality)" (*ibid.* p. 101).

These 'existentials' provide a series of foci for examining the texts. This list of lifeworld existentials can be understood as capturing the different elements

of place, (as seen for example in Casey's and Malpas' analysis), implying that place is a key part of all experience in van Manen's phenomenological framework. However there is no specific acknowledgement of 'place' as a unifying concept, with space being looked at only briefly.

Having thematised a text, van Manen's methodology has a further stage which involves using the themes to write about the phenomenon at hand. In this fifth stage, writing is not just 'writing up' but a process of thinking and theorising the research question:

Writing fixes thought on paper. It externalises what in some sense is internal; it distances us from our immediate lived involvements with the things of our world. As we stare at the paper, and stare at what we have written, our objectified thinking now stares back at us. Thus, writing creates the reflective cognitive stance that generally characterises the theoretic attitude of the social sciences, (*ibid.* p. 125).

The final part of van Manen's phenomenological research process involves pursuing standards of validity and critical thought. As seen in the quote above, writing itself is seen as a way to bring validity into phenomenological research:

Writing distances us from lived experience but by doing so it allows us to discover the existential structures of experience, (*ibid.* p. 127).

Van Manen also suggests always considering practice, or pedagogy, whilst writing, to keep a "strong and orientated relation" to the real world, (*ibid.* p. 139). He describes this process as "action research," (*ibid.* p. 154), but does not engage with the term as an extant and varied research discipline (see for example Reason and Bradbury (2001), and Noffke & Somekh (2009)).

Van Manen's methodology overtly deals with education and developing practice, and gives a clearly structured process. However there are several issues which arose in the context of Giorgi's work which are still unresolved in van Manen's methodology. The most important of these is the potential for collaboration in the research process. As implied in the previous quote, van Manen feels that other people's experience is very important:

In phenomenological research the emphasis is always on the meaning of lived experience. The point of phenomenological research is to

'borrow' other people's experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience, (*ibid.* p. 62).

In line with the idea of 'borrowing,' the majority of ways of producing 'texts' put forward by van Manen revolve around the researcher, for example interviewing people, or finding poetry or prose that deals with the phenomenon in question.

Van Manen hints at the possibility of a collaborative process to gather this 'data:'

...depending on the nature of the project and the stage of the inquiry process, the conversation interview method may serve either to mainly gather lived-experience material (stories anecdotes, recollections of experiences, etc.) or serve as an occasion to reflect with the partner (interviewee) on the conversational relation at hand. In the latter case the conversational interview can go back and [sp] again to the interviewee in order to dialogue with the interviewee about the ongoing record of the interview transcripts. The hermeneutic interview tends to turn the interviewees into participants or collaborators of the research project, (*ibid.* p. 63).

The collaboration put forward by van Manen falls short of its potential. If, as he points out in his six stages of the research, we need to be "investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it," why return to the texts? Instead of returning to the story of one experience and the process of increasingly conceptual analysis, why not explore other similar experiences with the themes in mind to see if they are confirmed or changed? This argument echoes critiques of phenomenological research put forward by Levering (2006) and Richardson (1999): that phenomenology risks becoming descriptions of people's descriptions of experiences, rather than descriptions of the experiences themselves. At stake here is the power of language to describe the elements of experience under study, and the research focus on experiences rather than texts.

A further issue arises here, seeded by Giorgi's comments on the possibilities of multiple testimonies (p. 107): why not explore descriptions of experiences as a group, comparing and contrasting different experiences and

understandings? Surely this fits better with van Manen's experiential and action-orientated ethos:

...a good phenomenological description is collected by lived experience and recollected by lived experience - is validated by lived experience and it validates lived experience, (*ibid.* p. 27).

These challenges are revealed when the methodology is applied. This can be seen in the examples of van Manen's phenomenological research methodology in place-based education (Cameron, 2005, Wattchow, 2006).

The most obvious of these is Wattchow's use of this methodology in understanding students' experiences of place (2006). Exploring Wattchow's research will highlight in a specific context the problems seen above with van Manen's approach.

Phenomenological research in action

Wattchow analyses educational experiences for the quality of place-consciousness they exhibit (Payne & Wattchow, 2008; Wattchow, 2006, 2007, 2008). The experiences in question are expeditions by canoe in Australia, which form part of student teacher's tertiary education. Using diaries made by the students at the time, and subsequent interviews, Wattchow follows van Manen's methodology: he creates texts from the testimony and analyses them. Those interviewed by Wattchow have the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, but the 'hermeneutic interpretation' is completed by the researcher alone (see Wattchow (2006, p. 144)). The obvious methodological question is: would greater involvement in the interpretation of the experiences have benefited the students, and/or the research? This benefit might be seen in two ways: one, that the students might have taken something from their involvement in the conceptualisation of their own experiences. The second benefit being for the research rather than the students themselves: that they might have helped shape the inquiry. The potential for collaborative research here seems to be great (despite the extra effort this might have taken).

One reply to these questions is that Wattchow had set out to explore the nature of existing courses, rather than finding out the potential for new

approaches. In this way repeated interrogation of the experience, whilst on the river, might have taken the expedition in a different direction, and defeated its purpose. Nevertheless group inquiry after the event might have been interesting. Beyond Wattoo's context, this discussion indicates the possibility of a more participative and experiential approach to phenomenological research. 'Participative' in this context means collaborating with research participants to not only record, but thematise their experiences. This might also involve repeated experiences rather than repeated focus on texts, and it might involve a group developing the findings of the research.

To sum up this chapter so far: phenomenological research provides a framework through which to explore the experience of place and place-based education as it is lived. From Merleau-Ponty's four principles, through Giorgi to van Manen's methodology, an outline structure emerges through which to explore my research questions. This involves an open exploration of a phenomenon, judging the themes which it exhibits and generating descriptions from them which reveal aspects of that experience. This chapter has also shown the close links between philosophical work such as Merleau-Ponty's and phenomenological research methodologies. These links will prove useful when I come to set my research findings back into the philosophical context of the inquiry (as defined in Chapters 3 and 4).

Both my philosophical and educational questions involve specific contexts and embody a tension between the understanding of place developed in this thesis and general or universal ideas. This tension has already been seen in the literature, especially in the context of philosophical work on place, (see Chapter 4). It now becomes an important methodological issue: how can my methodology take account of the uniqueness and specificity implied by an ontological approach to place? What scale and scope of description and conceptualisation is appropriate, educationally and philosophically? The argument so far also raises the possibility of a more collaborative and experiential approach to phenomenological research. This will be explored in the final part of this chapter.

5C – Action research

Understanding the practice and ontology of place-based education requires research from ‘in the midst of life,’ from within the lived experience of educating and being in place. This is a phenomenological project (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; van Manen, 1990b). Yet phenomenological methodology, both as philosophy and as a practical research approach, seems to fall short of its potential for collaboration. If they are drawing on testimony of others’ experience, why should researchers be the only ones to explore the research findings in the context of their own lives? Wouldn’t the phenomenological ideals of reduction (openness) and intentionality (inherent meaningfulness), be better explored within a group context? The challenge posed by different perspectives on a phenomenon could promote openness, questioning individual assumptions. The different meanings each person assigns to the experience would embody the idea of intentionality. Equally the search for essences might be more valid if the essence or concept reflects a commonality in the experience of the group.

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty’s, Giorgi’s and van Manen’s approaches to phenomenological research all seem to hold in common the idea that the research process reveals characteristics of experience already there. This contrasts with my investigation into what the literature implies is a relatively new educational approach in the UK: place-based education. While elements of place-based education might be familiar to educators under a different name, my inquiry requires an active practical and professional investigation rather than simply a reflection on what educators have already done. Put another way, answering my practical research questions around the role of place in education, and how place-based education can be applied in different contexts, starts with the question ‘what is place-based education?’

Taking a more collaborative approach raises many questions: how do collaborative research projects take place? How are they rigorous? How do they record experiences (given that description of lived experience is a goal of this research)? How does a more participative approach fit with

philosophical questions, and with phenomenological research? 'Action research,' understood as a family of different collaborative research approaches (Noffke & Somekh, 2009; Reason & Bradbury, 2001), provides guidance on some of these questions.

Action research is a complex and increasingly popular approach to research; it is more a family of similar approaches than a single coherent methodology (Dick, 2004; Noffke & Somekh, 2009; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). With historical roots back to Lewin, Gramsci and Freire (Reason & Bradbury, 2001), some key themes are: developing or transforming professional practice, community education, participatory inquiry, challenging power structures and creating meaningful change. Action research can be many things to many people. In the context of my PhD action research helps provide a structure for working with research participants, developing some of the possibilities for collaboration inherent in phenomenological research. (Whether the research approach which I developed could or should be called action research is discussed in Chapter 7, p. 155).

The two key elements from action research that are relevant to my inquiry have clear precedents in the literature: developing professional educational practice (Kemmis & McTaggart; 1990, Whitehead; 1989), and collaborative approaches to group research (Heron & Reason, 2001; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). A further defining element of my brief inquiry into action research is my engagement with questions outside the purely human sphere. Place, in the context of my investigation, is assumed to ground both nature and culture (the terms themselves become contested in this understanding). However, as Reason points out "most action research has been human to human, and the challenge of working directly with the more than human world is important and elusive," (2010, pers. comm.). The few exceptions to this: action research with environmental or place-based educators, and action research into our relationship with the more-than-human world, form the meeting point of my research concerns with action research literature. It is this segment of the literature that I will examine here.

My use of action research to support and develop the collaborative phenomenological approach of this inquiry does not engage with the full breadth of the field. Reason and Bradbury's five fold model of the elements of action research interweaves "human flourishing, practical issues, participation and democracy, knowledge in action, and emergent developmental form," (2001, p. 5). I am largely focusing on 'knowledge in action' and the ways in which action research dealing with issues of environment and place has developed group strategies to explore this way of knowing. There are parallels in some understandings of action research with elements of my research, which in my case have been shaped by the edges I found in the educational literature (as seen in Chapter's 2 and 4), and the phenomenological approach being developed in this chapter. Examples of these elements are: working with practicing educators exploring and doing place-based education, cycles of exploration and meaning-making from experiences. I do not explore these parallels further within the action research literature due to my phenomenological focus, but return to questions of the relationship between my research and action research in Chapters 7 (p. 145) and 11 (p. 254).

Action research and the environment

Reason and Bradbury state in the introduction to *The handbook of action research*, that action research contributes to "a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the wider ecology of the planet of which we are an intrinsic part," (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 3). Ballard et al. (2004) and Robottom and Sauve (2003) suggest that action research has a role for researching sustainable development. These statements open the discussion on collaborative research focused on the environment and on place. The relationship between outdoor and environmental education, outdoor learning and place-based education as educational approaches has been explored in Chapter 2. Despite locating my approach within outdoor learning and place-based education, action research in environmental and outdoor education will also be examined here due to the similarity between

contexts, and the lack of examples of action research engaging with this field in general.

Gayford (2003) writes that participatory methods in 'education for sustainability' are "not recorded," (*ibid.* p. 131). This is not entirely correct: Reason and Bradbury (2001), and Ballard et al's (2004) assertions have a basis in current research. While there are still only a few examples, the amount of literature in this area is growing (Bradbury, 2001; Collins, 2004; Gayford, 2003; Gough & Sharpley, 2005; Hovelynck, 2000). These examples describe a variety of different participatory methods that people (mostly educators) working with environmental issues have used to improve their practice. In another example of action research into environmental education, Posch (1993) argues that students too should take an action research approach to environmental education.

Posch introduces a paper by Požarnik et al. (1993) which describes the use of action research in exploring and developing environmental education with teachers. Action research workshops were organised to help teachers:

- to build up a good group relationship, a climate of mutual trust and co-operation among members of the project;
- to give opportunity for in-depth mutual exchange of information, experiences, questions and reflections regarding planning and running the projects;
- to give teachers basic information and some training on different aspects and phases of action research;
- to help to clarify some basic concepts connected with environmental education (e.g. taxonomy of aims, components of environmental awareness, ecosystemic thinking, entropy ...);
- to present examples of experiential methods that teachers could also use with pupils (e.g. role plays, structured exercises, different types of discussions and analysis by video feed-back); these are still new to most Slovenian teachers;
- to give teachers support and guidelines in evaluating the results and writing the final report (*ibid.* pp. 470 - 471).

Three two and half day workshops were held, with sixteen to eighteen teachers, once a term over the space of a full school year. The workshops with teachers were residential.

The project described by Požarnik et al. (1993) blurs the line between action research as a professional development strategy and action research as a learning technique that educators could use with their students. In the workshops the educators became students themselves, developing an understanding of environmental education. They learnt about the environment (for example about entropy), and modelled processes they could use with their students. For me, this implies that a collaborative action-focused approach can also draw on experiences of place, and the educators' experiences as learners, as well as the logistical and practical questions of how place-based education can be implemented. This is necessary to address all my research questions. The example here also provides precedent for a structure of centralised research workshops.

The engagement with 'environment' in the research explored so far is at the level of learning about or solving problems with pollution or natural spaces, rather than connection or ways of being in place. Other examples of environmental education action research also share this focus (Lewis, 2001; Wals, 1994). Sahasewiyon (2004) brings the debate closer to the key themes of my inquiry. Based in Thailand, Sahasewiyon relates the use of action research in developing a place-responsive local curriculum in schools. Despite interesting insights into the key factors in developing this curriculum, such as teacher and administrator attitudes, and the importance of developing relationships within the locality, the qualities of place-based education and deeper questions about place are not explored.

The 'shallow' focus of the action research projects reviewed so far returns to themes from Section A, where Evernden's 'crisis of being' (1985) is reflected in attempts to solve environmental 'problems' whilst not inquiring into the more fundamental question of 'being': what kind of things are we in the world, in place? Arne Naess' (1973) distinction between 'shallow' and 'deep' ecology is useful here. As discussed in Chapter 3, Naess writes about 'shallow ecology' as dealing with pollution, resource depletion and biodiversity. 'Deep ecology' on the other hand aims to question and reform our relationship with the world around us and our conceptualisation of

ourselves. The examples of action research seen so far seem to be of a 'shallow' rather than 'deep' kind.

Are there examples where action research inquires deeply into our relationship with the world around us, and the places we are in? This question is important as the collaborative element of my research needs to fit within the whole inquiry, where place pedagogy is being explored not simply a set of techniques or working in a local venue, but as a way of being. Equally, to shed light on the ways in which place structures our knowledge and physicality (place as an ontological phenomenon) research participants need to have the opportunity to engage deeply with the experience of place.

Placing action research

Reason and Bradbury state that our relationship to the wider ecological world around us is a fundamental element of participatory research:

A participatory worldview places human persons and communities as part of their world—both human and more-than-human—embodied in their world, co-creating their world, (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 10).

Reason also writes about this on other occasions, e.g. Reason and Torbert (2001). This indicates the potential for action research to engage with a deeper ecology, with the more-than-human. It is within this area of action research that further useful methodological precedents for my research might be examined.

Reason's paper *Education for ecology: science, aesthetics, spirit and ceremony*, (2005) provides a glimpse of what such an action research process might look like. Reason argues, with similarity to deep ecological writing and the premise of this thesis, that the ecological crisis is a crisis of understanding. He urges a less 'rational' approach to the environment, drawing on Bateson (1972), and educational techniques arising from deep ecology and ecopsychology. Implementing these ideas in a project at Schumacher College in southern England, Reason puts forward some design principles: using the place where the students study as a focus for exploring the ecology, regularly

being outside, using scientific and other ways of talking about nature, creating art and poetry, and holding ceremonies, (Reason, 2005).

These techniques have been written about and explored in the deep ecological, eco-psychological and environmental education literature (e.g. Higgins (1996), Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner (1995), Seed, Macy, Flemming, & Naess (1993)). The key point here, however, is that action research is the mode of inquiry. Under the section titled 'Education as inquiry,' Reason explains the link between action research and the more-than-human world, as seen in his workshop at Schumacher College:

The workshop... draws on the extended epistemology of cooperative inquiry: as human persons we participate in and articulate our world through experiential, presentational, propositional and practical ways of knowing (Heron, 1996; Heron and Reason, 2001). We open spaces for experiential knowing through face-to-face encounter with the natural world, aided by deep ecology exercises intended to offer new perspectives and perceptions; we open to aesthetic imagery through verbal and non-verbal forms of presentational knowing—creative writing, drawing, poetry; we provide a wide range of propositional knowing, concepts and ideas which articulate the ecology of the planet; and draw on practical knowing in the more ecological rhythms of life in Schumacher College. The whole workshop is designed as a process of inquiry cycling through these four ways of knowing, (Reason, 2005, p. 11).

Reason's focus here is on an epistemology that overcomes our separation from the world. In his work with Bradbury and Heron, this 'extended epistemology,' the articulation of the 'participatory worldview' and the 'action turn,' attempt to face the challenge of understanding ourselves as part of a scientific ecology as well as a subjective world of varied meanings and perspectives (Reason, 1998; Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Reason & Heron, 2008). This position implies some philosophical commonality with my inquiry, and gives an example of how a collaborative process can explore beyond human-to-human relationships. Despite my critique of some approaches to deep ecology (see p. 51) the possibility of an action research approach to place-based education is obvious, using insights from Reason's work but using place-based activities rather than deep ecological ones. As

will become clear below, such a substitution occurred in Preston and Griffiths work (Preston, 2004; Preston & Griffiths, 2004).

Reason's extended epistemology has been used by Nicol, to understand the multiple ways of knowing which can occur in outdoor education, and to help structure a theoretical position on these experiences which attempts to move beyond the Cartesian dualism between self and world (Nicol, 2003). Through Nicol, Reason's ideas and multiple ways of knowing have impacted on one of the few published examples of action research and place-based education (Preston, 2004; Preston & Griffiths, 2004). Despite the fact that it does not engage with the professional practice of place-based education, nor any key philosophers of place, Preston and Griffiths' work training student educators is useful in the context of my inquiry as it uses action research to investigate experiences of place. Motivated by concerns that research and learning should reflect a participatory worldview, Preston and Griffiths chose action research to enable students to be critical, experiential and collaborative, (Preston & Griffiths, 2004, p. 37). (Interestingly these concerns stem from engagement with environmental education, rather than any (referenced) acknowledgement of action research, specifically Reason's work on epistemology).

Preston and Griffiths' workshops are similar to Reason's. Drawing on Nicol's work, they structure a series of experiences and regular practices using different 'ways of knowing,' through which the students examine their relationship to place:

Students and lecturers in this unit make regular and intentional visits to individually chosen natural places and employ journal writing and collaborative discussion to endeavour to unravel some of the complexities that surround our experiences of natural places, (Preston, 2004, pp. 12 - 13).

In practice this meant:

Each experience in our particular place was framed with a specific intention in mind, for example, to explore the place experientially, to discover the European history of the place, to identify the flora, to paint a picture of the place, or to search for Koorie food plants, (*ibid.* p. 15).

The focus, in Preston and Griffiths' work, on specific, contextualised and cross-disciplinary learning, contrasts with Reason's emphasis on global environmental issues. This shows how participative inquiry can engage more directly with place. Furthermore, the role of place-based education in working contexts and the ontology of place are not addressed by Preston and Griffiths, confirming a space for my research. In summary, the two examples of Reason (2005) and Preston and Griffiths (2004) suggest practical ways in which a more collaborative approach to phenomenological research may be taken. Beyond organising workshops to share experiences of different working contexts (as seen in Požarnik et al. (1993)), the techniques used by Reason (2005), and Preston and Griffiths (2004), show how the experiences of place can be an important part of a collaborative piece of research.

This chapter introduced and critiqued the general area in which my research methodology sits. The next chapter will describe in practice how I conducted a series of research workshops to pursue my inquiry. Many questions from the current chapter have been left unresolved, for example: what was my exact methodology, how does it fit into the existing literature explored above, what was the relationship between phenomenological and action research in my approach, how was validity strived for in the process and findings of the research? Responses to many of these questions can be seen through my descriptions of the research in practice in Chapter 6, but they will be addressed explicitly in Chapter 7. This ordering of chapters attempts to reflect the fact that methodological development, both critiquing the literature and understanding my research workshops, occurred before, during, and after the actual process of delivery of those workshops. In fact this development continued all the way until the final draft of this thesis.

Chapter 6 – Research workshops

The previous chapter sited my methodology within phenomenological and action research literatures. In this chapter I will document the actual process of organising and conducting the research, how it felt and the decisions I made. This chapter will be more about process rather than content, focusing on showing how I attempted to conduct research *about* place, but also *in* place. The content, or findings, will be set out in greater detail in Section C. Conducting the research was a complex and messy learning process in itself, and a clear understanding of what I did only emerged when writing this thesis. This is reflected in my return to methodological considerations in Chapter 7. The place of these developments (highlighted in red) within the logic of the whole thesis can be seen below.

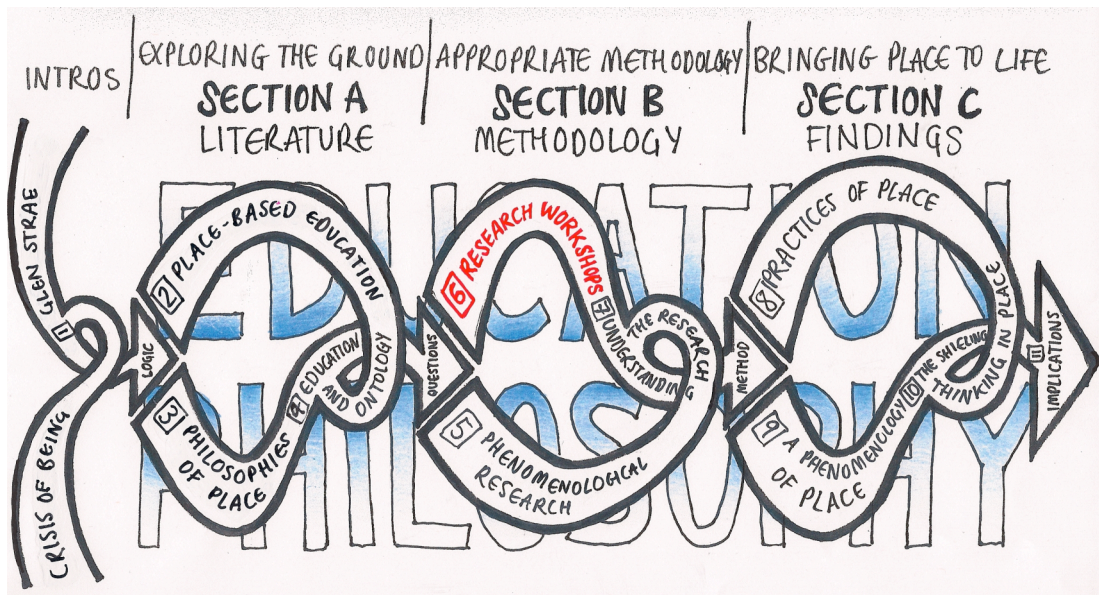


Figure 8. Conceptual map of the thesis for Chapter 6

It is Saturday evening on the first weekend meeting with the pilot research group. Ten of us are sitting in the kitchen of Duiletter Lodge in Glen Strae, around the spacious table. The Rayburn oven behind us is throwing out warmth; there is tea and cake on the table. A venison curry, which the group cooked using meat from the glen, has been consumed with relish. Before we

relax for the night, a participant suggests that we go over the day's events, and see what reflections people have. I begin by re-iterating the themes which I thought had emerged during the day, to open the conversation. Then there are questions concerning the research process, as the participants clarify their roles and expectations. Next one of the participants opens up again the question of place and place-based education:

A: I think maybe this is a daft question but maybe 'where is place?' you know we are up here in this beautiful glen and that, but is it the same in your playground? Is it to do with engaging with nature? Within your school grounds? Or is it to do with engaging with your community, your urban environment. I'm obviously not in that sort of situation so I can do place-based stuff where I am, because I live and work in a rural area. But is it to do with the environment, is it to do with the community? Is it to do with both? What is place?

Sam: Is that a question to me? Or...

A: It's a question to the group I suppose. What is place? Is it... you know, the place that you feel you belong, or is it the world.

C: Surely it's where you want to teach. If you are wanting to teach a certain thing, and you can see a way of teaching that in the area that you are in, isn't that what place-based education is? Wherever you can teach it. If you have a message to give and you find a place that you can correctly give it, and give it with... give it well. Surely that's what place-based education is.

A: So it's just putting things in context then. And is there a bigger message that we're trying to put over. Or is it just making things real for people? *Pilot Weekend One, Discussion G (transcription coded as P1.G – see Appendix E for full list of recorded discussions, participants have been anonymised and are denoted by a letter).*

The quote above marks a pivotal point in this thesis. Section A developed arguments and questions which set the research in motion, and Chapter 5 described the methodological thinking that I judged was relevant to my questions. Three elements can be summarised from Chapter 5: a philosophical approach to phenomenology (seen through Merleau-Ponty's work (1962)), a textual phenomenological research methodology (van Manen, 1990b), and an experiential and collaborative inquiry into relationships with nature (Reason, 2005) and place (Preston, 2004; Preston & Griffiths, 2004). This chapter describes how all these ideas and strategies were put into place, moving from ideas into actuality.

As has already been pointed out in the previous chapter (p. 122) the development of a research structure out of the literature (and other, practical, considerations which I explore below), was not a simple linear process. Implementing the elements listed above was a continual work in progress. Bearing this in mind, in the remainder of this chapter I will examine how I developed and delivered the research workshops, and the approach I took to posing my research questions.

6A – Planning

I planned a series of research workshops with practicing educators at a central venue. These needed to describe the practice and understanding of place-based education through experiences at the venue and back in participants' workplaces. Repeating the question 'what is place-based education?' would prompt inquiry into the commonalities or differences between participants' understandings. Posing this question was not aimed at finding definitions but prompting questions and reflection. The workshops also needed to examine experiences of place collaboratively both at the venue and drawing on other places in the participants' lives. In addition the workshops needed to explore the themes and meanings of the experiences under scrutiny, returning to lived experiences to aid the thematising. This part of the chapter explains the process I undertook in realising this workshop structure. I describe who I needed to work with, how I recruited them, and why they came.

Research questions

My research questions are grouped into philosophical and educational areas (see p. 93). (The third 'praxis' question asks how place affects thinking and learning. This reflects on both the thesis as a whole and the relationship between the outcomes of the first two questions). The educational questions revolve around the role of place experience in education. Understanding how place-based education might fit into different contexts, its outcomes, and how it affects ways of being in place, are questions that an educator

adopting place-based education might want to ask. In contrast, my philosophical questions, revolving around the ontology of place, derive from some complex philosophical debates (seen in Chapters 1 and 3). While they might be questions that a philosopher (of place) might want to ask, they might not necessarily be of interest to an educator. The different subject matter of my research questions created a methodological division: would bringing together a group of educators to describe and thematise their experiences meet my research needs, and answer both my philosophical and educational sets of questions?

My interpretation of the phenomenological idea of intentionality, supported by the participative ethos of action research, relies on research participants having an interest in drawing out the particular themes or essences of their experiences. A brief return to the literature already identified in this methodology section shows the context I drew on to plan how philosophical and educational questions might interact in my research. I will then describe the ways in which I structured the research workshops to meet the challenge of having both educational and philosophical questions.

An assumption that philosophy shapes research but is not shaped by it, is seen in Wattchow's work (2006, 2007, 2008), and is prevalent within place-based education literature (see for example, Cameron (2003), Greenwood (2003b), Payne (1997), and Somerville (2010)). Philosophy here is a 'one way' process of conceptualisation, a theory which aims to describe the world, which can be used to shape our understanding, say of place. Here it is not something which the research process dialogues with, either when engaging with participants, or in the researcher's analysis. As pointed out in Section A (p. 73), one of the reasons for this approach to philosophy may simply be that these scholars and educators do not have a philosophical question, rather (only) an educational one. However, I am attempting to ask both.

In contrast to the place-based educators referenced here, some action research scholars do engage with philosophical theory and the works of various philosophers (e.g. Bridges (2003), Carr (2006), Cotton and Griffiths

(2007), Elliot (1991), Kemmis (2001), Somekh (2006)). The most prevalent approach to philosophical works within this action research, is to draw out the philosophical implications of the action research separately to the collaborative inquiry itself. Acknowledging that interest and expertise in philosophical debates are not always shared by their research participants, the philosophical and educational are nevertheless brought into closer contact. The implication which can be drawn from these examples, (especially, for example, Griffiths (1998a, 1998b, with Cotton, 2007) is that philosophy can be rooted in everyday experiences.

Griffiths calls this 'practical philosophy:'

Practical philosophy self-consciously takes the practices and experiences of all human beings—not just academic philosophers—into critical conversation with established philosophy, thus changing the nature of that established philosophy as well as affecting those practices and experiences. This requires philosophers, including philosophers of education, to recognise that their philosophy is necessarily rooted in particular communities and social practices. It also requires them to speak not only to the communities in which they are rooted, but also to shift as they converse with other, overlapping communities, (1998a, p. 547).

This characterisation of practical philosophy, echoes the understanding of praxis which I set out in the introduction (p. 21), and Merleau-Ponty's understanding of phenomenology: "Experience anticipates a philosophy and philosophy is merely an elucidated experience," (1962, p. 73).

At the centre of the relationship between place-based education and place ontology, is the experience of place: both educational thought and practice, and philosophical inquiry are rooted here. However the literature seems to show that philosophers and educators can form two different 'communities.' The implications of Griffiths' statement above, and my approach to this inquiry, is that these communities can 'overlap' and 'converse' with one another (to use Griffiths' phrases). I have explored this overlap through praxis between the two bodies of literature in Chapter 4 of this thesis, but the key methodological question which emerges here is: 'how will the educational and philosophical inquiries interact in the workshops?'

Griffiths' categorisation of practical philosophy supports a certain amount of division of labour between my two areas of research. In an ideal world it might have been possible to bring together a group of participants who were both philosophers and educators, or to have run two sets of parallel workshops one with educators and one with philosophers, bringing both groups together to explore the relationships between the two investigations. Another option might have been to include the introduction of philosophical issues to a group of educators as well as dealing with educational ones. However, given the challenges of running these workshops at all (as described next), a simpler and slightly less collaborative structure was taken. This relied solely on myself as the representative of the philosophical 'community' to form the link between the educational and philosophical inquiries.

My particular solution to the challenge of linking the philosophical and educational strands of my research was to combine the inquiry at the start, through examination of the same experiences. These were: place-based education as explored through activities at the initial research workshop and subsequently in the participant's workplace, and ongoing experiences of place at the workshop venue and in the participants' lives. (Clearly the boundary between these experiences is blurred, this will be discussed further in Chapter 10). As the participants were practicing educators, I aimed to complete the critical, collaborative and experiential inquiry into 'what is place-based education?' during the workshops. However, exploring the implications of the descriptions and themes produced in the workshops for my chosen philosophical questions, and the phenomenological debate on place, required further work on my behalf (described in Chapter 7). Importantly however, the philosophical inquiry would be developed out of the same descriptions and themes of the educational inquiry. Undertaking philosophical inquiry at the same time as the workshops and feeding that into the group process represents another ideal world scenario which again required more time than I could spare (I continued to work part-time throughout my PhD).

Venue

The natural choice for the workshop venue was Glen Strae. This is a place where I feel at home, and was a comfortable and reasonably accessible venue for the participants. Having had experience in delivering projects and training there, the knowledge I had of the place would help the venue form an important element in the research. By the end of the first year of the PhD I had a clear idea of my area of investigation and was exploring the literature examined in the previous chapter. However it was not until the beginning of the third year, November 2009, that the first workshop happened. This was due to the difficulties of recruiting participants, and also finding the amount of funding needed to pay for accommodation. The timings of the workshops (in November) meant that camping was not an option, and equally I felt that having somewhere warm and dry to have some of the discussions would help us focus. Thus paying for accommodation was necessary.

A pilot study with nine people was held over two weekends: the 6th to the 8th, and the 27th to the 29th of November 2009. A reunion was held on the 1st and 2nd of May 2010. This was planned by request of the participants during the last research weekend. The pilot allowed me to see how the structure I had developed worked, and whether it was a useful and valid process to answer my research questions. The perceived success and feedback from the pilot study led to a second study with six people which occurred on the weekends of the 5th – 7th and 26th – 28th March and 11th – 13th June 2010. The following section of this chapter examines how I recruited these participants, I will then describe the workshops in more detail in part 6B.

Participants

The accommodation, the hunting lodge in Glen Strae, was limited to ten people including myself. This set physical constraints on the size of the group, but I also felt, drawing on my professional experiences running training workshops and action research, around ten was a reasonable number to form a close and critical group. In contrast to research into one

institution where the spread of participants in group workshops will be determined, amongst other things, by the people who work in that institution, I needed to have a strategy to invite people to participate.

I wanted to have a broad spread of educators who had an interest in environmental or cultural issues, so I used a qualitative research strategy called 'purposive sampling' (Bryman, 2004). This is where participants are chosen for their ability to answer the research questions, in my case coming from a range of educational organisations. This use of purposive sampling was aimed at "maximum variation" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28) where the range of contacts was deliberately varied to find comparisons, differences and common patterns. The phenomenological reasons for this variation have been set out above (p. 111).

The particular method of 'purposive sampling' used was 'snowball' sampling, (Bryman, 2004; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Starting with initial contacts I had made as a professional in schools, outdoor centres, and environmental education organizations, and explaining what I was trying to do, I was given further contacts thus 'snowballing' into a wider network than my own. The organisations in this network, whilst not representing every outdoor education or environmental education organisation in Scotland, still present a typical and thorough cross section, including outdoor centres, academic institutions and NGO's (the full list of the organizations contacted can be found in *Appendix A*). A form of 'saturation' (Bryman, 2004) was indicated by the reoccurrence of organizations or individuals as suggested participants by those I contacted for involvement. This indicated that I covered most of the range of possible contacts.

While working context was the main focus, other variation occurred within the groups: there were a mix of sexes (7 female, 8 male), a mix of ages (from early twenties to late forties), and also at a range of different points in their careers from just finishing university courses and engaging in the world of work, to very experienced (e.g. a head teacher). The locations in which the

participants lived and worked also varied: from city contexts, suburban, rural towns and villages. This spread was an outcome rather than an intention of my approach to purposive sampling. However, in addition to the different working contexts, the variation in age, gender, location and experience can also be seen as providing contrasting contexts through which to explore place experience and place-based education, thus further contributing to 'maximum variation' (Miles & Huberman, 1994)).

The majority of participants had close access to countryside in which they could work, and there was a bias towards Argyll-based participants (four out of fifteen of the participants were from this district), as this was the location from which the 'snow-ball sampling' started. Rather than attempting to sample from all over the UK, the participants were drawn from Scotland and more specifically the area within two to three hours from north Argyll. This was partly dictated by the fact that participants had to meet their own transport costs and attend a series of workshops in Glen Strae. This might also be a reason for the bias towards a rurality in the group: only five out of fifteen of the participants were from urban or suburban contexts.

Motivation

Getting participants to take part in the research was difficult. For the pilot study I contacted thirty-nine different people/organizations, some of them three or four times, and some face-to-face. Due to the complexity and commitment of the process I tried to speak (by phone) to potential participants directly as well as putting out a flyer (see *Appendix B*). In some cases this meant speaking to heads of organizations so they could explain a bit more if colleagues had questions. I spoke to anyone who responded to my inquiries with interest by phone to explain the process further. I invested a considerable amount of time and energy and succeeded in recruiting nine participants, just under a twenty-five percent success rate. Two participants didn't attend the second workshop, one due to illness and the other did not have time. The additional 'reunion' weekend was attended by four of the group.

It is possible that some potential participants did not join the research due to difficulties in understanding the process: a participative and developing research process might have been less familiar compared to a simple interview. However, whilst some were just not interested, the majority of people who could not take part expressed interest but said time was a factor, either they didn't have enough, or the particular weekends were already taken up with something else.

Finding participants for the second study should have been easier. I had a clearer understanding of what I was trying to do, and how to describe it. I also had suggestions and 'referrals' from the pilot participants (another example of 'snowball sampling' (Bryman, 2004; Cohen et al., 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994)). In addition to this I had a list of people interested from the first round of contacting who hadn't been able to attend due to timings. However, time seemed to be even more pressed for the people I spoke to. Equally I was planning three rather than two weekends (the reasons for this are explained below (p. 141)). I contacted thirty-one people/organizations, seventeen of whom had been contacted and expressed interest but were unable to take part in the first set of workshops. I succeeded in getting six participants (a similar success rate). One of these six attended only one workshop and a prospective seventh participant could not make any of the workshops in the end.

Once people had committed verbally, I sent some more information about the process, requirements and possible outcomes, asking them to read and sign it (see *Appendix C*). This was to add 'weight' to their commitment and give a clearer understanding of what that commitment was. To gauge people's initial motivations, I also asked them to fill in a table on why they wanted to come on the study, some information about themselves, along with contact information. This was then shared with the group, so that everyone could see each other's responses to the professional and biographical questions, and have a means of contacting each other. This occurred after initial phone conversations with me, and receiving the flyer, but before any of the workshops. *Appendix D* shows the participants' own

entries, answering two questions: profession and interest in the research (the entries have been anonymised). It is clear from this information that in some cases the pre-exposure to place-based education was very small, but sufficient to pique interest. There were a variety of levels on which participants understood place-based education and many different reasons for their engagement with the research. These ranged from wanting to explore an idea of place which they had already developed, to wanting to know more about place-based education.

6B – The process

In this part of the chapter I describe the process of the workshops. I draw on my research journals to document and support my choices and decisions. The content of the process: what the groups had to say about place-based education, will be set out through the themes and statements that the groups wrote down during the workshops. I will also draw in a limited way on the transcripts of the discussions (how these various forms of expression, including journaling and blogging, fit into the research is explained in further detail below (p. 148)). This part of the thesis is not so much about what was said, but how things were said, or rather how the workshops facilitated the inquiry. An equally important element here is to show how the participants went about creating themes and developing ideas about place and place-based education during the workshops, and what remained for me to do afterwards.

The pilot study – weekend one

The 'pilot' workshops in November 2009 allowed me to start working with my research structure in practice, and begin to judge its success. The pilot study occurred over two weekends. The first workshop needed to do many things. The initial task was to communicate my understanding of place-based education as a starting point for inquiry. This aimed to allow the participants to take what I had learned up to that point, and interweave it

with their own ideas and practice, opening up the inquiry to their energies and interests.

We met and chatted informally on the Friday night, and the 'research' started the next morning. Initially I introduced myself and the research, attempting to set out 'where I was coming from' and clarify the process for the group. We then moved on to a discussion of our favourite places. This is a technique I use frequently with groups which allows them to reflect on the importance of place in their lives, and get to know each other. The group were paired off and invited to tell their partner about their favourite place. Back in the large group each person described their partners' favourite place and we then discussed the themes that arose. These themes included: water, movement, home, and tensions between 'insiders and outsiders,' *P1.B*.

Having started to explore questions of place and develop relationships between the members of the group we moved outdoors. I introduced place-based education through doing it rather than discussing it: through the use of some of the activities I had developed in my work in Glen Strae. This stemmed from my phenomenological focus. I wanted to move into ways of being and an emphasis on experience rather than starting with ideas and definitions without common experiences to base them on. However, to give some form to the starting point, I used my own basic idea of place-based education as 'in, about, and for' place (Harrison, 2010c), encouraging participants to develop their own ways of talking about place-based education as the inquiry progressed.

I facilitated some place-based activities throughout the Saturday of the first workshop to set the scene. In addition to introducing some debate on place-based education these activities invited the participants to explore Glen Strae as a place, thus aiming to establish a grounding context for the research. The activities focused around different ways of knowing and being in Glen Strae. There were various experiences: sensory engagement, 'solo' time, choosing a favourite place, learning about plants and history, speaking to and helping the estate manager. There were opportunities for a variety of modes of

expression: discussion, drawing, poetry, mapping, story-telling. Various different perspectives on Glen Strae were explored in discussion: history, ecology, geography, the ethics of landownership.

The choice of these activities reflect elements of the action research explored in Chapter 5 (combining some of the approaches of Reason (2005), Preston (2004) and Požarnik et al. (1993)). They also give form to van Manen's injunctions to explore 'lived experience,' and the 'lifeworld existentials' of body, place, time and relationship, (van Manen, 1990b). Beyond these methodological concerns, the activities formed an example of place-based education, being drawn from my professional practice and my research. The activities thus also drew inspiration from the American and Australian practice examined in Chapter 2. As mentioned, these activities were used to set the scene of place-based education, but also reflected my experience of how to begin to engage (educationally) with a place.

The activities were chosen to introduce place-based education through being, and also to start to open up some of the debates and questions that this educational approach might prompt. The strategy was to do an activity, and then to discuss it, how it felt, what questions it raised, and how it fitted into the participants' work and understandings. These discussions were recorded (see *Appendix E* for a list of the recorded discussions). This process of experience and critique helped stimulate a debate on the experience of place, the nature of place-based education and provided opportunities to share our different perspectives. The debate drew on the educational experience that the participants brought to the workshops, and also offered the opportunity to take some of these activities and implement them in their work places over the course of the research.

Providing as much opportunity for discussion as possible served the phenomenological character of the research. Van Manen points to the power of conversation in revealing elements of the phenomena studied:

... conversation has a hermeneutic thrust: it is orientated to sense-making and interpreting the notion that drives or stimulates the

conversation. It is for this reason that the collaborative quality of the conversation lends itself especially well to the task of reflecting on the themes of the notion or phenomena under study, (van Manen, 1990a, p. 98).

Structured opportunities within the workshops to reflect singly and as a group provided time to digest the experiences of the workshops, and time to conceptualise what was happening. To make this process explicit, we had a discussion after dinner on the Saturday to sum up the themes of the first day (part of this was described above on p. 124). Much of this discussion revolved around practical understandings and techniques. The morning session on Sunday, the last day of the first workshop, returned to these themes. This session involved the group discussing and writing their thoughts on two large sheets of flipchart paper under two headings: 'what is place based education?' and 'considerations,' which involved questions and challenges raised by the approach. The group's responses (referred to from now as *Group Notes*) are set out in full here:

What is place-based education?

- Responsibility and action from enjoying the place
- Passion
- Inspiration
- Using the past and present to engage in the landscape
- FUN!
- Teachers facilitating learners own learning
- Relationships (giving / receiving)
- In, About, For = Now, Past, Future = Exploring, Learning, Sharing w/ others (sustainability)
- Being
- Opportunities to unlearn unuseful things
- Putting place central to education - better understanding of place gives understanding of wider issues
- Applicable to other situations
- Entering a place and learning about it (ecology, history etc)
- Progressing to understanding other places (spiralling out from, and back to, home)
- Process not outcomes
- Sense of belonging to your place (protecting places)
- Sharing
- Understanding how people make places
- Opportunity to make connections (knowledge, emotion, asking question of the place)

- Tools for leaving a legacy for people and place (passing on to the next group / generation)
- Multiple perspectives
- Outside / Experiential
- Place as interdisciplinary

Considerations of place-based education

- Place-based education could be capitalized on, but shouldn't - should remain a tool in the box
- How much knowledge do you have to have? (does it change the experience?), not knowing can be good
- Comfort / Safety / Access
- Determining outcomes (for schools, funders etc) but being open
- Facilitator building relationship with the place - could be hard
- What is the motivation? - the challenges of facilitation, how? why? could go very deep
- Getting repeat visits - is easier working locally, starting where you are
- Beliefs might change things
- Special places too small for a project
- Does it have to be a beautiful, natural place (will this mask things / difficulties?)
- Impact on the places we use
- What is success?: wanting to return, doing another course, place looked after, educator returning, pupils still talking about experience, seeing long term affects (no) - yet still making claims about what will happen to participants in future - perhaps let go of future outcomes - focus on the present
- Sustainability - about connections between places
- Boundaries of place
- What do we give back?
- Some places might not be right for everyone
- Hidden agenda - revealing it
- Dialogue between senses of place
- Different ages seeing different things - adults often concentrating on beautiful views

These words and sentences describe the initial understandings and questions of the 'pilot' group. I then asked the group to think if they could narrow down the questions they wanted to ask in the rest of the research process. In the time I took to fetch my i-pod to record the discussion, the participants had already put themselves into small groups and decided on particular foci. Some groups reflected on their own particular lines of work: forest schools, working with disabilities, and 'transition' projects (Hopkins, 2008). The teachers grouped together to focus on possible outcomes of place-based education, and the two participants who worked in more adventurous

settings decided to explore how they could help their colleagues reflect more on place within their work. The variety of themes and questions stated in the *Group Notes* above, and the different particular lines of inquiry taken by the group reflect considerable divergence in the group and a certain messiness. (The idea of mess as a validity procedure is examined in the next chapter, p. 165).

The final task of the first workshop was to engage the group with the process of continuing to refine their understandings through their particular lines of inquiry and their experiences at work. I chose to label this as 'action research' because it was a simple description of the process I was asking the participants to undertake (the different stages in my own understanding of the research process are described in more detail below (p. 152)). I asked the group to engage in cycles of action and reflection, drawing on the experiences, activities, ideas and discussions of the workshop. I suggested that they could reflect on their practice at work, or if they wanted to and were able: organise overtly place-based activities.

The shift towards collaborative research started during the weekend through reflection on, and questioning of, the experiences we had together. I felt that this critical approach provided an example of the reflection process that the participants could use in their professional contexts. The group were encouraged to use this reflection to form their own ideas of the value and form of place-based education. These ideas would be returned to in the next workshop. The participants were encouraged to maintain a journal, and put their thoughts up on the web using our private group blog. This blog allowed contact to continue through descriptions and reflections on place and place-based education.

My experience of the first weekend of the pilot study was very intense as I struggled to find the right way of bringing to fruition my complex and challenging research structure. I struggled with the balance between introducing place-based education, facilitating experiences of Glen Strae, and starting the collaborative research. As I was struggling with this, the group

were too, with one participant initiating a discussion at the start of the weekend trying to clarify 'what am I here for?'

G: I felt like I was invited to come along and contribute, and bring my experience and be part of a group, you know like last night, where we were just sharing. But now I am sitting here thinking I am now a receptor. *P1.A.*

This query provided the opportunity for me to clarify how I wanted to provide a base for the research of 'where I was at' and then we could progress from the same area of questioning and rough understanding of place-based education.

My approach of introducing place-based education through experiences rather than simply giving a definition initially appeared to add to the sense that the participants were merely 'receptors' of techniques which they would go home and implement. However, as the weekend progressed and each activity was followed by critical discussion, both my tension eased and the group seemed to become happier with the approach. This sentiment was reflected in the final discussion at the end of the two research workshops where the group reflected on the process as a whole:

A: I really liked having to think about it [place-based education] on the first weekend, when you did the activities, because it just made it... you're more aware of how I was becoming part of the place, because I was thinking about the research as well... *P2.F.*

The pilot study – weekend two

The participants spent three weeks back at work pursuing their chosen questions, recording in journals and writing on our group blog. Then the second research weekend took place. This provided the opportunity to relate how people had got on during those three weeks, to discuss the insights and questions that arose from their particular foci and to conclude by working again on the question 'what is place-based education?' The opportunity to evaluate and comment on the whole process followed.

The second weekend felt much easier to me. With a few activities to move back into the space (an insight into the geology of the glen and a creation

myth story telling exercise), the participants themselves began shaping the rest of the weekend. However, when the group reported on the previous three weeks, the short time span seemed to have produced more aspirations for the long term than practical action:

The action research process went well – you can see the understanding emerge in the second weekend with relevance to the questions of the first. I perhaps need to point that out more strongly – we aren't going to have abstract 'what if' discussions, we are going to reflect in context and come back with ideas, *Research Journal, 30th November, 2009*.

The 'what if' discussions revolved around possible outcomes of projects which the participants hadn't been able to implement, due to time or workload. These were partly a function of the short amount of time they had to actually implement things in their workplaces, and implied that a lengthier process was needed.

Returning to the process of *Group Note* writing, after the discussion of their particular contexts and questions, challenged the group to find areas of convergence and divergence. This helped ask again whether our understandings accurately reflected our experiences. Much of the discussion revolved around whether place-based education was a set of techniques or an ethos. There was also debate around the idea of 'connection' with place, and the meaning of the word 'place:'

J: That's the only thing I worry about with the word 'place,' my immediate thing with place is landscape, and that was what I came with. And then realised that it was as much about the people that were either there or you went with, *P2 Group Notes*.

One participant summed up the ongoing and unfolding nature of the experience of place: **A:** "place starts as a location and then becomes something more..." *P2 Group Notes*.

The group notes generated summed up some key ideas:

- Place-based education - providing opportunities to develop connections with a place: through head, heart and hand
- 'In,' 'about' and 'for' place
- Mapping out a territory: Place-based education is the core, and around that is place-based practice
- Place-based education is a tool and a theme

- Place-based education is an ethos: about a relationship of give and take with the people & place & everything
- Outdoor learning is different from place-based education due to this ethos – sense of place and connection
- Quality of connection is important

The key ideas and debates form themes showing new understanding, or confirmation of previous understandings that emerged out of the wide variety of perspectives and inquiries over the two workshops.

Despite the trial and error approach of the workshops, I found them very rewarding, providing many new questions and ideas for the research.

During an evaluation discussion (asking what worked and what could be improved) concluding the second weekend, the participants said they did as well. The pilot participants suggested a three weekend structure allowing more, and lengthier, periods of time back at work and a less dense approach.

I used this structure for the second study I carried out. The pilot group suggested the addition of a third weekend for themselves as well. The reasons the participants put forward to meet for another weekend were to share each others company again, and to talk further about place-based education and what they had managed to do with it in their work contexts. While the plan for the 're-union' weekend was developing I asked if I could record some of the discussions there as I felt they would contribute further to the research. In this way a third research and re-union weekend was organised by the participants.

Held in a group setting, rather than anonymously, the evaluation was very positive. Despite the possibility that negative feedback might not have been voiced in that situation, the fact that busy professionals were keen to meet again to develop some of the themes of the research and socialise, is one measure of the success of the workshops. Equally, subsequent to the re-union some of the participants got in touch to tell me about place-based projects that they had delivered stemming from ideas explored during the workshops, showing motivation and longer term impact which could be attributed to the workshops.

The reunion occurred in May 2010. Four people attended, some were unable to come due to time, only two seemed not to have an interest in the reunion. (One participant who attended was running adventure activities during the weekend, but drove to the glen after he had finished (a journey of one and a half hours) and walked in the dark to meet the group at our camp (a further hour's walk). He spent the night with us, and then walked out before the dawn to get back to work on the Sunday morning). We camped for this weekend, and discussed what we had been doing with regards to place-based education. This third meeting offered even more 'depth' as we cycled again through some of the same topics:

Being – just being up here – beyond words – this place as an important place away – a place where it is easy to just be. But it's harder to find that way of being at home – but that is the challenge,
Research Journal, 1st May, 2010.

This reunion brought to an end the first set of workshops.

What had been intended as a pilot series of workshops became no longer a dry run but an important element of the research. I gathered a large amount of 'data' in the form of group notes, recorded discussions, my observations, participant journals handed in to me, and discussion on our blog. Scanning this data showed it to yield a mixture of descriptions of experiences, practical insights into educational contexts, themes of the research, and understandings of place. As a group we managed to cultivate a sense of inquiry into both the experience of place, and how we might work with that educationally through our understandings of place-based education. (How I processed all this 'data' is set out in the next part of this chapter and the findings which emerged are set out in Section C). Importantly the experience itself was very rewarding and engaging, both for myself and, as seen through the evaluation and commitment to the process, for the participants.

However, entering into the workshops with a provisional state of mind allowed me to plan a second set of workshops which would, perhaps, be an improvement on the first. This also allowed me to engage another group, to work more confidently having run the workshops once before, and to

incorporate elements of the feedback from the first group. The description below illustrates what stayed the same and what was altered.

The second study

This occurred from March to June 2010. In the first two weekends, as with the pilot study, we stayed in the lodge in Glen Strae. The last weekend was camp-based, in a more remote location (*Inbhir nan Ghuibhas*) accessed on foot, further up the glen (see map on p. 5). The outline structure, activities and rationale seen in the description of the pilot study above were followed in this second study. However, the three weekend structure allowed us to spend the whole of the first weekend setting the scene, with only a small indication of an active research process which would follow the second weekend.

At the end of the workshop, to draw out the themes of the first weekend, whilst still maintaining an open focus on the experience of place, and the possibilities of place-based education, I used a mapping exercise. Each participant was encouraged to draw a map of his or her experiences during weekend, using whatever approach seemed most suitable. We then discussed our maps. Various themes emerged from this discussion: time, creativity, change, education, embodiment, responding to place, practical constraints, and the idea of place itself, *M1.F.*

The first weekend of the second study felt a lot more comfortable, having been through the first research process. But I still tried to maintain an open critical approach:

Nice to get into it again – a balanced and interesting group – shame it's a bit small – but each person seems happy to speak up... I feel a little bit of tension again as to whether this is interesting enough for them, but lots of interesting points already. I feel more open about place-based education as a result of the last workshops – but is it too vague? *Research journal, 6th March, 2010.*

Having more time to explore the place through the activities I facilitated gave this weekend a more personal and slow feel than its counterpart in the first cycle of workshops.

The feeling at the end of this workshop was open and undefined, which was acknowledged both positively and negatively by some of the participants.

P: I find it interesting and also frustrating about how open it [place-based education] is at the moment. And also because I need to go away and really analyse what it is I think of it. Lots of things are firing off, but I need time to really reflect on it, *M1.G.*

For some this meant that the ideas were open to new forms and directions, while for others the lack of anything concrete to go away with was unsettling. As with the first set of workshops messiness, openness and a variety of different paths through the inquiry defined this first weekend.

A three week interval followed. (This length of time was chosen from my judgement for the first 'pilot' group, but reinforced by them as a good interval in their evaluation. The pilot participants argued that two weekends reasonably close would allow the process to be seeded and structured, with a larger gap before the final weekend). The participants on the second study returned on the second weekend workshop to relate their experiences and become more active in the research. We became more focused:

Great discussion – feels like we got to the heart of it – openness, revealing place, enabling educators, multiple layers of place. Feels like there is a question of where to go next – how to deepen the investigation? *Research journal, 27th March, 2010.*

After a discussion reminding ourselves of what had occurred on the previous weekend, we went out and did some activities to bring the place and direct experiences back to the fore. There was then an opportunity for everyone to relate and discuss what they had done or thought about in the intervening three weeks. The participants then structured some time to run some of their own activities with the group. This was a suggestion from the pilot group, and also a request during the first weekend of the second study. At a certain point one participant suggested that we should return indoors and draw out some of the themes of our experiences so far. It was suggested that we discuss the question: 'why do place-based education?' *Creating Group Notes* (as described above, p. 136), led to the following statements:

- Place-based education gives a context for learning

- Makes it relevant
 - Meaningful
 - Sensory
 - Gives direct experience
- Place-based education gives a foci for further learning
 - Children taking responsibility for their learning
 - A holding point for what is learnt
- Place-based education could be a journey
 - Leading to somewhere
 - Leading to something
 - Leading back to the start
 - Spirals, cycles, circles
 - Focus in, stand back, focus in again
- Place-based education can deal with many topics
 - Personal and social development
 - Sustainability
 - Land management
 - Health and well-being
 - Life sciences
 - History / culture
 - Ecology / environment
 - Physical education / active approaches
 - Can be a collaboration with teachers / a multidisciplinary approach
- Place-based education as 'in, about and for' places
 - For – *the vision* – could be saving the planet, looking after our places, living better in our places, or could be linked to other priorities
 - About – *aims and objectives* – what we want to learn about
 - In – *actions* – what we are doing, where we are going
 - We assume that 'about' leads to 'for' – don't want to tell people to care, but hope that if they understand and think and connect then they will. But if time is short should we focus on the caring?
 - Can't just tell people to care for a place without regular engagement with it
 - Can't justify regular engagement within schools unless wider learning is happening (beyond the sustainability message). In environmental education this could be justified.
- It is important to ask *why* are we going out there
 - Local is better? Appreciating what is on their doorstep
 - Stronger connection with nature
 - Outdoors as a medium for learning
 - Place-based education could be a whole bunch of unrelated activities
 - Need to go out regularly to get past initial 'wow! I'm outside!'
- Place-based education asks 'how deep is your ecology?'
 - Does the whole world have value beyond you?
 - Does your identity include your locality?
- Place brings out relationships

- We are part of a system
- Creating habits of mind / being
- Place-based education is *for people* as well as place
 - Brings out values / morals / spirituality
 - We see how we treat places and ourselves
 - Knowing place, knowing where you are, rebuilding community, leads to a sense of belonging
 - History, culture, continuity, grounds identity
 - Being *with* a place rather than *on* it
 - Self as place

On the Sunday other participants led activities. Then we returned to the Lodge to bring together our understandings before deciding on particular questions to pursue over the next two and half months. The *Group Notes* from this thematising session are as follows:

What is place-based education?

- Place-based education as ‘in, about and for’ but not necessarily in that order. It could be *for* the environment or *for* other types of learning.
- Place-based education is getting to know a place, enabling people do find their connection / relationship with it. It helps us understand where we fit into the environment. This connection is given *strength* and *depth* by repeated visits.
- There are many possibilities for place-specific approaches
- Place-based education is facilitated by teachers or educators, place-based learning might happen at any time
- Place-based education is taking ownership / claiming back the land that you are in
- Understanding place means belonging, grounding, meaning
- Place-based education shows us how to relate to the outdoors
- Place-based education means personal interaction. It is the opportunity to look closely and relate to things around you.
- Place-based education draws connections between many places
- Place-based education needs a vision – what are you doing this for?

Questions / Celebrations

- What is the impact of focusing on a place?
- What does this place have to offer us as educators?
- What is the impact / value / meaning of place-based education?
- What skills for learning do we gain through place-based education?
- How do we plan place-based education? Allowing for flexibility and openness within structure
- What is the significance of time? Reflection, down-time, unstructured time – how do we manage this?
- How does place-based education fit in with specific objectives / targets / outcomes?

Incorporating participant-led activities, and discussions on 'what is place-based education?' this second weekend moved smoothly to a participative frame. I reflected on this the day after the workshop:

It feels like we are exploring the 'depth and breadth,' to use N's phrase, of what PBE could be, revealing the fundamental process of 'disclosing' our connections through place. We are still searching for the language around that. Everybody seems happy to work at this level, using practical activities to pursue deeper questions. There is something exciting in the basic idea which has such richness in everybody's context, *Research journal, 29th March, 2010.*

Two and half months followed, where the research continued in the everyday work and lives of the participants, before the final weekend. Engagement was only visible within the group through blogging, and a round of phone calls I made to each participant after a month and half.

The group came together for the third weekend with a greater intensity than before. The participants related how their research had progressed in the intervening months: some had reflected on their existing work, others had created projects or structured activities to explore their research questions. The participants decided what they wanted to do and the timetable for the weekend, including free time, discussions on their experiences over the intervening months, returning to question of 'what is place-based education?' and 'what is at stake here?' and pulling together conclusions and evaluations. I felt like we were getting to the 'heart of the matter,' as I reflected after the weekend:

A lovely weekend – that feeling on Saturday afternoon the mix of discussions and flowing quiet experiences was very special, *Research journal, 14th June, 2010.*

The participants voiced similar feelings:

K: I think certainly coming back three times works, so I mean you could cover a lot of what we've done over a weekend, but I think the going away and reflecting on it and coming back, makes it all the more... I think someone mentioned it, you are a lot more grounded in this final weekend. Coming back to a place that you have already built up some sort of relationship with, and with a group of people as well. And in that way you have got past all the early initial finding out about somewhere and you can get into it in a deeper way, *M3.C.*

These short descriptions of the feeling of the workshop process show how the questions, structure and approaches developed in Section A and the previous chapter of Section B were realised in an inquiry into place-based education. They show the ways in which lived experiences of place and place-based education were shared, developed, questioned and thematised in a continuing, open, and often messy, spiral process.

Capturing the process

Gathering the participants' thoughts, ideas and actions from the research in a way that made them available for me to report on in this PhD (and in the case of the philosophical inquiry further thematise), provoked various different strategies. As was seen above, there were many different techniques employed as tools for reflection which also provided avenues for 'capturing the process.' These were: discussion, artwork, journals, blogging, and sessions where the group would write and discuss place-based education on flip-chart paper: *Group Notes*.

I used my i-pod to record the discussions, and I transcribed these recordings using the following rationale. Both Giorgi and van Manen use transcriptions of interviews for phenomenological analysis (Giorgi, 1985; van Manen, 1990b). Their use of transcription differs from "conversational analysis" (Bryman, 2004, p. 366) where the syntax and phrasing of the speech transcribed is a key element of the analysis, and is expressed using a variety of symbols. In phenomenological analysis it is the description of the experience that matters, not the pauses or inflections. Examples of transcriptions in works by both scholars have rendered interviews into readable descriptions (e.g. Giorgi (1985, p. 9) and van Manen (1990a, p. 80). Action research, with its focus on the participants making meaning themselves, draws less on transcriptions. But in the cases when transcriptions are used to describe the conclusions a participant drew, the speech is rendered into sentences in a readable format (see for example Barret and Taylor (2001) who include descriptions of laughter and the group talking over each other in their transcriptions).

My approach to transcribing the workshop discussions was based on these precedents. I rendered the discussions into readable format, cutting out 'ums,' 'likes' and 'ers,' and highlighting unfinished sentences with '...' I maintained some sense of the flowing nature of the discussions as new thoughts break sentences and move them onto other directions, but my focus was not on the syntax of the conversation, but rather the transcription as a description of experiences and ideas.

Through roughly 240 hours of time spent with the groups during the workshops, I recorded a total of 997 minutes, or sixteen and a half hours, of discussions. The process of transcription yielded a total of 152,000 words, 75,000 words from the first group workshops and 77,000 words from the second.

I developed an alternative technique for creating the *Group Notes*. This process was about working as a group to agree on a set of statements and the themes of what had been discussed in the workshops. I placed a large sheet of flip-chart paper and pens in the middle of the group, and everybody had the opportunity of writing on the sheet. Different statements were tried out and some were developed and changed after being seen on the page. After recording a *Group Notes* session with my i-pod during the second 'pilot' weekend, I did not record any further sessions as I decided this would be 'double-handling:' the aim was for the group to record where they had got to on the page. I kept these *Group Notes*, transcribed them into a digital format and posted them on the blog to help the group get a sense of the progress of the inquiry.

There were also other opportunities for expression during and between the workshops. Some of these arose as part of the activities, others from the use of journals and blogs by the participants. The activities included: poetry, mapping, drawing, and story-telling. These established more creative ways of thinking as part of the process. The use of journals was encouraged, wherever and whenever was judged appropriate by the participants. At the start of the pilot workshops I made the participants aware that I might draw

on those journals for the research. The final technique used was blogging (which had been used successfully in a project I had worked on as an action research consultant (Harrison, 2009, 2010b)). This provided the opportunity to maintain some of the momentum of the workshops while at home and express opinions which the group could debate. The blog was private, so only the group could access the content. Many of the other ways of reflecting and thinking found their way onto the blogs: participants' photographs, drawings, poems, and summaries of the flip-charts were posted.

I made no effort to directly record the experiences of the participants outside the workshops. Within the constraints of time and interest, the participants were encouraged to write in their journals or put up a blog, and many did this. Beyond these ways of recording the ongoing process outside the workshops, the opportunity to tell the group about 'what has been going on' and have a discussion about it, was given at the beginning of each workshop. These discussions were recorded.

Inevitably much of the process fell outside these recorded discussions, journals and blog statements. Thoughts and feelings on place and place-based education which arose during the workshops or at home might have come out during the car journey home, or the social time during the weekends, or whilst teaching a class or leading a group. All the techniques documented above represent secondary opportunities to record these, but it was left to the participants to decide what was worthwhile to contribute to those discussions.

Initially I had thought that I might draw on all the sources of data described here for reporting and analysis. Having a pilot process enabled me to explore whether this was necessary. During the first set of workshops, all discussions were recorded, *Group Notes* taken, and the journals which participants kept (which included their artwork) were handed to me at the end of the process. When I reviewed all this potential data, including our blog, I judged that I had enough from the recorded discussions and group

notes alone. To ascertain this, while I was transcribing the discussions I compared them to the journals and blogs. I felt that the discussions adequately captured all the themes covered in the wider spread of reflective techniques. In this way journaling and blogging were included in the second set of workshops, as part of the process, but with no expectation on my behalf of using them to report on the findings of the process for this thesis.

Chapter 7 – Understanding the research

In the previous chapter I described the series of workshops which I ran examining experiences of place and place-based education with practicing educators. As already discussed in the previous chapters in Section B, the linear account of my research in this thesis belies the fact that methodological development occurred during and after the workshops, as well as before. Understanding more clearly what I was doing, and had done, was a process which took time. Writing this thesis has added clarity to that understanding: I came to understand the research approach as ‘collaborative phenomenology.’ In this chapter I discuss what I mean by collaborative phenomenological research, and then debate the implications of my methodology for questions of validity and generalisability. This chapter can be seen in the context of the whole thesis (highlighted in red), on the conceptual map below.

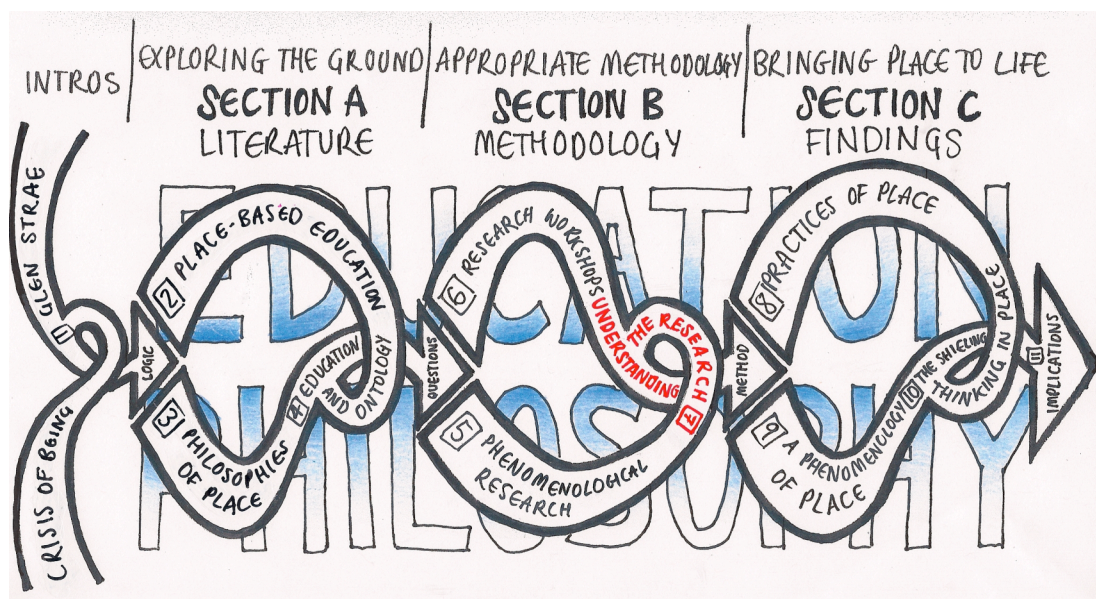


Figure 9. Conceptual map of the thesis for Chapter 7

While doing the workshops I often referred to the process with the participants as ‘action research.’ Despite the obvious links between my collaborative phenomenological approach and action research, the exact definition of what I was doing remained unclear. The research workshops were an intense period of ‘mess’ for me, where I was “aware of the dawning

of the new, but as yet [had] not made sense of it," (Cook, 2009, p. 281). Making sense of what I did, and how the elements which I brought to the workshops: phenomenology and collaborative research, balanced in the end, has only come to fruition while writing this thesis. The first section of this chapter reflects my best understanding of what I did, under the term 'collaborative phenomenological research,' and allows me to critique the workshop process I led.

7A - Collaborative phenomenological research

Through the two series of research workshops the participants and I explored different aspects of Glen Strae, but also used those experiences to reflect on our own places. We examined how the educational content of those experiences might fit into different working contexts through reflection on and (and in some cases) implementation of place-based education. The cyclical process of creating *Group Notes* was a rich and open way of thematising these experiences. It challenged us to critique and understand experiences which were ongoing as part of the research, rather than simply implementing a pre-defined practice of place-based education, or just remembering and reflecting on past experiences. The understanding that I have arrived at through delivering and writing up the workshops is that this research process is best defined as 'collaborative phenomenological research.' This part of the chapter examines what collaborative phenomenological research means in contrast with action research, and the implications of my methodology for analysis and the idea of 'truth.'

The term 'collaborative phenomenological research' seems only to have been used in one other context, by Paton et al. in their description of collaborative nursing research (2004). The collaborative element here describes a number of researchers working together to understand their findings, rather than a relationship between between researchers and participants. My collaborative approach to phenomenological research also shares similarities to Finlay's understanding of 'relational phenomenological research,' (2009), which focuses on the relationship between researcher and (individual) participant

and is applied in psychology and studies of health conditions. Equally there is resonance between my approach and Halling and Leifers' 'dialogical' approach to phenomenology (1991) which brings together a group of phenomenologists (and students of phenomenology) to find common themes between their experiences of psychological phenomena, see also Halling, Kunz & Rowe (1994). However, in contrast to these three examples, my group focus, with participants, and on more-than-human relationships lends a different emphasis to my phenomenological research.

The idea of a phenomenological inquiry as a group might seem to be a departure from Merleau-Ponty's thought. Yet at the heart of his philosophy of 'flesh' is the idea of shared immersion in the world. Merleau-Ponty expresses this in typical dense and poetic fashion:

...the seeing that I am is for me really visible; for the first time I appear to myself completely turned inside out under my own eyes, (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 143).

What Merleau-Ponty is arguing here is that to see means also to be seen: being one segment of the flesh of the world necessarily means being sensible to others. So while Merleau-Ponty's philosophical process is solitary, his thought implies that we live in an inter-subjective world, a world where our different perspectives have a mutuality and common grounding. This lends itself to including others within the phenomenological research process (Finlay, 2009). My workshops provided one way of exploring this intersubjectivity, and how perspectives are grounded in specific places.

My contextualised and group orientated interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's guidelines contrasts with the textual emphasis of both Giorgi (1985) and van Manen (1990b). The research workshops that I organised focused on experiences of place and place-based education, rather than texts describing those experiences. Yet texts still played an important role: for example in the form of participant journals and group note-taking during discussions identifying themes. But here texts were used to record discussion and ideas rather than as a focal point for the research.

The experiential approach I took seems to hold greater potential for van Manen's stated aim of examining lived experience. The process of finding the essence of certain experiences, through the question 'what is place-based education?' mirrors van Manen's thematising, where themes reveal or capture the nature of the experience at hand, (1990b). However my approach offers a less structured and defined process of conceptualisation than the ordered progression outlined by van Manen (1990b).

Having begun to define my approach as 'collaborative phenomenological research,' one question arises: 'what is the relationship of my approach to action research?' It is important to note the strong parallels between some interpretations of phenomenology and action research (Lukenchuk, 2006, Ladkin, 2005). The critical, inter-subjective approach to phenomenology I have been developing also sounds very similar to Reason and Torbert's statement about action research:

Since action is always interaction, the action turn in research emphasizes the participatory, relational nature of research. Fundamentally, if one accepts that human persons are agents who act in the world on the basis of their own sensemaking; and that human community involves mutual sensemaking and collective action, it is no longer possible to do research on persons. It is only possible to do research with persons, including them both in the questioning and sensemaking that informs the research, and in the action which is the focus of the research, (Reason & Torbert, 2001, p. 7).

The phenomenological idea of intentionality is seen in the idea of 'participatory, relational' research with people rather than on them. People are naturally 'sense-making,' and, importantly for the collaborative dimension of this research: so are communities. There is also considerable literature on maintaining openness to the action research process (Cook, 2009; Dick, 2002; Feldman, 2002; Heron & Reason, 2001; McArdle, 2002; Somekh, 2006), which has much in common with my interpretation of the phenomenological idea of reduction.

From these commonalities it might be possible to argue that my collaborative phenomenological approach could be understood as part of the 'family' of action research. Whether this is the case or not, my approach is best

understood as a development of phenomenological thought (following the logic of my critique of phenomenology in Chapter 5). Furthermore much of the research which could be grouped under the family of 'action research' is explicitly focused on action, rather than (also) description and finding essences.

Although it might be less obvious, phenomenology can be understood as orientated towards action. As van Manen points out, the phenomenological process aims to reflect back on, and develop, practice (1977, 1995, 2007). This is also found in Merleau-Ponty's argument that phenomenology places ourselves "once more before our eyes," (1962, p. xx). Action, in the form of group activities, and educational projects run by participants in their working contexts, formed an important part of my methodology, keeping the lived experience of place and place-based education at the forefront of the research. However, and in contrast to some action research (see for example Reason and Bradbury, 2001), description, discussion and thematising were fundamental elements of the workshops, and this reinforces their phenomenological character.

With hindsight and this clearer understanding of the 'place' of my research methodology in the literature, improvements suggest themselves. These revolve around further inquiry into the experience of place. The focus on action back in the workplace, described to the participants as 'action research,' maintains its importance, as a way of exploring ideas and techniques from the weekends in different working contexts. Yet I could have done more to focus the participants on what it felt like to experience place (for themselves or their students). Reflecting on and describing experiences was a strong part of the workshops, arising mostly from the activities we undertook in Glen Strae. But a simple schema such as van Manen's 'lifeworld existentials' of body, place, time and relationship (1990b), might have focused participants more on their lived experience of place at home and work.

Analysis?

Understanding the workshops as collaborative phenomenological research also clarifies the extent to which further work needs to be done on the themes isolated by the participants, and the ways in which the research findings might be set out. In line with Merleau-Ponty's descriptive approach to phenomenology, where experience is not analysed but once more 'placed before our eyes,' (1962, p. xx), 'analysis' is not a helpful term in this inquiry. The *Group Notes* quoted in full in Chapter 6 show the participants' own process of finding 'essences' of their experiences with specific relation to place-based education. The debates I transcribed provide greater detail as to what was discussed during the workshops and how the inquiry progressed. Further development of the groups' ideas on place-based education by myself would defeat the collaborative and phenomenological character of the research, and undermine the validity of each participants' educational viewpoint, which was the reason why the participants were recruited. It was not my role in the research to tell others what their experiences meant, but rather to help the group ask questions of their own experiences, through individual and shared processes.

The findings of the workshops relating to my first set of research questions about place-based education are thus set out through a concise summary of the practical discussions (including differing viewpoints) and conclusions from the workshops (in Chapter 8). These aim to show the participants' views on the development, features and outcomes of place-based education. Based on the *Group Notes*, I used my judgement to draw out salient parts of the discussions in the transcriptions which reflected the group themes, or characterised earlier parts of the debate. Another input that I made here was to reflect on the similarities or differences between the findings of the two groups. In Chapter 8 I have also set the summary of the participants' views and findings in the context of the rest of the PhD.

To ascertain the success of my summarising and reporting, a draft of Chapter 8 was distributed to all the participants during the writing process (at an earlier date from sending out the whole thesis to them before submission).

This provided the opportunity for the participants to make sure that I had accurately represented and summarised their ideas and conclusions. I had responses from a third of the participants, suggesting minor changes, which I made, but generally asserting that they were happy with the presentation of the workshops.

However, the same process was not possible for the ontological questions about place. As described above (p. 128), a division of labour was imposed by the real-world constraints of having both an educational and philosophical inquiry. Despite a considerable amount of reflection on the experience of place, and the meaning of 'place,' the collaborative nature of the philosophical thread of my research was compromised as I came to set the themes into the wider philosophical debate (set out in Chapter 9). Drawing on my knowledge of the philosophical issues (discussed in Chapters 2 and 4), I continued the phenomenological inquiry into the ontology of place beyond the workshops. My inquiry was based on the reflections and ideas about place and place experience put forward by the participants, and developed in my own on-going phenomenological inquiry. The process I used draws on van Manen's work (1990b), but involved my own return to Glen Strae three times whilst completing the inquiry. My experiential and place-sensitive approach aimed to maintain some of the qualities of collaborative phenomenological research which I have set out in this section of the thesis. This final element of my phenomenological process is described in further detail next.

To isolate philosophical themes to work with I drew on van Manen's understanding of themes as the "structures of experience," (*ibid.* p. 79):

Theme is the experience of focus, of meaning, of point, theme formulation is at best a simplification, themes are not objects one encounters at certain points or moments in a text, theme is the form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand, (*ibid.* p. 87).

In *Researching lived experience* (1990b) van Manen puts forward a process whereby the text is examined for themes, and the 'selective reading' approach was most relevant to my project. The other options look at the

meaning of the whole text, or line-by-line, both of which do not fit the scale of my transcriptions. Selective reading is undertaken as follows:

In the selective reading approach we listen to or read a text several times and ask, What statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described? (*ibid.* p. 93).

Drawing on the collaborative element of the research, I used the *Group Notes* to guide my selective reading. This reflects the grounding of the ontological thread of my inquiry in the shared inquiry of the workshops. Whilst transcribing the recordings of each discussion, I took notes on themes which might be relevant to an ontology of place in my research journal. After one to two months gap, where other elements of the research were continuing, I returned to the transcriptions and, having printed them off, read them through in their entirety, and again using the group notes, highlighted themes. This developed the initial reading, and gave the opportunity to find new themes or modify and reject initial ones. A third reading occurred just before the writing of this thesis where quotes which exemplified the themes were isolated from the text forming a shorter series of excerpts.

Throughout this time I was also returning to Glen Strae to reflect on my inquiry. This involved taking extensive notes while in the glen, and also writing phenomenological descriptions of my experiences. A segment of this writing is set out at the start of Chapter 10, before I set out the themes which characterised my and the participants' experiences of place, and the way in which they respond to my research questions. As in Section A, my approach to praxis between educational and philosophical debates occurred after the outcomes and findings of those two debates became clear. Chapter 11 takes the understandings of place-based education and place ontology set out in Chapters 9 and 10 and explores their mutual implications.

Truth?

The final debate in this part of the chapter deals with the implications of my collaborative approach to phenomenological research for the idea of truth.

As set out in detail in Chapters 1, 3 and 4, I understand place as a process through which we are interwoven, here and now, in and through the world. I have largely focused on the ontological implications of this position, drawing on philosophers of place, especially Merleau-Ponty (1968), to argue that, experientially, we are enmeshed in and through places in particular contexts. This philosophical position has underpinned my research questions, and as explained in this section of the thesis, my research methodology. The ontological approach to place I have been developing also has implications for the kind responses which I might get from my research.

The importance of the subject, embodied with other subjects, in place, has epistemological implications. While ontology has been the focus in this thesis there are many epistemological implications of my position. These are relevant to my methodology as they consider how knowledge (generated in the research) might be considered to be 'true,' or at least 'truthful.' (Truth and truthfulness are important methodological themes, which have received attention in both phenomenology and action research literature, e.g. Griffiths & Macleod, 2008; Groenewald, 2008; Ladkin, 2005). Merleau-Ponty's statement that "there is no thought which embraces all our thought," (1962, p. xv) already quoted above, implies that I cannot step outside the research process. This means that it is not possible for me to guarantee the truth of the research findings 'objectively,' i.e. from a position independent of personal perspective (Mautner, 1996). What does truthfulness mean then in my place-bound and inter-subjective context?

Merleau-Ponty's understanding of phenomenology is critical here. Phenomenology strives to "place [our relationship to the world] once more before our eyes," (1962, p. xx). In this way the truthfulness of a finding in this research might be found in the way it reveals the lived or implicit facets of the experience of place. A finding might describe how things are for us (myself, the research participants, and readers of the research) in specific lived situations, but also show those experiences in a new light:

It is at the same time true that the world is what we see and that, nonetheless, we must learn to see it, (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 4).

The implications of these ideas are that 'truth' in my inquiry is an embodied contextualised experience.

Merleau-Ponty puts forward some thoughts on the nature of truth in his work *The prose of the world* (1973). These add definition to the idea of truth as an embodied experience set out in here. Merleau-Ponty argues that:

There is no truth that can be conceived only outside the field of presence, outside the limits of some situation or some structure. We are able to sublimate this situation to make it appear a particular case in a family of situations, but we cannot cut the roots which implant us in a situation, (ibid. p. 107).

And also:

The foundation of truth is not outside of time; it is in the opening of each moment of knowledge to those who will resume it and change its sense, (ibid. p. 144).

The next two parts of this chapter deal in more detail with this idea of 'truth.' The first part looks back at the workshop process at its truthfulness, or its validity. The second and final part looks forward at the truthfulness of the findings, or their generalisability.

7B – Validity

My concern with validity can be formed into various questions: how can I make sure I did not simply shape the research to conform to my assumptions, how were the workshops structured to strive for a truthful representation of place-based education, how can I show this process in the thesis? While this section comes after the description of the workshops, in reality development of my ideas and procedures around validity occurred throughout the process. Important phases of this development occurred before the workshops, in the planning stages, during the workshops as I strived for a critical and open process, and afterward in the write-up stages as the links to phenomenological and collaborative research became clearer. The discussion of validity in this part of chapter, will shed light back onto the description of how the research progressed in actuality seen above in Chapter 6.

Discussion of what constitutes validity is present within both action research (Griffiths & Macleod, 2008; Reason & Torbert, 2001) and phenomenological research (Groenewald, 2004; van Manen, 1990b), with Ladkin (2005) spanning both these disciplines. Both these literatures impacted on my approach to validity, and will be examined in further detail next.

Critical subjectivity

A collaborative approach to phenomenology draws on understandings of phenomenological research (van Manen, 1990b) and action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2001), both of which involve the researcher deeply in the process. Given this situation, it is important that the researcher allows the research to unfold, rather than simply shaping it to follow their own assumptions. This requires awareness of assumptions and of the ways in which the research is developing. Heron and Reason label this quality “critical subjectivity,” (2001, p. 149). Heron and Reasons’ understanding of critical subjectivity can be summarised as follows: being present and open, bracketing and reframing questions, being sensitive to direction and content, openness to outcomes, and striving for emotional competence (Heron & Reason, 2001). Heron and Reason argue that these qualities “can cultivate a high-quality and valid” perspective (*ibid.* p. 149). In the context of participatory environmental education research, Robottom and Sauve put forward similar guidance to maintain rigour: integrity of the researcher, transparency (showing what actually happened), and the self-reflection of the researcher, (Robottom & Sauve, 2003, pp. 121 - 122).

From phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty’s four principles (1962) show similar concerns about validity. The goal of describing experience, rather than analysing it, can be understood as aiming for transparency: trying to present the experience as it occurred rather than as it suits the research. Reduction as the questioning of assumptions, and intentionality understood as the inherent meaningfulness of all perspectives, also present important qualities for the researcher to aspire to. Van Manen develops Merleau-Ponty’s argument that phenomenology is informed by and informs experience, by

arguing that phenomenology as “critically orientated action research” should inform the researcher’s life and practice (1990b, p. 154). For van Manen this leads to greater awareness of the meaning and significance of the researcher’s working situation as an educator (1990b).

The discussion above implies that a collaborative approach to phenomenological research clearly rests in part on the self-awareness of the principle researcher. Yet the assumption of this thesis is that place grounds self, thus self-awareness means place-awareness. Critically for me this means awareness of my own relationships to place, and also the ways in which place is present in the research. Pivnick talks specifically about this second point, arguing that rigour and sensitivity to place can be found through four qualities. These can be paraphrased as: opening and listening to a place, understanding the elements of the place, fact-finding, and caring about and for that place (Pivnick, 2003). Through lived exploration of place, very similar in quality to 1st person action research described by Reason and Heron (2001), Pivnick (2003) suggests “we must come to understand the [research] topic as someone who has lived in its midst,” (*ibid.* p. 150).

Beyond the narrative sections in this thesis, the main strategy I used to maintain self- and place-awareness during my research, was to maintain research journals in which I noted down my thoughts, feelings and observations. These arose at any point – during work, during the research workshops, after reading a paper or book, or when coming back from a walk around my local area. There were two streams of writing in my journals: personal reflections, where *belonging* has been an important question for me, and professional developments. As the PhD has progressed I have come to label myself as a place-based educator, organising projects in schools while also working as an action research consultant. In the previous chapter I quoted from my research journals to give a sense of how my own process of critical subjectivity was ongoing during the active phase of the research.

Openness in the workshops

While cultivating a level of criticality was important throughout the research, the most important context for this self- and place-awareness was in the research workshops themselves, and the philosophical analysis which continued after the workshops. In the context of this PhD thesis, I hold a lot of responsibility for validity, as it is me who wrote up the research (discussions of power and responsibility in collaborative research are common e.g. Coghlan & Shani (2005), Grant (2007), and McArdle (2002)). The guidelines explored above for critical subjectivity are clearly important in that respect. However, the participants in the research also have a role in shaping the validity of the findings. As such critical subjectivity and self- and place-awareness were important for them as well. These considerations show how various strategies I employed during the workshops also aimed for validity. Each participant maintained a research journal; opportunities for reflection and writing in those journals were included in the workshops, as were times for describing the places which were important to them in their lives.

Beyond what might be understood as 'individual' criticality, the validity of the research findings also depended on the qualities of the group process. Here questions of how the findings reflect the individual experiences of the participants and if and how the group came to a consensus were important. The guidelines for critical subjectivity can 'scale up' to encompass group processes. This involved asking what assumptions were held by the group and whether the findings and themes really reflected the group's experiences.

Certain approaches to action research provide a useful description of strategies for criticality within group processes. Dick describes how cycles of 'critical reflection' allow for findings to be examined and re-examined (2002). Whitehead describes the process of examining whether educational practice measures up to values and aims (1989). Heron and Reason suggest a series of 'validity procedures' for co-operative inquiry which include repeated

cycling through questions, exploring convergence and divergence, and allowing time for reflection and action, (Heron & Reason, 2001).

These ideas about the validity of group processes can be linked with phenomenology. While phenomenology has typically been a solitary process, as argued above, (p. 114), the tenets of reduction (questioning assumptions), and intentionality (inherent meaningfulness of experiences), may be better served in a critically aware group process. Phenomenological research literature which explores beyond the paradigm of the single researcher reinforces the current discussion on criticality and openness within my research. Both Finlay (2009) and Halling & Leifer (1991) stress (in different ways) the importance of acknowledging different perspectives, striving for openness, questioning assumptions and always returning to the phenomena at hand. Halling et al. argue that group phenomenological processes carry with them the possibility of overcoming 'individual subjective bias,' (1994).

Practically, striving to achieve criticality as group during the workshops involved various facilitation strategies on my behalf: trying to ensure everyone had a chance to speak, offering opportunities in smaller groups and pairs for people to share ideas, challenging the group to re-examine the themes we had generated, and also trying to create a culture where people felt open to ask questions or state views. Beyond these moment to moment challenges, the structure of the workshops, cycling between work and time together as a group, examining and re-examining experiences of place and place-based education, posing and re-posing the question 'what is place-based education?' contributed to the criticality of the workshops.

A further important strategy that maintains openness to new understandings is to cultivate 'mess.' Phenomenological methodologies involve a complex ongoing process of discovery. Clearly in a collaborative approach, where decisions, understandings and discussions involve several people this complexity is much greater. Action research literature shows how group processes can be emergent, messy, complex, open-ended and rich (e.g. Reason & Bradbury, 2001). There has been much written in this literature

about the challenges of doing action research while respecting this flux. Some of this reflects the particular challenge of doing a PhD, where the research is not simply for the participants but to gain an academic qualification (Grant, 2007; Levin & Martin, 2007).

Cook argues that openness is not just a factor of emergent real world research, but a key element of the research which needs to be planned for and facilitated (Cook, 2009). Cook puts forward the idea that 'mess,' where things are unclear, difficult, and scattered, is the area where new steps are taken:

The 'messy area' is formed where participants have deconstructed well rehearsed notions of practice and aspects of old beliefs; are aware of the dawning of the new, but as yet have not made sense of it, (*ibid.* p. 281).

In planning for and encouraging a role for 'mess,' Cook argues greater rigour is achieved: mess is the opportunity to question what we know and create new understandings. This develops the phenomenological idea of reduction, moving beyond openness in the philosopher's mind, to cultivating openness in the research process. Finlay argues for a similar approach. From a phenomenological perspective, she talks about openness as:

... a zone of ambiguity and uncertainty where the unforeseen hovers and layered meanings invite discovery, (2009, p. 13).

These points explain the periods of uncertainty and 'mess' within the group processes that I held (as described above e.g. p. 138), and my own experience of coming to understand my research through doing it.

The two elements which contribute to validity in my research process: self/place-awareness, and openness in group process, imply a third element. This is the ability for someone external to the process, who might be reading this thesis, to see how effective these two processes were, and thus make their own judgement about the validity of the conclusions drawn. This requires transparency on my behalf when reporting on the research. Setting out the descriptions of how the group processes went in actuality, including the 'mess,' in the previous chapter, aims to contribute to this transparency.

7C – Generalisability and place

The previous part of this chapter discussed the strategies I undertook in the research to promote validity. The focus was back onto the research workshops as described in Chapter 6. Looking forward now to the final section of the thesis which presents the findings and conclusions from the inquiry, the question discussed at the start of the chapter recurs. This is the place-bound and contextualised nature of 'truth' in my inquiry. Here 'truth' can be understood as a question of generalisability: how much scope and importance can be attached to both the practical and philosophical findings? This question also returns to the ongoing theme of this inquiry: the way in which place as specific context draws attention to the scope and scale of thought, and in this case the scope and scale of my research.

The question of generalisability, or the scope of conclusions which are highly contextual, is a key methodological consideration, and there are various relevant positions on this within the literature examined for my methodology. Robottom and Sauve (2003) discuss participatory approaches to environmental education, arguing that any sort of attempt to move away from the experience and disseminate it will be challenging:

The meaning and significance of the outcomes of the research are likely to be highly contextual, and of relevance and interest mainly if not only to the community within which they were generated. Participatory research does not seek to underwrite the generalisability of research outcomes, and in fact its underlying subjectivist epistemology makes claims to generalisability unsustainable, (*ibid.* p. 123).

On the other hand, Whitehead argues that practice and research shows practical 'living theory' generated from action research to be usefully generalisable (1989). Bradbury and Reason (2001) show how this might be possible, stating that:

A well written inquiry can be used by fellow inquirers with similar concerns to 'see as if' and illuminate their own situations, (*ibid.* p. 347).

Bradbury and Reason's point can be seen as a response to Robottom and Sauve: action research *is* highly contextualised but a well executed exploration of a context can have meaning, and suggest actions, beyond that

particular context. But as Gustavsen points out, this meaning will be dependent on the situation of the reader (2001). Developing this line of argument, Griffiths and Williamson argue that action research should be clear about the context and situation of the research so that the reader can then judge how 'transferable' the findings are to their own context (2001). These points link back to my discussion of the importance of transparency for validity above (p. 166).

The approach to generalisability from certain examples of collaborative research is mirrored in the phenomenological literature. In discussing the findings of phenomenological research, van Manen starts with an acknowledgement of the uniqueness of every situation. It is this very uniqueness that makes the outcomes of the research of use:

Pedagogic situations are always unique. And so, what we need more of is theory not consisting of generalisations, which we then have difficulty applying to concrete and ever-changing circumstances, but theory of the unique; that is, theory eminently suitable to deal with this particular pedagogic situation, this school, that child, or this class of youngsters. We can move toward theory of the unique by strengthening the intimacy of the relationship between research and life, (van Manen, 1990b, p. 155).

Cotton and Griffiths, contribute to this idea of the 'theory of the unique':

...the point is not to tell some universal truth about the world, but rather to tell particular truths in order to allow us all, tellers and hearers, to reassess what we understand of the world and so of our own possible actions within it, (Cotton & Griffiths, 2007, p. 550).

Ladkin's work using phenomenological thought to explore themes in action research also has relevance to this question of uniqueness and generalisability:

Action research inquiries are undertaken in the 'on-line', 'real world', rather than in controlled laboratory environments. The nature of truth revealed through such inquiries will necessarily be located, limited, and emergent. If undertaken rigorously and with keen attention, they will, I suggest, also have a depth and quality of insight into those particular contexts which may be missing from more generalised approaches. That depth of insight might better contribute to an understanding which would enable effective action to be taken in a given context, (Ladkin, 2005, p. 123).

What is clear from this literature is an argument that in-depth research into specific situations has the ability to reflect on other contexts. This occurs not through the assumption that all contexts are the same, but rather through the idea that contexts in their particularity and uniqueness can actually shed light through comparison and contrast onto other specific situations. This approach to the validity and wider use of conclusions is shared by other methodological approaches, two of which will be briefly explored here: case studies, and 'rhizomatic validity' (Lather, 1993).

The concept of the 'rhizome' was put forward by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), to explore the multiplicity, situatedness, and often contradictory nature of meanings. In contrast to the metaphor of a tree, where one trunk implies a single approach to meaning, or knowledge, the rhizome is a network where no node or tuber has any more significance than any other. Lather uses these ideas to put forward the concept of 'rhizomatic validity' (1993) which "generates new locally determined norms of understanding; proliferates open-ended and context-sensitive criteria," (*ibid.* p. 686). A further type of validity suggested by Lather (1993) is 'situated validity,' which again explores the context bound nature of understanding, but specifically through the situatedness of the body.

These approaches to validity are acknowledged to be a useful way of understanding action research (Reason & Torbert, 2001). The concept of rhizomatic validity and knowledge has also had an impact on Australian place-based educators (e.g. Stewart (2008), Gough & Price (2004)). This is particularly evident in Gough (2008) who uses the rhizome as a way of conceptualising place. The 'rhizome' emerges from a postmodern or post-structuralist focus on the construction of meaning. Here, the focus is on individuals: contexts are different because different people construct different understandings of them. My emphasis is slightly different (although arguably just another node in the same rhizomatic field): contexts are different because of the very nature of place, which forms the unique site of our emergence from and into the world.

The research approach of working from deeply explored case studies also involves similar debate about the ability to transfer understandings from a small number of contexts, to the context of the reader. A recent special edition of *Environmental Education Research* (2004) explored the role of the case study with particular parallels to my topic of study. The consensus of the papers in this edition was that outcomes could impact on other situations but that success depended on the communicative quality of the research (Corcoran, Walker, & Wals, 2004), and the ability of the reader to have a 'vicarious' experience of the research and contextualise it in their own location (Stevenson, 2004).

Validity through place

Neither case study approaches nor understandings of rhizomatic validity deeply explore the role of place in aiding 'situated' validity. However the discussions above, including those stemming from action research and phenomenological literature, all contain the simple idea that my particular form of research is *place-bound*. Generalisability rests on evoking the places of the research, and the links that can be found between those places and the places of the readers. The frequent use of the words 'context,' 'location,' 'situation,' 'embodiment,' all imply the centrality of place in generalising from the forms of research explored above, yet 'place' has not been explicitly acknowledged in these discussions.

With my research focus, place seems an obvious metaphor through which to further explore the question of generalisability or the validity of the research findings in other contexts. If we see validity in terms of place, the question is 'can you generalise about places?' Obviously all experience of place has unique characteristics, hence Robottom and Sauvé's stance against generalisation between contexts (2005). Yet on some levels place experiences have similarities and linkages. My experience in Glen Strae, described at the very start of the thesis, has commonalities with experience of other places: cultural histories, ecologies, ways of moving over the ground, links with other experiences, times and memories. This returns to Merleau-Ponty's

point, described above (p. 154) of the common grounding of our experiences in the flesh of the world.

The fact that place is a 'nested' and scaling phenomenon is acknowledged by several theorists (Cameron, 2005; Malpas, 1999; Relph, 2009; Young, 2002).

This takes account of the fact that, for example, the place where I am standing at *Tom Clach Diontaichd* is also in the place 'Glen Strae' which is also in the Loch Awe watershed, which is also in the county of Argyll etc. At different levels of this nest, different similarities and differences are found. For example being on the gravel path walking toward the 'green pool' in Glen Strae is very different from being in the woods near 'faultline falls.' Yet on a bigger scale experiences in Glen Strae can be very similar to experiences in other Highland glens, but not very similar to being in valleys in East Anglia in the southern UK.

These facets of place help understand the scale on which generalisations might be possible within this research. While the participants had a national scale in common (Scotland), they worked in a variety of different local scales. A consensus was reached about the nature of place-based education spanning these locales, but as will be seen in Section C, different participants had different experiences and stressed different points about the purpose and techniques of place-based education. While I will explore the level on which the group were talking in the analysis, it will depend on those interested in the research to decide whether they are dealing with the same scale, or if the particular place of the research resonates with their own place.

As we move between places we can feel more, or less, at home. We can 'lose our bearings' or 'fit right in.' This implies, in addition to the idea of places as nested, that other places can have (or lack) parallels with the places we are currently in. This is a central concept of place-based education: that education focused on one place is not parochial, but helps learners live well wherever they find themselves (see for example Bishop (2004)). Bradbury and Reason's call to see research 'as if' it were in their own contexts fits here. When we move between places we see them as if they were our own, with

greater or less degrees of fit (see for example Brook (2003)). This understanding can be extended to research. Thus generalisability in my research, and the judgements made by readers, becomes a question of place: what is place of the research, and in what other places do these conclusions shed light?

While the debate on validity and generalisability voiced above shows in general terms how truthfulness was aimed for in my research, and can be assessed by my readers, many questions remain. These questions take the same form as those raised in Section A which led to my third research focus: 'how does place affect thinking and learning?' If we are embodied in certain places, how do we understand more general or abstract (research) ideas? How is research/learning shaped by place, and how do we contextualise research/learning? These questions were raised in the context of place-based education (the subject of my inquiry), but clearly have equal importance for my methodology (the process of my inquiry), in particular the possibility of learning from this research being applied in different places. In this way the questions of validity and generalisability are ongoing within my phenomenological inquiry, particularly my third strand of 'praxis' research questions.

Silences

Before relating the research findings and conclusions in the final section of this thesis, it is important to acknowledge the inevitable failings and blindspots of any account of this research. The written thesis, and the analysis in the next and final section, takes a linear form, but as Grant puts it:

Our research may not emerge in the tidy, linear manner described in research papers, (2007, p. 266).

Dealing with this issue there is considerable discussion in action research as to the most appropriate strategy for writing a thesis (McArdle (2002), Grant (2007), Davis (2007), and Whitehead (2009)).

Beyond the complexity and spiral nature of this research, acknowledged throughout Section B, the very nature of writing holds difficulties for a complete expression of the research. Van Manen points out that language inevitably falls short in its ability to express the nature of experience (1990b). Experiences of place and place-based education are the core of this research, but the fact is that reading a thesis about place is not the same as experiencing a place. Rather than attempting a non-conventional form of thesis (for example using video (Whitehead, 2009)), I am happier to acknowledge the 'silences' of the research.

The irreducibly contextual and life-bound nature of experience and practice will always resist total description: there will be silence. This form of silence is expressed by van Manen as 'ontological silence': "the silence of Being or Life itself," (van Manen, 1990b, p. 114). In pointing towards this silence, narrative and anecdote can be powerful, and these forms of writing have been used in this thesis to approach as far as is possible the lived experience of place and place-based education within my research context.

A further silence within this thesis is the ongoing lives of the research participants. They played a central role in my own inquiry and through the face-to-face encounters elements of our shared and separate lives, both professional and private, have been recorded. Yet much of the effect of the research on the participants falls outside of my ability to record it with this research methodology. I argue that such a 'silence' in this thesis is inevitable and acceptable. As Bradbury and Reason put it:

In seeing that the outcome of inquiry can be a shift in ways of being in the world, and in the development of new skills, we are liberated from the tyranny of having to 'write up' everything, (Bradbury & Reason, 2001, p. 348).

Section C – Bringing place to life

In March 2011, whilst in the middle of writing up this thesis, I returned to Glen Strae to run some activities with an environmental education network, exploring sense of place and education. It was the first time I had stayed at the lodge in the glen since working with the participants in this research, and being there brought back lots of memories. The experience also started a process for me of looking beyond the research. Sitting in the lounge of the house, with the fire roaring, amongst a disparate group of people, discussing 'place' into the early hours, I wanted to try and input a flavour of my PhD inquiry into the discussion. But how? What were the key things I found, and how would they relate to the contexts of the others in the discussion?

Whether I succeeded in expressing the outcomes of my research or not is an open question, but this was the first time I had attempted to communicate them. Questions of overall themes, contextualised examples, practical and conceptual findings and the relation between the two, all arose in my mind as we debated. In many ways my experience being back in Glen Strae parallels this final section of the thesis: looking beyond the genesis of my research questions, or the process of running the research workshops, to the key findings and implications of the research. Section C presents the educational and philosophical findings of the research and explores their inter-relation.

Chapter 8 addresses my educational research questions, Chapter 9 my philosophical questions. However much of the development of conclusions and new insights from the research is delayed until Chapter 10 where praxis occurs between the two streams of the inquiry. In this chapter the 'praxis' questions about thinking and learning in place are also addressed. Finally, Chapter 11 presents some implications of the research.

Chapter 8 – Practices of place

The previous section showed the process whereby the research participants generated ideas and understandings about place and place-based education during the workshops. It described the open and responsive structure of the research weekends and the mechanisms through which the discussions and ideas were ‘captured.’ As described in Section B, each research process went through several cycles of investigation: exploring experiences of place and place-based education, and developing ideas and themes from the inquiry. In this chapter I will present a summary of the educational findings from the research process. In the final part of the chapter I draw out the particular implications from the findings which return to my line of questioning in Chapter 4 – what is the point of learning in places? This can be seen (highlighted in red) in the context of the whole thesis, on the conceptual map below.

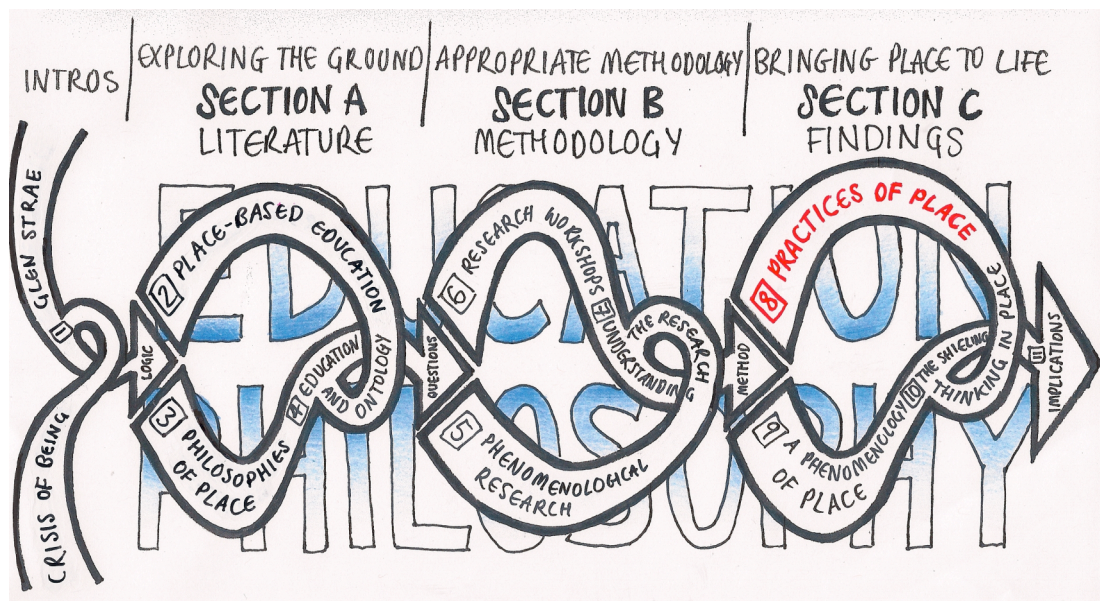


Figure 10. Conceptual map of the thesis for Chapter 8

Three educational questions were set out at the end of Section A:

- A - How can place-based education be developed in specific contexts, such as Glen Strae?

- B – What are the distinctive features of doing place-based education in these contexts?
- C - How does place-based education affect experiences of place?

These sub-questions addressed the over-arching question ‘what role do experiences of place have in education?’ I will use the three questions as sub-headings to group the responses from the research workshops.

Summarising what the groups had to say about the nature of place-based education, as they understood it from discussions and practice, will address the first question. The groups’ thoughts on the pedagogy involved in this approach to education will explore the qualities and methods that each participant felt were important in their own contexts. The question ‘what is place-based education for?’ and consideration of its outcomes featured in both group’s discussions towards the end of each set of workshops. The summaries of these responses will address the third research focus. I will return to the main question ‘what role do experiences of place have in education?’ at the end of the chapter.

When quotes are given, I will note the discussion from which they came. For example *P1.G* denotes discussion G from the first weekend of the pilot group, *M2.C* is discussion C from the second weekend of the second, ‘main,’ study. See *Appendix E* for full list of discussions with brief descriptions of location and context. As noted in Section B, the quotes are anonymised and letters have been assigned to each participant. However when the working context of the participant is relevant it has been described.

The approach to setting out these findings has been to use the *Group Notes* to outline important ideas, as they were the process by which the groups identified key findings. From the base of the *Group Notes*, relevant quotes from the transcribed discussions are given to add depth to certain points and also show the variance of different perspectives.

8A – How can place-based education be developed in specific contexts?

Two parallel processes occurred with relevance to the participants' ideas on place-based education. The first was an attempt to find a common understanding of the approach, prompted by my repeated raising of the question: 'what is place-based education?' The second showed the divergence between the different participant's opinions, contexts and applications of the approach. I will look at these two areas in that order.

What is place-based education?

The following extract from the *Group Notes* expresses the basic idea which emerged from the research workshops: that place-based education was about context:

- Place-based education gives a context for learning
 - Makes it relevant
 - Meaningful
 - Sensory
 - Gives direct experience, *M2 Group Notes*.

This can be seen in the following segment of discussion with the first group:

C: If you are wanting to teach a certain thing, and you can see a way of teaching that in the area that you are in, isn't that what place-based education is? Wherever you can teach it. If you have a message to give and you find a place that you can correctly give it, and give it with... give it well. Surely that's what place-based education is.

A: So it's just putting things in context then. And is there a bigger message that we're trying to put over. Or is it just making things real for people? *P1.G.*

The idea of 'putting things in context,' was expressed in other forms during the workshops, for example: "learning grounded in a particular place" *P2 Group Notes*. For the groups, places could be more than locations to learn about from somewhere else (e.g. the classroom), but real contexts to be in, to experience. This meant going outside the classroom and physically exploring those places. But as one of the participants pointed out, context is not just physical. The word 'place' for her needed to be expanded to include the social as well as physical:

J: That's the only thing I worry about with the word 'place,' my immediate thing with place is landscape, and that was what I came with. And then realised that it was as much about the people that were either there or you went with, *P2 Group Notes*.

However, simply contextualising learning in a social and physical place was not seen as the full picture. The question at the end of the first quote above is suggestive of a deeper understanding of place-based education: what is the bigger picture, beyond getting out into places? Both groups felt that place-based education was not merely about contextualising learning: what was important was connection and relationship. This idea was expressed in different ways: 'a relationship of give and take with the people & place,' *P2 Group Notes*, 'place brings out relationships: we are part of a system, creating habits of mind / being,' *M2 Group Notes*. The *Group Notes* also highlight other elements involved in this idea of relationship: 'belonging,' 'giving and receiving,' understanding how we 'fit' into our environment. The groups' view on the nature and purpose of this relationship will be explored further throughout this chapter.

The starting place for both groups was home:

K: We often think place-based education is about being out in the countryside, of course it's not it's about where you are, and getting people connected to that and how it can be made a more important place, somewhere to care for, somewhere that's nicer to live. How does what you do in your place affect all these big global issues. You know whether that's a city or the west coast of Scotland, *M2.C*.

The different contexts, home and away, in which the participants worked will be explored next, however there was a consensus that home places were the core of place-based education, (e.g. *P1 Group Notes*). Home was understood as the area around where people live, therefore the participants who were teachers often dealt with home, but the outdoor educators often did not. The relationship to other places and wider scales could be two-way: understanding other places could occur through exploring home, and trips away needed to be linked back to home, to fully contextualise what was learnt. This was expressed by the participants as 'spiralling out from, and back to, home,' *P1 Group Notes (and also M2 Group Notes)*.

One participant discussed their understanding of the purpose of spiralling between focus on home places and other places and wider scales:

K: The way I've looked at it a lot, is it's... we're forever talking now about getting people to do this that and the other, you change attitude, change behaviour, change lifestyles. In order to save the planet. And one of the best ways of doing that I think is by doing it locally. So if people are doing it in a place they become very familiar with, and then it's possible once they have that to extrapolate that, and to expand their understanding of wider issues. Rather than very often we come in at the wider issues start-point and there's no basis for understanding at all, there's just these concepts that are out there...

M: There's no grounding...

K: ...Whereas in fact by starting with where you are at and working outwards then it does have relevance that people can see, which is critical if people are going to change, alter or whatever, or there's going to be a greater understanding that we need to move on, *M1.D.*

To sum up the ideas that were part of this element of the research: exploring single contexts both links places by comparison and contrast, but also makes sense of abstract ideas; ideas generic across places. Also it was felt that different topics are easily connected in real-world contexts. This was something that participants felt was a strength of place-based education, with its focus on context, *M2.C.*

As described in Section B (p. 134), both groups were urged to change or discard the understanding of place-based education as 'in, about, and for' places (Harrison, 2010a and c), which I used to introduce the approach. However, both groups kept this understanding and modulated it in different ways. The first group explored how place-based education should engage 'head, heart and hand' (*P2 Group Notes*) a re-ordering of a phrase 'heart, hand and head' which comes from the work of Patrick Geddes (Geddes, 1949). For the group this phrase summed up the idea that place-based education could be practical and emotional as well as factual. They also interestingly suggested that 'in' could mean the present – being here now, 'about' could mean the past – what has happened, grown, changed here, and 'for' could involve the future (*P1 Group Notes*). For the second group, 'for' was the vision: why are we doing place-based education? 'about' was aims and objectives, and 'in' was the educational strategies (*M2 Group Notes*). The

second group argued that what place-based education was for might depend, it might be for wider environmental causes, or learning mathematics (*M2 Group Notes*). In summary the general consensus of the research groups was that for them place-based education meant developing a learning relationship with places, that was personal, experiential and might serve a variety of purposes.

Different participant understandings

Through the process of trying to find a consensus on the basic characteristics of place-based education, contrasting opinions and perspectives became clearer. It was acknowledged that each participant would have different experiences of working with or thinking about the approach, and that each person could contextualise the research in their own ways. Variance in ideas might then reflect different professions within the research groups, from teachers to outdoor educators, and /or different contexts, as well as different opinions.

A significant amount of discussion occurred with the first group as to whether place-based education was a series of techniques to be used, or an ethos, from which different approaches might be derived (*P1 and P2 Group Notes*). While the general consensus by the end of the workshops was that place-based education was an ethos that could find different forms in a variety of educational settings, this initial debate seemed to have been triggered by questions about content. What do you actually do when you do place-based education? One participant was happy to use the techniques I had modelled with the group in a school project she was running, (*P2.D*) but another had clear ideas of how and where techniques might be adapted in their own context (*P2 Group Notes*). Here, this participant argued that the techniques used could shift, and therefore place-based education was first and foremost an ethos.

The second group had a different understanding of the question of techniques and ethos, arguing that it was very important that place-based

education was identified as an ethos, rather than a set of techniques. Two particular participants were concerned that if place-based education became defined as a set of techniques, then those techniques could be used to train and accredit people, narrowing the possible understandings of place-based education and restricting people's ability to use and be creative with the approach (*M2.C*). Drawing on their experience with some current nationally recognized outdoor learning techniques within the UK (some participants in the study were involved in the John Muir Award and Forest Schools), the groups argued that place-based education was a flexible and accessible approach. And furthermore they argued that it would be possible to work within existing approaches with a place-based ethos.

With an understanding of place-based education as building a learning relationship with places, the debate around how to do that led to different ideas within the groups. Some participants who taught in schools discussed the contrast between projects focused on a place, and incorporating place-based techniques into everyday classes:

D: ...is it [place-based education] a stand-alone thing that you assess? Or is it part of the process to achieve the other outcomes that you are looking at?, *P2.D*.

Another teacher reflected that place-based education implied a reconsideration of his approach to teaching:

N: I am thinking a lot about opportunities for learning, having been through... the importance actually for teachers to do this. Rather than planning this as the trip we are going to do, and then going and doing it. Is actually saying, right I'm going to go to this place and see it and know it, and see what the opportunities are. Cause all these different things that have popped up, the bog myrtle and then the water, we had the pulsing of the water that we were talking about. All kinds of different things that you wouldn't have planned to put in on the way here. But I think we are very guilty of saying right what do we have to teach, we have to teach this and that and the other, lets go and do it there. So it's almost as if... education arising from the place, specific to the place, rather than education merely in a place... *M1.F*.

Responsiveness to place is important for the participant quoted above. For another, responsiveness to certain particular elements of places which had been obscured, was important:

K: So very often... it's about wild places for nature and biodiversity, and looking at that. Whereas looking at the economic, the cultural, the social, all of those other levels, is... will enrich those experiences and those places for the people that are using it, *M2.C*.

These quotes sum up the sense within both groups that place was necessarily cross-disciplinary and involved different perspectives (*P1, M2 Group Notes*).

Both groups acknowledged the fact that the teachers found it easiest to contextualise place-based education. The teachers worked with children near to home, who were there to learn specific things, and had the possibility of long-term engagement. Other participants had different situations, for example the outdoor educators worked with groups over the short term, often far from their homes, and with a clear set of objectives, such as learning to kayak, developing interpersonal skills, or completing a journey. The participants who came from the Transition movement were working explicitly to help people reduce their dependence on carbon. Debating the role of place-based education in these different contexts, the first group differentiated between place-based education, and 'place-based practice' through which people working for example with groups for short periods of time or far from home could consider place within the experience (*P2 Group Notes*).

The contributions of participants who were not teachers were acknowledged to be very useful to explore the tensions and different variants within place-based education. For example a participant from the Transition movement in the second group felt that it was more important to come out from the city to help the people she worked with to get distance from the ecological issues in their lives. She felt that exploring the ecology of a rural place and having space and time to consider the urban counterpart would be more beneficial:

L: I think that trying to help people see into, and understand the details of their own lives, in a city, where there is just so many distractions from the things that you are actually dependent upon as an individual in a society. You kind of have to create an awareness of what is normal and what is abnormal in that situation, so I think that the shift of context is actually really important, *M3.A*.

Several participants who worked in outdoor education centres felt that place-based ideas could enhance both their own ability to work with groups, even if they were only 'passing through' places, *P2 Group Notes*.

In summary, this part of the chapter shows how participants developed different understandings of place-based education. The quotes and descriptions above show how place-based education can be developed in different contexts through a process of contextualised inquiry. The participants *placed* place-based education in their different working situations and what emerged was a variety of different understandings, with commonality arising around the idea of a whole person learning relationship with place. The variance between perspectives on place-based education will also be seen throughout the rest of the chapter, as the groups' understanding of the approaches and outcomes of place-based education are described.

8B – What are the distinctive features of doing place-based education in different contexts?

The participants spent a considerable amount of time exploring how their particular educational understandings and practices might be influenced by a focus on place. This debate about the pedagogy involved in place-based education is reflected in the *Group Notes*, where participants' ideas about learning styles and approaches were set down:

- Place-based education means personal interaction. It is the opportunity to look closely and relate to things around you, *M2 Group Notes*.
- ... knowledge, emotion, asking questions of the place, *P1 Group Notes*.
- Place-based education gives a foci for further learning
 - Children taking responsibility for their learning
 - A holding point for what is learnt, *M2 Group Notes*.

Place-based pedagogy

The qualities involved while experiencing or practicing place-based education were discussed at length by both groups. Various themes emerged from these discussions: different approaches to learning and

assessment, the importance of time, various practitioner skills and techniques. These will be documented in this section.

The research workshops explored a tension between providing information to people, and allowing them to follow their own inquiry:

F: ... I think if I don't have any context for a place then it's just like scenery to my life and I walk around it thinking about my life. And it's not really that... and I think to connect to a place you do need a bit of context I think because otherwise it's always just going to be about you...*P1.D.*

This sums up the idea voiced within both groups that elements of knowledge about a particular place can challenge and develop understandings, and prompt people to adopt or consider new perspectives. In addition to this understanding, the concern was raised that people have the opportunity to explore and inquire as well. Self-directed learning was felt to both personalise and help motivate people's interest in a place. Some of the strongest advocates of this, especially within the first study group were participants who worked in outdoor education, where factual learning was not seen to be as important as in school or environmental education contexts.

One of the developments of this debate on pedagogical styles within place-based education was the discussion of the idea of 'child-led' learning:

I: One of the big things they talk about is child-led. Forest schools that's what they want, they want the kids to discover themselves, but you are there on hand because they're going to have questions...

A: Yeah because it's knowledge that they're asking, it's that whole idea of I remember what I've learnt and not what I was told, *P1.D.*

The implication here is that in developing a connection with a place, learning will be more effective if it is motivated and directed by the learner. However this approach requires educators possibly answering all sorts of questions which learners might generate, which in a cross-disciplinary context might involve a vast amount of information. The difficulty of accessing knowledge specific to places was a concern raised by the research participants, *P2.D*, *M3.A*.

In a similar argument as put forward above, that to be challenged by a place requires some external information, a participant in the first group pointed out that while 'child-led' learning is important, the children, or the group being worked with, might simply not know the range of things that they could explore: **A:** "They don't have the wealth of experience to know what's out there to learn about," *P2.D*. The debate between self-guided and more structured approaches to learning, need not resolve into a dichotomy:

L: It's incredibly important to trust people to develop their own relationship with that landscape and let the landscape do its work with them, on a one-to-one level. And perhaps if they haven't spent so much time in these places before... but also I've found with really unfamiliar landscapes, to me, sometimes they can be quite one dimensional in terms of what you are seeing, smelling and hearing. If you don't have any kind of indicators or pointers from someone with more knowledge about what that landscape means to... and it would just be pointing out what it means to other people, and it's pointing out those things to... to facilitate that relationship. To let people pick from the options. Adding that depth but not kind of making a choice for one person in particular, *M1.B*.

The quotes above come from the initial research workshops with both groups, and by the end of both processes, concerns about the tension between exploring and being taught had become less strong. Time is an important factor here, both with the research participants, and as they point out, with the practice of place-based education. Establishing trust, moving through the initial phase of getting to know each other and the place and starting to focus on areas of inquiry, were all felt to be important elements facilitated by extended periods of time. "Place based education [is an] emersion in place, a sustained connection," *P2 Group Notes*, "... connection is given strength and depth by repeated visits," *M2 Group Notes*. These ideas show how for the groups a long-term approach allows different inquiries to be developed and followed, but also different pieces of information to be found and contextualised.

For the members of the research groups who were teachers, the question of whether learning had occurred, and at what level, was important, *P2.D*, *M1.C*. This was explored in two opposite directions: some teachers looked at ways of understanding the feelings generated by place-based education

experiences, or the curriculum areas covered. This raised questions about flexibility of outcomes in an experiential context: how specific can planned outcomes be if the students are shaping their own experiences? In contrast one teacher in the second study suggested the idea that the outdoor experience could be an assessment itself: where the pupils could show how the things they have learnt inside the classroom are found in a particular context:

N: ...So place-based education allows huge opportunities... for saying to the kids... rather than saying – today we are going to go out and learn about this. There is the opportunity to say – you have been learning about this in class, what have you done this week? Right, now we are going to go out and lets see this in evidence, you show us... you are being assessed on this, and it could be team work, it could be observing things, it might not be a set thing, it could be you pick something from this week, *M1.E*.

Discussion of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (LTScotland, 2004) and its role in supporting assessment of place-based education was a feature of both sets of workshops. This showed how participants with either direct or indirect involvement with this curriculum strove to contextualise place-based education within current educational developments.

A final element in this discussion of how the participants' pedagogical ideas related to place-based education, shows how outdoor learning is something which pupils as well as educators need to understand:

N: One of the things we've been very conscious of is the... kids actually acknowledging to themselves that they are actually learning stuff when they are outdoors. A lot of them, when we do evaluations with them, we go – what was the best thing you did? Oh well we went outside. What did you learn? Ummm... They did learn a lot, but it's actually getting it so that they understand that it isn't just the classroom where they learn. So that's the big challenge, the ongoing challenge, *M3.A*.

This part of the chapter shows how different participant understandings or theories of learning – what they do and how they do it - related to their developing understanding of place-based education. In summary, the groups explored the ways in which place might affect their pedagogy through the balance of structured and open learning experiences, and

considering what role the learning experiences in place would play within their particular educational context and curriculum.

Practitioner qualities

Place-based education understood as developing relationships with places which are personal, exploratory, informed, progressive and reflective, is a complex task for any educator. Both groups spent time considering the qualities and demands that place-based education required from an educator. “How much knowledge do you have to have?” was a question raised in *P1 Group Notes*. Knowledge, confidence and vision were felt to be critical. These will be examined in this section.

For some of the participants I provided a role model for knowing a place well, as I led some of the introductory activities.

G: ...one of the things that occurred to me in my reflection this morning, was the... how well does the facilitator, the teacher need to know the place that they are taking the group into? And do they have to have an element of connection that goes beyond the normal sort of everyday connection. So obviously you've invested a huge amount of yourself into Glen Strae, the locality, and that's evident because... there's an element of wisdom there that we... I feel able to gain from, *P1.F.*

Another participant reflected on his own experience of coming to know Glen Strae better, and what that implied for the knowledge he needed to gain to provide similar experiences.

H: It links into that wisdom thing we were talking about a minute ago. Because the land we go on with groups goes past these sort of areas and I've always intended to learn some more but I've not got round to it. I've bought a few books but not read them yet. And I want to know the history so I can pass it on, and I completely agree with that. I find myself looking round a settlement with a few ruins going oh yeah I wonder what it was like and then don't actually think any further. But the fact that we've been here and we've done these activities and then they were all great to try and understand. And for me the parts that you've been saying about this is what happened, and the actual history of what went on, has turned the colour up for me here. And it's gone from a bit of a bleak moorland with a few stone piles, to an amazing place, which then translates as well to the question: If we don't have the wisdom that you do having spent a year here, can we create the same experience? *P1.F.*

For this participant, as well as other outdoor educators, developing such specific knowledge presented a particular challenge, because they used such a wide variety of venues, and were encouraged to go to new places regularly. For the teachers, who worked in one place, usually a place close to their homes, such a level of knowledge didn't seem so challenging:

J: ...if I look at place-based education I kind of think that it needs to be based on a place that I know very well...

Sam: What you as a teacher or you as a person?

J: Me as a person, whether I am a pupil or a teacher or whatever. So whether it's my playground or my local park or whatever. But I visit it regularly and I know that this building is there, and these people inhabit it, *P1.H*.

The problem of multiple venues was felt to be compounded for outdoor educators by the short time they had with their groups, who often came from far away. One participant suggested that the knowledge and 'sense of place' of the educator, or in this case 'instructor,' could act as a counterbalance to the brief experiences of those they work with:

G: So through the instructor's awareness of their connection, they can then more consciously facilitate a connection for the students, *P2.C*.

Extending the debate on the importance of knowledge and connection to place, the groups argued that doing place-based activities as part of the workshops was a valuable experience for themselves as educators. Beyond opening up the discussion on what place-based education was, the activities we did as a group, run by myself and other participants, gave everyone the opportunity for "experiencing the challenge of things as well," Participant M, *M1.D*. Understanding what educators were asking of their groups was felt to be very important. But equally the role that place awareness could have in the educators lives, in sustaining their drive and commitment was commented on:

K: ...That's what I've found from these weekends, particularly this one, being out camping, it's really nice to do again and feel relaxed. A bit smoky and midgy-bitten! But you know that's all part of it. But you know it's a great time. Yesterday, totally a muir walk, just wandering off to see what was there with no particular thing in mind, it's incredibly good for the heart and soul.

And that I think means I am going to have to do a lot more of this for myself. And it's very easy I think for us to get wrapped up in all the doing it and getting other people going out and doing it, making it possible for them to do it, and then to forget about your own wellbeing and needs too, *M3.C*.

In addition to these insights, it was argued that confidence was an important factor for educators in bringing place-based education to fruition. However, as mentioned above (p. 181), the second group in particular felt that this confidence would be strengthened by opening up possibilities for educators to be creative and work with place-based education:

K: It needs to be able to have someone take a look and think – yeah I can do that, that's a great idea I'd never thought of that, lets go and do it, *M3.B*.

It was argued that qualifications and certification can create obstacles and even form excuses for not 'having a go,' *M2.C*. The important point about place-based education, as an approach to outdoor learning which does not necessarily involve the adventurous, is that it could and should be easy to undertake:

K: ... I'm just really concerned that it gets wrapped up in expertise and qualifications when it doesn't... it's a nonsense if that happens, and actually using your own local environment, any teacher anybody should become confident just to go out and do really quite deep and powerful stuff right where they are. Without thinking in order to do this stuff I need to get someone to come in and do this for me. That's missing the point entirely, *M3.A*.

The experiences of some of the participants were drawn on to explore how educators could be empowered to undertake place-based education. This would involve small steps, starting from the 'door-step' or school grounds and working outwards from there (*M3.A*).

The primary teachers within the research groups found it easier to move between subject areas and take a holistic approach to place, but in a secondary teaching context the cross-disciplinary nature of place-based education presents a particular challenge. As one of the participants who was running an outdoor learning project which crosses between subject areas at the secondary level pointed out:

N: I think there is a case for letting go of the geography teacher, the art teacher and going back to teacher. And there's a lot of people in secondary that find that difficult... *M1.D.*

Beyond the individual practitioner or educator, the participants also discussed the role of the organisation where they work and its importance in the development of place-based education.

Time and distance

One particular theme: time, played a pivotal role in the groups' understanding of place-based education. "What is the significance of time?" was one of the questions raised in the second series of workshops (*M2 Group Notes*). It has already been mentioned above (p. 182, p. 185) in various ways: time to develop a relationship with a place, both for students or groups, but also importantly for the educators themselves. Equally a long-term approach allowed different styles of learning to be involved, and perspectives challenged. These ideas are added to here, showing the groups' understanding that place-based education is as much about time as it is about place.

One aspect of the importance of time was felt to be experiential: the sense that going outside and experiencing a place developed questions slowly instead of demanding instant answers from inside people's heads:

N: ...if the question is a day long in a space or in a place, that then allows all the people involved, kids or adults, the time to actually come up with the answer, *M3.B.*

This was also part of the process that the research participants undertook, having two or three weekends spread out over several months to consider place-based education.

As already glimpsed in the foregoing discussion, lack of time *and* a long distance from home seemed to go hand in hand for those participants who worked in outdoor education centres. While they felt that place-based education should involve an "immersion in place, a sustained connection," *P2 Group Notes*, the structure of short courses was not helpful.

H: We are building connection with the environment we pass through, but I think that kind of sums it up, we are passing through it, *P2 Group Notes*.

One participant discussed the 'task-focused' nature of their experience of outdoor education and questioned whether connection to a place could have the same power in such a short time. The groups felt that one-off experiences could be powerful, but that understanding those experiences back in the people's home places was important, and often neglected in their experience of outdoor centres. Several participants argued that comparing and contrasting home and away places could be of value in 'transferring' learning. Yet in the context of outdoor education centres this required a sensitivity to place which members of the group felt in their experience was not often present.

Time was felt by both groups to be fundamental to the quality of relationship that could be developed through place-based education. Repeated focus on place over time gave "strength and depth," (*M2 Group Notes*) allowing periods of structured learning, 'down-time,' and reflection. The importance of home in the groups' understanding of place-based education is also about time. Working around home allows time to be taken more easily in that place, as well as time outside of formal 'place-based education' for people to continue developing their relationship with place (*P1, M2 Group Notes*). In addition to these ideas, the timescales, history and future of the place itself were felt to be an important part of the learning experience.

8C – How does place-based education affect ways of being in place?

Relating the groups' understanding of place-based education and its practice has shed light on how place-based education can be applied in different contexts, the specific challenges which participants encountered, and ways in which individuals have come to understand the approach. My third educational research question remains to be dealt with: how does place-based education affect ways of being in place? The response to this question

takes two forms. The first summarises the participants' feelings about the purpose of place-based education, based on the experiences they had in and out of the research workshops. This explores both the potential they see in place-based education and the outcomes they have seen in their own work. Secondly I will set out the participants deeper thoughts and feelings about the 'ways of being' that place-based education involved for them. This second more philosophical discussion creates a bridge from the educational research into the ontological inquiry in the next chapter.

What is place-based education for?

Both groups spent time discussing the purpose of place-based education, they felt it involved:

- Responsibility and action from enjoying the place, *P1 Group Notes*.
- We see how we treat places and ourselves. Knowing place, knowing where you are, rebuilding community, leads to a sense of belonging. History, culture, continuity, grounds identity, *M2 Group Notes*.

For the participants, achieving these aims started from the provision of a real world context for learning, place-based education allowed for 'relevant' and 'meaningful' 'direct experiences,' *M2 Group notes*. In this way it was felt that learning in and about a place engages learners more significantly with that place, rather than with one activity in that place, or studying it remotely from a classroom.

This experiential relationship with places is going on all the time, but both groups felt that place-based education had the potential to reveal, 'bring to life' (*M1.C*) or make 'conscious' (*P2.C, P3.A*), that relationship:

H: ...we can't help but be immersed in the landscape, and the environment and the locality... And it is... it's continuously woven through a course, this sense, and I think the strength of raising awareness of that is that you can enhance what you are doing, you can enhance the amount of information you are putting across, the amount of opportunity for young people to experience this place, and make connections or get excited about it or whatever. And yeah, it's all very good for me because it's all awareness raising. It's all about awareness. It's finding ways to raise your own, and other people's awareness of things. Once you know about something it's difficult to not know about it, impossible in fact.

G: It makes place explicit rather than implicit, *P2.C*.

Making explicit our relationship to places was felt to connect with an ethic of care, of giving to and receiving from a place, of 'belonging' and 'protecting,' (P1, M2 Group Notes):

G: ...connecting people to the place where they live, therefore forming some kind of conscious attachment to it, an awareness of what that place means to them and how they fit into it, and it could be the community. That they then consider how they could change their lives and how they could protect it more, P2.C.

This ethic of care was a key component of both groups' discussions. One participant questioned how education could be reintegrated with valuing places:

P: Just because what's been frustrating me is that you don't... you get all this education stuff, and I think for most people the ultimate aim is that you start caring about this environment and looking after it, and then I walk round Loch Lomond and it's a pigsty, it's absolutely disgusting, and it's not through lack of education. So most people will wax lyrical about what they should be doing, and how they are going to look after the environment, and how they are not going to leave anything, and then you go back to the same campsite a day later and it's absolutely trashed again, so they know what they should be doing, it's not lack of education, it's just they cannot be bothered with it. And it's really frustrating, because I think education is so valuable, but there's obviously a gap that is occurring where people just don't care, M3.A.

The second group in particular developed this question, looking specifically through one participant's experience in the Transition movement of trying to achieve environmental outcomes:

L: ...cause we're still working in the old system of set objectives. We're going to do this by telling you to do this... And it's quite horrendous really. And it's never going to work...

M: No, it's not is it?

L: It's never ever going to work. And yeah... if I could think at the moment of a way of actually making those kind of conversations and that learning with those people meaningful, it would be to really start from the beginning of our life systems, and together learn about how we are part of an environmental system. M3.A.

The consensus within the second group was that place-based education offered an alternative to their experience of current approaches within education which attempt to tell people to care for the environment. For both groups place-based education offered the potential to explore, understand

and develop a relationship with a place, from which ethics would then follow (*P1, M2 Group Notes*). As already described in this chapter (p. 182), one participant wanted to explore the comparison between urban and rural places as part of this 'behaviour change' process. This example and others from the participants from within the Transition movement contributed to this debate, putting forward the idea that change in our behaviours will not work unless it comes from deep self-motivation.

Participants drew on their own experiences in confirming the value of a less didactic approach to change:

K: You know, being told what to think and do innately just turns people off it.

M: A guaranteed way of making me not do something is telling me – you will do this, *M3.A*.

The groups felt that relationship with place was the ground from which change could start. This is summed up well in the quote below:

K: ... where a lot of things fall down is that people look for solutions, again, at a level which is way beyond the root cause. And the root cause is that we live lives that are totally now distanced from where we come from, in terms of the earth and the planet and our past. So that's where the neurosis comes in. So the way to get back to that, with homeopathy would be a constitutional remedy. And that constitutional remedy is spending time outdoors in nature. You know, whether you want to stop people buying too much, or stop them driving their car or reduce their carbon, or whatever. The way to do that is not immediately tell them that what they are doing is wrong. It's actually just to get them to go back to this bigger connection with where they actually came from. And start to understand it, and see it, and care for it. And then the decisions will make themselves, you know will come from that, *M3.A*.

As pointed out at the beginning of this section, the groups' feelings and understandings of the value of place-based education stemmed from their experiences during the workshops, and reflecting on these experiences or running place-based projects in their working contexts. The key idea voiced in this section: of bringing our relationship with place to life, or making it explicit, drew as much from their personal as professional experiences. And while the outcomes of their engagement with place-based education professionally could only be reported to the group, the experiences we had

together could be shared and examined in more detail. These experiences, in Glen Strae, of 'being with a place rather than on it,' were felt to create 'habits of mind and being,' *M2 Group notes*. The next section explores this way of being, to complete the summary of the research groups' understanding of place-based education.

Being in the place

Some of the *Group Notes* describe the ways of being found through a learning relationship of 'give and take with the people & place,' (*P1 Group Notes*):

- Understanding place means belonging, grounding, meaning, *M2 Group Notes*.
- Being *with* a place rather than *on* it. Self as place, *M2 Group Notes*.

As with all other elements of the participants' understanding of place-based education, physical presence and embodiment were key elements of being in and understanding a place:

I: But for me the thing that made it easy to start with was that we had a physical thing there, the old ruins of the shieling. If these weren't there it would have been a lot harder to imagine things, but we had the real physical thing there that somebody lived in, *P1.F*.

One participant related this quality from a project he ran in his school during, and partly for, the research workshops:

M: When you walk up, and you're doing stuff about the Clearances and you walk up to the top of the track and over to the next place... all this line of stone black houses that are along the shoreline, which is where you would be living. And you can see this massive manse [minister's house], and the church just down at the other side, which you are supporting. And a big posh farm there, and all the nice farm land that you have been kicked off. And for the kids that... you know they are there and they can see it, and it's blatantly obvious that that's how it was. And it's a huge message there, *M3.A*.

This immersion in place and the importance of seeing place as both people and land/ cityscape, might seem simple and obvious, but the contexts of two participants illustrate how hard it can be to undertake such experiential approaches. For one participant working in the Transition movement,

environment was the heart of their project yet experiences outside the lecture room were not:

L: It's about the environment, and it's about our impact on the environment, and how on earth are we supposed to learn that when we don't actually see it? *M2.C.*

For another participant, university study and experience had a similar disconnection:

P: ... we had an important assignment to write which was on the Ben Lawers area, and at no point was it mentioned that we should even go near [it]! *M2.A.*

The way of being described so far: embodied, relational and often unconscious, impacts on the philosophical thread of this thesis, asking 'what is the ontology of place?' The way of being discussed by the participants and presented briefly here will be explored further in the next chapter, as the points raised by the group in this part of the thesis constitute the start of a more philosophical investigation into the experience of place.

8D – What role do experiences of place have in education?

This research set out to examine the role that experiences of place could have in education and also in shaping a way of being that explored our emersion in the world around us. The collaborative phenomenological approach I developed produced a rich and varied response to my research questions around place-based education, as seen in the previous parts of this chapter. Ideas on the contexts, practice and effects of place-based education, generated and thematised through the research process, present an interwoven picture of individual perspectives, with some commonalities and some contrasts. This chapter has given depth and definition to the research process described in Chapter 6.

The research was designed to explore what it might be like to contextualise place-based education in a variety of educational practices, and how that process might occur. The process here is as important as the outcomes, it shows a handful of particular journeys into the question 'what is place-based education?' The intention of the research was not to take those particular

journeys and then create a generic model, but rather to show in depth what a few specific journeys might look like. The participants asked what place-based education means as a term, how it fits with their own pedagogies and areas of work (outdoor education, school-based education, environmental education), and what its outcomes might be. As stated in Chapter 7, the placed nature of this research leaves it to the reader to explore and understand the descriptions and themes which these questions gave rise to, in their own context.

Within the research context the findings described in the first three parts of the chapter provide many ideas which could be explored further (and contrasted with the relevant literature), such as: participants' theories of learning, perceived connections to curriculum, ways of judging outcomes, or the level of education and age-group the participants work with. Another area of interest might be the relationship between place-based education and the participants' understandings of their own discipline (e.g. outdoor education). This might or might not fit with the relationship between place-based education, outdoor learning, and outdoor education examined in the literature review in Chapter 2. Furthermore themes from place-based education literature such as locality, time, and sense of place are clearly present within my own research. However, linking these areas of debate with the experiences of the participants was not the key focus of my research. The overarching educational question I asked in Section A was: 'what role do experiences of place have in education?' And it is to this particular question I turn now.

In Chapter 4A, through praxis between the educational and philosophical literature, the key question which I developed asked 'what is the point?' Why go to a place to learn about it, as opposed to staying in the classroom? What role does the experience of being in the place play in education? Within the contexts of my research, and the ideas of the participants already set out above, a response to this question can be seen. Being in the place that is learnt about adds emotional and physical elements (*P1 Group Notes*):

'Place-based education gives a context for learning: makes it relevant, meaningful, sensory, and gives direct experience,' *M2 Group Notes*.

Having educational experiences in a place, for the groups, was about creating or revealing a physical, emotional and intellectual relationship with that place, not simply with a topic of study. For the groups, there was a reciprocity involved in this relationship: it was not simply the learner making connections with the place, but the place making connections with the learner. 'Place brings out relationships: we are part of a system, creating habits of mind / being,' *M2 Group Notes*. The connections fostered between learner and place reach out to other places. Place-based education could be about 'progressing to understanding other places (spiralling out from, and back to, home),' *P1 Group Notes* (and also *M2 Group Notes*).

Furthermore, the direct or indirect focus on local places, where people live, means that for the research groups learning in places meant contextualising that learning into ongoing everyday lives. 'Place-based education is getting to know a place, enabling people to find their connection / relationship with it. It helps us understand where we fit into the environment,' *M2 Group Notes*. Place-based education might mean seeing the 'impact on the places we use,' *P1 Group Notes*. This process involves exploring values: 'Does the whole world have value beyond you? Does your identity include your locality?' *M2 Group Notes*. A further implication of this discussion is that for the participants exploring these values can lead to action: '[you] can't just tell people to care for a place without regular engagement with it,' *M2 Group Notes*.

To sum up, the research process I undertook gives one response to the question why learn about *and* in places, from the perspectives and experiences of a small group working educators. The experience of being in the place that is learnt about involves the whole person, and can help them understand and value their embeddedness within places. This implies an expansion of learning beyond set experiences or topics into the learner's life as a whole. These ideas have similarities with two key figures in the

development UK education in the first half of the twentieth century: John Dewey (1998) and Patrick Geddes (1949).

Geddes argued that we “learn by living,” (1949, p. 111), and through the design of his ‘Outlook Tower’ in Edinburgh, advocated learning about the city through a variety of scales, through local, regional, continental to global. Higgins and Nicol argue that Geddes had “a commitment to learning through the senses and personal experiences, and able to make intellectual leaps within and across disciplines,” (Higgins & Nicol, 2009). From Geddes’ work the popular phrase ‘think global act local’ emerges. Dewey argued that education “must be based upon experience - which is always the actual life-experience of some individual,” (1998, p. 113). For him worthwhile and quality educational experiences included the internal (personal) and the external (factual), and that the intersection of these two involved stepping outside of the traditional school bounds:

The school environment of desks, blackboards, a small school yard, was supposed to suffice. There was no demand that the teacher should become intimately equated with the conditions of the local community, physical, historical, economic, occupational, etc., in order to utilize them as educational resources, (*ibid.* p. 36).

In both Dewey and Geddes a localised whole person experience characterises a quality learning experience, and the traditional boundaries of the school are challenged. Place-based education as a field inherits some of this educational development (Gruenewald & Smith, 2009). Furthermore, the findings of the research groups clearly have a lot in common with Dewey and Geddes’ ideas. Place-based education as a concept however also inherits considerable development in ideas about place from the second half of the twentieth century (as seen in Chapter 4). In this way the concept of ‘place,’ within place-based education brings in contemporary challenges of understanding a globalised context (in the UK), and the educational and philosophical understanding that it is in places that cultural and environmental issues interweave.

In terms of this research one feature differentiates the participants' findings from the ideas of Dewey and Geddes, perhaps adding further definition to the legacy of these educationalists. This is the way in which the research puts forward a phenomenology of learning in place not present in their work. The role of body and mind in place which is developed throughout the next two chapters adds further to the understanding of 'experience' in learning. The lack of clear understanding of what is meant by 'experience' in an educational context is also an issue in 'experiential education,' (Fox, 2008; Roberts, 2008; Seaman, 2008), which inherits many ideas from Dewey and Geddes.

The idea of whole person contextualised learning experiences, resonating as it does with the work of Dewey and Geddes, only begins to answer the question why go to places to learn about them. It remains a claim about the possibilities of education in places, and while this research was not set up to explore the outcomes and effects of such experiences, the discussions which occurred during the workshops can shed further light on what it is like to have these experiences of place. This requires a return to the experiences of the research participants, and as argued in Section B (e.g. p. 158), this also involves scrutiny of my own experiences. The next chapter tries to achieve this by moving from an educational phenomenology – what is the experience of practicing place-based education? - toward a more philosophical phenomenology – what is the experience and ontology of place? This will provide more clarity on what a learning experience which involves the whole person in context might be like, and also address my philosophical questions. Further debate on the findings set out in the current chapter will occur in Chapter 10 where the educational and philosophical threads of the inquiry will once more be compared and contrasted.

Chapter 9 – A phenomenology of place

The previous chapter presented the findings of the research participants in their investigation into place-based education. Summaries of discussions and their own analysis of their experiences show place-based education was understood as a process of revealing relationships with where we are. The different qualities of this learning relationship were examined. The last section of Chapter 8 took these findings and explored them in the context of the main educational question of this thesis, making links to the philosophical questions of this chapter. In this chapter I will set out an example of how I continued the phenomenological inquiry after the research workshops, bringing out some phenomenological themes from the participants' discussions. I use these themes to discuss the ontology of place, and ways of thinking about, or through, place. The position of these developments in the overall logic of the inquiry can be seen (highlighted in red) below.

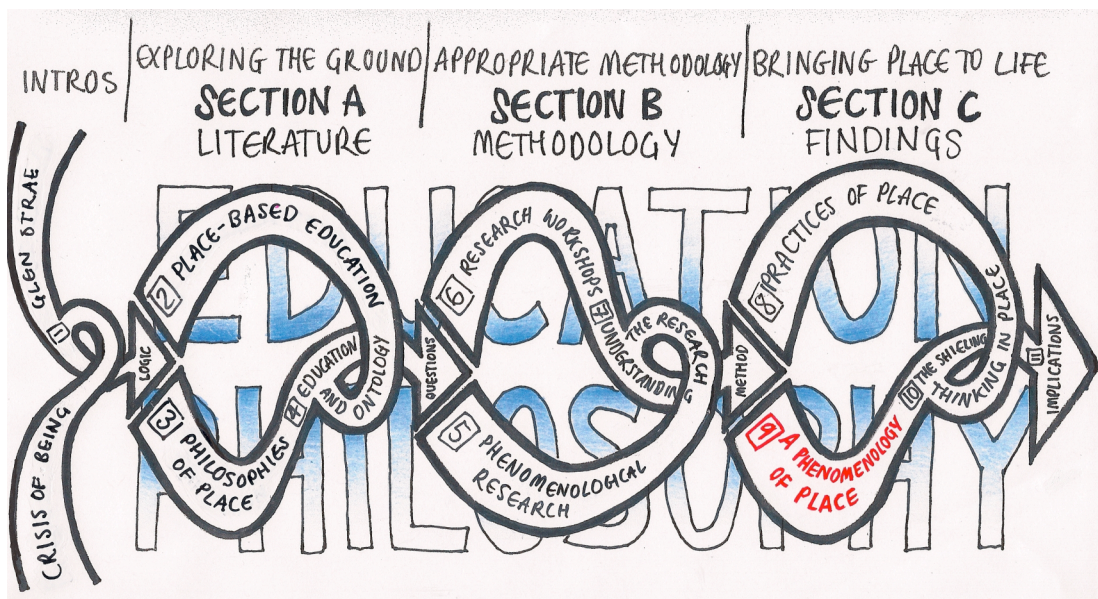


Figure 11. Conceptual map of the thesis for Chapter 9

Throughout this research the line has been blurred between the participants' own experiences of place learning and being in Glen Strae, and their

experiences reflecting on, planning and delivering place-based education in their working lives. This was deliberate, and stemmed from my philosophical focus on the nature of place. This consideration (amongst others which served the educational inquiry) required exploration of experiences of place as a group in Glen Strae, and also important places in the participants' lives. But clearly the experiences which occurred during the research are not the only type of experiences of place. Structured experiences, whether for research or education, do not always characterise experiences of place.

However, a broader phenomenology of place is interestingly reflected in the way in which the groups argued that place-based education brought place to life. The approach blurred the line between education and the ongoing life of the learner. As this research has sought to, the groups found that place-based education revealed and brought out the role and possibilities of place. Beyond the implication that this PhD inquiry could be understood as a form of place-based education, this insight helps justify drawing out more general philosophical themes from the research workshops in this chapter. However questions of scope and scale of the philosophical findings (as discussed in Section B, p. 113) will continue to be very important.

The previous chapter has shown how the groups argued that learning in as well as about a place involved the whole person and could reveal context and connections. These responses indicate a level of philosophical inquiry into the nature of place experience which will be developed further here. The current chapter also returns to the ontological questions of this investigation. Section A of this thesis developed a particular philosophical position, understood as an 'ontological approach to place,' (p. 64). Drawing on insights from Evernden (1985), Heidegger (1971; 1977) and Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1968), the idea of place was used to bring attention to our way of being in the world, specifically our way of being right here, where we find ourselves. It was argued that experiencing ourselves as part of a place: an ongoing ecological and cultural process, might overcome the separation between culture and nature which is at the root of the 'environmental crisis.'

The work of Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1968) and Malpas (1999) was drawn on to show how place could be understood as a process which made such experience possible. In this ontological approach to place, we are segments of the 'flesh of the world,' both part of and separate from our context. Place allows us to experience this two-fold nature: understanding ourselves and the world around us.

Through the development of this position, and debate from the field of place-based education and other disciplines which explore the nature of place, the question 'what is the ontology of place?' became one of the three main questions of my inquiry. This question was broken down to three sub-questions:

- How can an ontological approach to place be described in a specific context, for example in Glen Strae?
- How are we (always) in place?
- How is it possible to account phenomenologically for the different facets of place: physical environments, bodies, thoughts, experiences, facts?

These questions highlighted three problems with the philosophical position sketched above: how does this universal and abstract theoretical position relate to concrete and unique places?, how does this ontology of place interact with our everyday conscious experience of place?, and how can seemingly different mental and physical elements of this experience be accounted for in an ontology of place?

As described in Chapter 7 (p. 158), I took on the philosophical development of the inquiry after the research workshops had finished. The first part of this chapter documents part of that inquiry and how it helped me draw out themes from the group discussions recorded during the workshops. The phenomenology of place which emerges will be used to explore the three research questions reiterated above in the context of theoretical positions on place, particularly those of Merleau-Ponty. The distinctive and challenging finding of my research is the question of mind in place. This is explored at the end of the chapter.

9A – Phenomenological themes

Tom Clach Diontaichd

It is February 2011. I am driving in my car from Taynuilt, where I live, to Glen Strae, twenty minutes down the road. I have my music turned up and am moving fast through a familiar landscape, driving down a road I have been on countless times. I am thinking about personal things, my mind wandering over recent events, hopes for my future and worries about the present. My body continues to drive the car, but I have a feeling of separation both between my thoughts and body, and between my self and the world whizzing by outside my music and windscreen.

I round the corner beyond Loch Awe village and Glen Strae comes into view. Suddenly I am drawn away from my thoughts and smile. The hills of *Beinn a' Chochuill* (the mountain of the cowl) and *Beinn Eunaich* (the mountain of the birding (hunting)) guard the left side of the entrance to the glen. *Stronmilchan* (the ridge of the dog louse) with its orderly line of rectangular crofts running up the lower slopes, defines the right hand side. I have a sense of expectation and familiarity. My mind is drawn back into the present and no longer seems some separate entity, I can feel myself tense, ready for the walk ahead.

Drawing into the estate track off the road, I park up, turn the music off and step out of the car. Immediately things come into focus: I feel the cold air in my lungs and looking around the familiar mountains seem nearer. The sky is white, but a different shade of white from the mountains, where snow lies from the summits down to close near the valley floor. There is always more snow here than at home.

On one of my first visits in 2008 Donald the estate manager told me that this spot where I am parked had been a droving stance, where the men who drove the cattle to market had the right to stay for a night and graze their beasts. For several centuries towards the end of the last millennium droving was a big trade in Scotland with cattle driven, swum and sailed from all parts of the Highlands and Islands down to markets at Crief and Falkirk (Haldane, 2008). I have camped in this spot with many groups over the last few years, and always tell them this little story, as I feel it presents a new perspective on our few nights under canvas there. The layers of experiences and memories I have of Glen Strae shift and move, this aspect comes to light now.

As I stretch my body out of its car driving position, I glance over at the stream which runs through the campsite. Here, last year, camping

with a group on a training course, we saw a ball of young eels or elvers shimmering in the water. They formed a shifting, glinting and almost self-consuming globe writhing in the stream. Born in the sea they had shifted their physiology from tolerating salt-water to fresh, and moved up the river to spend their adult lives before returning to the ocean, reversing the process, to breed.

I walk out up the road towards the higher path which runs into the glen, passing over an old bridge and section of military road. It was constructed in the mid eighteenth century to help subdue the continual uprisings which had occurred in the Highlands for the previous two hundred years. The blue of the pool below catches my eye. My chest and legs hurt as I push forward up the hill. I haven't yet got into the flow of walking. But as I work my way along the tracks, up past the house and erratic boulder towards the shieling ground, I warm up, my legs no longer creaking and resisting.

My mind wanders in and out of focus. I catch myself thinking about the PhD or about other things and bring myself back into the present, back into myself, and walk on. When I am looking around me, at the bare oak trees or the deep red of the leafless birch wood on the slope above, I do not need to 'bring my mind back,' it is only when it wanders that I need to, or can, pay attention to it. My senses are opening up and I am getting into a rhythm of walking: the splashing of a stream is almost overwhelming and drowns out all other sounds. At one point the smell of silage is acrid and fills my head. Particularly aware of my experience, on this walk for this research, I get the sense that I am walking through the place not on it. This is a curious feeling of walking through something solid and unfolding, filled up with sounds and smells and sights, rather than something empty where these sensory experiences are of things far away through an empty clear space.

I notice the stress I am putting on myself to pay attention to my experience, and also my reluctance to spend the time being here, living through the research question. Can't I just go home and write it? Wanting to have it done already is a palpable feeling, yet I tell myself to relax, let go and be patient. A buzzard utters its distinctive cry and my eyes catch up with the sound to see the big bird lazily soar down into the lower fields below me. Instead of thinking of other things, I start to think through the glen. The mass of 'old man's beard' lichen on an oak I walk under brings to mind a TV programme I watched about reindeer, and seeing them feed on lichen and moss. The tumbled down walls, or dykes, which crisscross the path make me wonder about the boundary between Tulloch and Duilletter farms. I feel sadness at the vast breadth of lost knowledge about this place. There were once six farms here, and even though most of their stories have been lost, the boundaries are still visible through traces the land.

As I approach the shieling ground a special feeling comes over me, this is my favourite area in the glen, and also somewhere I think about a lot when I am not there. Beyond the tree-lined stream, lies a flat and slightly boggy meadow perched on a plateau a hundred meters above the valley floor. The views up and down the valley and the wind blowing through make this an ideal spot for a shieling: defence against other people and against the biting midges which can't fly in winds over five miles an hour. Is this why it is called *Tom Clach Diontaichd* – the hillock of the defence stone? Collapsed rectangular walls of moss-covered stones show the foundations of the huts and enclosures where people and their livestock would stay every summer.

Most pastoral cultures herd their animals into high pastures for the summer in a practice called 'transhumance.' Since the Neolithic, some six thousand years ago in Scotland, people here have been taking their cattle into the mountains to areas called 'shielings.' Archaeological evidence of this reaches back at least to the Iron Age some two thousand years ago, (Cheape, 1996). As the process of 'improvement' and clearance occurred during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries these areas became enclosed as part of sheep farms and the practice of moving up with the beasts largely came to an end, lingering on in the western isles until the nineteen fifties. Yet even now livestock will be moved up to higher pastures in the summer: the highland cattle in Glen Strae spend most of the summer far up the glen.

I step between slick stones crossing the stream and put my bag down inside the remains of an old stone enclosure. Its rectangular shape runs between two large boulders deeply sunken into the slope: they have been integrated into the wall. There is a shallow depression which runs away from the lower end of the enclosure into the stream. I haven't really noticed this before and wonder if it was manmade to drain off the dung and urine that would have accumulated in the enclosure. I put on some extra clothes and settle down to think.

Themes

I undertook this walk, and several others like it, during the process of writing up and exploring the implications of the research workshops. I stopped and made many notes while walking, and also took photographs. On my return home, using the notes and photographs, I wrote a description of the experience, one example is seen above. The process helped me explore and isolate themes from the research workshops, and understand them

through my continued experiences in Glen Strae. The ways in which place slips into and out of focus, my bodily feelings, emotions and personal perspectives, and the ways in which my knowledge and learning about the glen fitted into my experience are reflected in the themes below.

As one participant pointed out “place starts as a location and then becomes something more,” *P2 Group Notes*. Through the group’s own phenomenological reflection on their experiences of place, and of educating in places, the ‘something more’ became clearer. This took form in the idea of bringing to life a whole person relationship in a particular context. The implications of this for my educational inquiry were explored in the previous chapter, but the nature of this relationship also feeds into the philosophical investigation. To understand this relationship in a phenomenological way, I used the educational findings, seen in Chapter 8, the *Group Notes*, as well as my own phenomenological inquiry to thematise the transcripts from the workshops (as described in greater detail in Chapter 7 p. 158). Following this process the themes I identified were as follows: unexamined place, bringing place to life, embodied place, place and time, and place and people. I will explore these in turn.

Unexamined place

‘Place starts as a location and then becomes something more,’ *P2 Group Notes*. This quote has been used before, but becomes important here in trying to understand how the research sheds light on the experience of place *before* it is ‘revealed,’ ‘brought to life,’ ‘made conscious,’ or ‘explicit.’ In the description above of my trip to Glen Strae, place remained implicit and unexamined as I drove my car, thinking of other times and places. Glen Strae was a location that I was going to. Equally, even when I was walking, concentrating on my experience, sometimes my thoughts would ‘wander off’ to other things and place would recede from consciousness.

These experiences helped me explore and understand similar ideas within the research participants’ discussions, where place remained unexamined.

The idea of place as a location for personal experiences and memories was present when the groups reflected on their favourite place at the start of the first workshop:

A: I think sometimes your special place is a link to do with where you are in yourself, and in your life, and what else is happening to you. It might be a place, but it might be yourself. And it could have been a number of places, *P1.B*.

Here the focus is on what happened to the individual in that place. Place is a marker for a personal event, rather than the focus of an ongoing relationship.

What is clear from the quote above is that these experiences are still very meaningful. While this importance may seem simply to stem from the question 'what is your favourite place?' it was actually present in many other aspects during the research. This can be seen in another form in the following quote:

G: ... sometimes it is enough for people to go and be, so that people can form their own connection without having to know the ins and outs of the history or the ecology. They form a connection with the place and through their own inquiry begin to find out what they want about the landscape, by looking at the river, walking to the river... whatever. I am just thinking about a week I ran on Skye where we went to a place called Boreraig, and just stayed there for five days. And didn't really go much into the history apart from, you know, this is a cleared village. But by the end of the week people actually felt a huge wrench when they left because they had really connected parts of themselves to that place. And when we left people actually voiced that and they didn't say that they felt sad about the village and the location, history etc, it was what they had invested of themselves, *P1.D*.

Here again place serves as a marker and container for the person and their feelings. These are events that happened *at* Boreraig. Examining the historical or ecological context was not part of the experience, but personal visual and emotional elements were. The quote above also returns to Thomashow's criticism of eco-psychological gatherings where place was more an element of people's own self and feelings:

This may be great for cultivating the spirit of imagination or opening the gates to deep personal issues, but it is ultimately anthropocentric, neglecting the rich natural history tapestry that nourished a deep sense of place, (Thomashow, 1998, p. 284).

The experience of place as a locator or an empty box which contains a personal experience forms an illuminating theme. This theme helps understand experiences where place remains unexamined, and is further supported by an example from another participant. In an outdoor education context one participant felt there was a push from both management and staff, including himself, to always go to somewhere new for an expedition, instead of building up knowledge and connection, as a leader, with a smaller number of areas. This was associated with 'adventure,' 'play,' 'keeping it fresh,' *P2.C*. Again this resonates with the idea of places as blank spaces in the leader's experience, which can be ticked off simply by going there, being filled up by the personal experiences had in that location.

The idea that when place is unexamined it can be experienced simply by being seen is also developed by the following comment. When we reflected on our initial discussions and experiences of Glen Strae, one participant said:

K: I think we've looked at it, we haven't done anything else to the place at all. We've looked at it and that's about it really, so I don't think you can say we've got to the heart of it. Without... how far you want to go down into it, you could just keep on going. Because there's all the other different... social, economic, cultural... all the different layers that have been placed upon this place, which we have yet to explore, or even think about, *M1.C*.

Another participant's statement links just 'looking at' a place with the idea of 'beauty:'

P: I kind of rattled through a lot of places very quickly that I thought were very beautiful, but I couldn't really justify it as my favourite place unless it had an emotional attachment. *M1.A*.

As place becomes more important, and examined, just looking at a beautiful place is not enough.

These insights into what being in a place might be like when it is unexamined also rely on a set of socio-economic factors: being able to go to different beautiful places and experience them, even the possibility for me to get into a car and drive quickly through places. These factors imply that this theme (and most likely all the others) will be very contingent on a wide variety of factors including economic means and line of work. (One

participant pointed out that none of the research participants work on the land in an agricultural capacity, and this shapes the type of everyday relationship that we have with place, *M1.E* and *M2.C*).

The different facets and ideas on place discussed here combine to create a theme for the research: unexamined place. Here place can be understood as a location for personal experience, that can be beautiful, moving, or full of memories. It is important to note that I am not arguing that there is anything wrong with these experiences, but that here place is simply a backdrop for ongoing lives. If place is to come to the fore then it needs to be examined. This research set out to explore an ontology of place where our 'placement' was an ongoing process of integration and differentiation within the larger body of the world around us. Becoming aware of this implies a different kind of experience to the ones described above.

The next theme 'bringing place to life' describes the transition from unexamined place to an experience where place is consciously engaged with. The research participants felt that this transition defined place-based education, but what is it like? What is the phenomenology of bringing place to life?

'Bringing place to life'

The idea of experiences of place which aren't 'everyday experiences' carries with it a danger. This is the implication that certain kinds of place experience are only available to some people – perhaps only 'natives.' The slide here towards an idea of 'true' place as an essential and immutable experience, was discussed in Section A and seen for example in the work Heidegger (1971), Relph (1976) and White (2005). However, my experiences, such as the one related at the start of this chapter, and the discussions during the research workshops, give a different picture. For the participants, moving into relationship with place was a process of 'bringing it to life,' making place 'explicit,' and revealing our connections to our surroundings (p. 197). The implication is that this way of being is there all the time, ready to be

discovered, or re-discovered, rather than a different way of life available only to some people. The exact nature of what is revealed is variable, open and shifting, as will be seen in the subsequent themes.

As with the previous theme, bringing place to life is dependent on a variety of factors. The participants identified some of these factors: one was movement and contrast. While the first theme could have implied that brief experiences in places do not help examine place, participants argued that the contrast between places could be an element which aided a "heightened awareness of place," *P1.B*. Educationally, contrast between places was felt to be a good strategy for bringing place to life. One participant suggested that having explored another place you might come back with "your eyes open," *M2.C*. As seen in the previous chapter, another participant suggested that the contrast between urban and rural ecologies could be beneficial:

L: ...I think that trying to help people see into, and understand the details of their own lives, in a city, where there is just so many distractions from the things that you are actually dependent upon as an individual in a society. You kind of have to create an awareness of what is normal and what is abnormal in that situation, so I think that the shift of context is actually really important, *M3A*.

As another participant points out, this change of context might occur through taking 'time out,' and can be a very personal process:

M: ...I think what can happen for all of us, on a personal level is you get wrapped up in what you are doing and you can lose your sense of place to some extent. And get things that move your grounding away a little bit, and you end up being a wee bit adrift for a bit. And actually being somewhere, and taking time out, and reflecting for a bit on that gives you the opportunity to put some of that stuff back into place. And I think that the sense of place is an internal thing as well as an external thing, you know it's where I fit in the world. Yeah where I fit in the world, and where I fit in myself, *M1.E*.

One participant describes their own particular experience of what it is like to bring place to life:

E: ...it's almost like a meditative kind of space that then I can really think about all these different aspects or really think about place as this place where I am as a multidimensional thing. I am sure I think about it but it's never a conscious thing. And then maybe it's

only when you are under threat that you realise that this unconscious process has been happening. Otherwise I find it happens very rarely, and that's why I have enjoyed these weekends... P3.A.

This highlights another trigger for revealing place: when that place comes under threat. Beyond immanent threat, this participant states, in common with the previous quote, that the inquiry process of the research served to bring to consciousness his relationship with place. These quotes imply that intention is an important element in bringing place to life. This can be seen in my intention to explore my experience in Glen Strae, or the educational intention to learn about a place.

The importance of intentions has implications for both place-based education and place ontology. The theme of bringing place to life seems to imply that moving into an open and responsive relationship with place is not a state which is gained simply by being who we are, or where we are. Nor is it gifted by knowing what we know, but crucially by becoming more aware. Returning to the issue highlighted at the start of the discussion of this theme, bringing place to life implies that both 'native' and 'incomer' might need to examine their experience of place. Moreover, such a distinction seems to be less useful within this understanding, where place is something that easily becomes unconscious or forgotten. As this theme shows, bringing place to life seems to be an ongoing process rather than a state which is achieved once and for all. This can be seen in my own experience above, where my consciousness of place slips away and returns.

In this context knowledge is useful, but not to 'know a place better,' rather to continuously bring place back into consciousness. The latter part of a quote already seen above, sums this up well:

H: ...for me the parts that you've been saying about this is what happened, and the actual history of what went on, has *turned the colour up for me here*. And it's gone from a bit of a bleak moorland with a few stone piles, to an amazing place, P1.F, *emphasis added*.

This quote makes the role of knowledge clear: learning that these piles of stones are a shieling was not an end in itself, but contributed to a process of

'turning the colour up,' of bringing that place to life. The idea of knowledge in place will be returned to in more detail below.

This theme is useful as a bridge between the first theme of everyday unexamined place, and the qualities of place experience when it is revealed. While the groups identify some triggers which start this process, and there are implications of what it is like, the overall suggestion is that a shift in perspective needs to occur to reveal this experience. My research suggests that this can be brought on by internal or external factors, by reflection, new knowledge, contrast or threat.

The next themes explore the nature of the experience of place during and after it has been 'brought to life.' They are less strong or less fully explored than the previous two themes, as they capture some of the variety of types of experience that the group had once they had moved into a more conscious relationship with place. Unexamined place and the process of bringing place to life were common experiences, but the following themes seem to have made a particular impact on certain participants.

Embodied place

As seen in the description of my walk in Glen Strae above, as soon as I stepped out of my car, the sensory and bodily elements of the experience became stronger, and at some points almost overwhelming. However, during the research workshops attention to the body was not so common. Discussions tended to focus on values, knowledge, time and other less physical qualities. I feel that this was partly due to the facticity of the body: it is always there, and thus easy to over look. Having become aware of this potential blind spot in the first set of workshops, I asked the second group what the difference would be between being in Glen Strae as we were and watching a film of being in Glen Strae. The response was interesting:

L: I find that distinction quite difficult to even describe, because it just feels so self-evident that you are either somewhere or you are not. You are hidden from everything in a room with a video screen and you don't feel anything.

M: Or just look at us all here, you're pulling the wee bit of bracken, you're stroking a bit of grass, you know and if we are all sitting there in front of our screen doing this, you are missing all that! You can't do it. That's part of it, it's that kinaesthetic bit, *M1.C*.

As will be seen in this theme, the role of the body, or embodiment in place, is just one of the aspects of a relationship with place that comes to be more conscious, as place is brought to life. Interestingly this contrasts with the first theme where place is easily evoked by a set of memories, a postcard, or perhaps a holiday video. As place is brought to life, actually being there seems to hold more importance. This can also be seen in my description of going to Glen Strae. While I am thinking about the glen during my drive, it is not until I get there that an immersive embodied experience is possible, and this in turn brings the place (back) to life.

One of the participants who ran several days of place-based education with his school during the research, illuminates the physicality of being in place through a discussion he had with his pupils. In trying to explore with them what made jumping into a natural pool so different from jumping into a swimming pool, both the participant and the pupils become aware of the physical qualities of the experience.

M: ... and I said – a lot of you have been in a swimming pool where you've got different diving boards where you can jump in and it's a bit higher and a bit higher. So I said – so is that better or worse than this? Well this is better. Well why? What is it that makes it different, and what is it that you are taking away from it? One wee lass put her hand up and said – you see when you are jumping in you don't really know what's there, so you are looking really closely at what that water's doing. So I thought that was a really valid point. So we went on from that, and we were highlighting the little things and a lot of it was to do with the aesthetic of the place. So we got the fact that it was fresh water, it wasn't full of chlorine, and they liked the fact that it was just natural water. The excitement of the fact that you couldn't see what was there and that you were having to build up your understanding of the place that you were in before you could jump off that next level, so you'd been in the pool a few times and you knew where things were and what you had to do to keep yourself safe with that.

And then you'd got the fact that it was less public, so it was a private place and it was quiet, you know so you've got the whole aesthetic of actually being out. The water tastes better! I thought that was great. And then they were on about the colours, cause you've got the marble

pools that we've been up through under Blaven [a mountain in Skye] there and it's just... the colours, it's really turquoise water, it's just amazing, M3.A.

This quote is interesting in that it shows the importance of the inquiry process as well as the physicality of a place. Colour, taste, depth, feel, all these elements of the sensing body, were brought to the surface here.

Place and time

For many of the group time was of fundamental importance in their experiences of place. This has been examined in the previous chapter in terms of time spent learning in a place, locality allowing time for regular exploration and the role of time in the research process itself. The value of time taken to understand experiences of place is clearly shown in the philosophical mode of this research as well as ideas and themes develop in complexity and depth over the months of the research. However with a focus on the experience of bringing place to life, the feeling of time and change was remarked upon by several participants. This was a quality of their experience which drew more interest than bodily involvement in place. It is worth quoting a larger section of one discussion from the second set of workshops to see the importance of this theme in the research. This occurred in the context of a discussion at the end of the first weekend with the second study group, as the participants reflected on the themes which came out of the weekend.

K: Time... I was talking about time to N with the rock and the water. The waterfall, as I was sat right at the water's edge watching it, and it's just so transient, and obviously I've seen waterfalls for years, but just that moment I was watching it and that rock... cause you were talking about it, you know a hundred million years ago that was there, that's always been there for that length of time, but the water that's passing over it is just there fleetingly. And that was a real feeling of time...

M: That was a real thing that fascinated me, and the lumps of rock that have dropped off that, but these huge boulders that have been cleft away from the main bit, but again it's still, I mean relatively... there's been hardly any change in that. And then underneath that you've got all the little... the bio bit happening in there, so you've got the insects and the mosses and that sort of thing which is there

fleetingly, which is sort of there on an intermediate time-scale, and the whole lot of that interlinking I was like wow! Profound moment!
K: So that then also brought me on to thinking about change, cause we often look at landscapes and think it's been like that forever, but in fact there's been so many changes, and in fact there still is changes happening. You know and that water is such a... and where does it all come from again? It's just constantly moving, it's phenomenal, *M1.F.*

As with the quote about the pupils' experience of the physicality of the rock pools, part of the discussion above shows the process of bringing place to life: the 'wow!' moment, the feeling of time flowing, or the re-appraisal of the waterfall. The combination of new knowledge about the timescales of the rock, with an attentive and inquiring frame of mind, brought forward these qualities of the place: the experience suddenly expanded. Feeling part of the ongoing flow of time involved change over different scales: the fleeting streams, the flow of the seasons, the historical momentum of culture and the immensity of geological time. Here the participants are not simply noticing the changes around them, but in themselves as well, they became aware of their own changing in and with the place. This is a particularly strong element of my own experience in Glen Strae due to the number of times I have returned there.

Place and people

The immersion into the physicality and timespans of a place is very different from the first theme: the unexamined experience of place. Experiences when place is revealed happen *with* the place not simply in it. Bringing place to life is a reciprocal relationship where we are revealed to ourselves, as the place too is revealed. The self-awareness of the participants as they became conscious of the relationships they have with places was clear in the previous two themes, and implies a further theme: people as part of place.

This theme involves both self-in-place and the group-as-place. These were mentioned early on in the process by both research groups, as participants discussed the role of family or friends in their favourite places. But the role of people in places developed further as the research progressed. In the

second workshop a participant in the first group remarked “this group is a place for us all as well,” P2.A. The idea of people as an integral part of an experience of place, implies that place here is no longer an external location or container, but rather a reciprocal process of exploring who we are (and with) and where we are. This can be seen in my own experience described above as I explore new things about the glen, but also get an insight into my own state of mind (about getting my PhD done!).

The second group felt that that exploring self through place was a particularly important theme, as set out in their *Group Notes*:

- Place-based education is *for people* as well as place
 - Brings out values / morals / spirituality
 - We see how we treat places and ourselves
 - Knowing place, knowing where you are, rebuilding community, leads to a sense of belonging
 - History, culture, continuity, grounds identity
 - Being *with* a place rather than *on* it
 - Self as place, M2 *Group Notes*

Part of the idea of understanding ourselves with and through place seemed also to be about an ethics of care:

F: I think to be genuine... to have a connection with a place and you put something yourself into it then if it's under threat then there's something of yourself in there, and you should want to defend it,
P1.G.

In this quote there is the possibility of being a part of place, clearly place is no longer a location, but something to ‘be with.’ A link is established here between being in place and action and care. Beyond the exploration of this idea seen in the previous chapter, philosophically such care involves an intimate intertwining between person and place. The argument seems to be that understanding ourselves as part of a place would lead to action because we would be in some way defending ourselves (as voiced in the quote above and for example by Participant K, M1.E).

The sense of the self and group in place became stronger through the workshops. By the third weekend with each group there was an acknowledgement that interaction with each other and with Glen Strae had

changed. Specific direction or structured activities did not need to occur for the inquiring and exploratory approach to place to be maintained (as voiced for example in discussion M3.C). A quality of experience which enfolded the group and the place had been established. While no further effort was made to theorise this way of being in the discussions, it was voiced by both groups.

Place in flux

Five themes have been identified which describe the participants' phenomenology of place in the research: 'unexamined place' is a pre-reflective experience where place is a location for experiences and often deeper elements of place are left undisclosed. 'Bringing place to life' was an experience of transition from place as a 'backdrop' to a more immersive relationship with place. This transition was found to be triggered by many different things, such as threat, inquiry or contrast. When place was brought to life, different qualities of the experience of place emerged: body in place, time in place and self in place.

The clear downside of my research structure is that for most people Glen Strae was far from their homes. While education centring around home, locality and connections with other places, was important in the previous chapter, the focus on participants' experience of Glen Strae in this phenomenological analysis, does not reveal so much about their experiences of their home places. As stated in Chapter 7 (p. 156) some questioning of place experiences at home might have strengthened this area of the inquiry. However, weaving the participant's experiences into my own phenomenological inquiry where Glen Strae is part of my home area, attempts to balance this possible problem.

What becomes clear from the previous part of this chapter was the contingency of experience of place on people themselves and the contexts they are in. The fact that the research participants were of an economic level which allowed them to move, and to see different places, that they were not dependent on the weather or soil for their livelihood and survival, and

equally were not under the shadow of a volcano or living through local ecological disaster (as voiced by Participant P, M2.C), significantly shaped their understanding of place. This was clear in the context of 'unexamined place,' but also impacts on their 'deeper' understandings of place. While the implication of the research is that examining and opening up to place might be important, what qualities and experiences this brings out remain open.

Having explored the specific themes from the research participants' 'lived experience of place,' writing a short exploration of these themes will aid in the process of phenomenological inquiry (van Manen, 1990b). This writing will serve to bring out and join up the themes in one coherent position, and allow me to set this phenomenology into the wider context of the philosophical element of this inquiry. Within this contingent context, 'we' in this section of the chapter are the research groups, including myself.

Place can be an unexamined location for our experience. Here experience happens in locations, but place is a passive partner. We might go to see a place, or remember what happened there. These things happen at or on a place but not with it.

Place-based education, and the phenomenological inquiry undertaken by the research participants, and more fully by myself, provides an opportunity for us to take time, to return and to open up to places. Bringing place to life seems to be an ongoing process which reveals or re-discovers the deep reciprocity we share with places. This relationship can become hidden and forgotten. If a place is under threat, or we have had our eyes opened in other places we may also begin to explore this way of being. Our ability to care or empathise with place may be rooted in this deeper immersion.

Opening up into a relationship with place can involve becoming aware of our own bodies in place, the kinaesthetic nature of that experience. The passage of time can become a felt quality: we feel ourselves part of a nest of different timescales and processes of change. This intimacy brings ourselves to life through the place: becoming aware of ourselves means becoming aware of the place, and vice versa. Equally, the people we are with become part of that place with us, as we get to know them, and all our ways of being open up.

This piece of phenomenological writing implies that the process of inquiry is perhaps more important than what is found, or the starting point of the inquiry. The initial understanding of place *and* the nature of the way of being developed through this inquiry, has taken many forms and shapes. Different aspects had different importance for individual participants, these became important at various times and after various particular experiences in the research process. Thus, while separate themes have been formed in this chapter, what could be understood as the 'implicit' and 'explicit' experiences of place are rather two different sets of possible experiences of place.

I explored the flux between implicit and explicit place further in my experiences in Glen Strae. This is seen in one particular context in my description of walking through the glen above (p. 204). Different thoughts, or sensations move place 'into' or 'out of,' 'focus:' thinking about other places or things in my life draws me out of Glen Strae, wondering where the field boundaries of the old farms are draws me in. Seeing the buzzard flying across my field of vision brings me back into place, feeling my anxiety about not writing my thesis draws me into thinking about other things, away from the glen. This helped me understand how within one experience place can be implicit or explicit (this implies that Brown and Wattchow's 'denials' of place through certain activities (2011) (discussed in this thesis on p. 40) may also be about intention and mind as much as the structure of the activity). Moving between these states, bringing place to life, seems always in flux, and not simply 'on or off:' the process slides between particular qualities and experiences as they are brought to light or forgotten.

9B – An ontology of place

As discussed in Chapter 7 (p. 160), my approach to phenomenology aims to reveal characteristics of experience which were implicit or unknown. The phenomenology engaged with in Chapter 8 examined the experience of doing place-based education, revealing qualities and ideas about that practice. The phenomenology in this chapter is philosophical in character

(rather than educational) and has explored the way place experience (in this particular research context) is in flux. Through an inquiry into the experiences and ideas of the research participants, aided by my own continuing phenomenological investigation, unexamined place experience, and how place can be 'brought to life,' as well as what that might be like, has been described.

Various questions now arise: what does this phenomenology reveal about the ontology of place? How does this picture of place experience in flux fit with the philosophical debates set out in Chapters 2 and 4? Edges of this debate were defined through my philosophical research questions, so responding to these research questions will help explore how the phenomenology of place described above fits into the philosophical debate.

The most important finding that emerges from the previous part of the chapter is the way in which place might come into and out of the foreground of experience. As seen above this can involve phenomena such as 'consciousness' and 'intention' and thus has implications for our understanding of 'mind.' This key finding is examined further in the final part of this chapter.

Before turning to my philosophical research questions, I will deal with the query raised above: how can the phenomenology of certain experiences of place impact on an understanding of *what place is*, its ontology? Surely there is a difference between an examination of an experience of place, and an examination of place itself. From a phenomenological viewpoint however the previous sentence reflects a false dichotomy between the objective (place) and the subjective (experience). In Merleau-Ponty's ontology, our experience of the world is better understood not as a separate subject perceiving a distinct object, but rather as an interpenetration of different segments of the 'flesh of the world.' People are both sentient and sensible, subject and object, intermeshed in a sentient and sensible world (see p. 61).

This ontology relates to the experiences and examination of place. As defined from an examination of phenomenological thought on place in Chapter 2 (p. 64), an 'ontological approach to place' holds place to be a process through which we come to know ourselves and the world around us. Place is thus a way of knowing ourselves and the world as both subject and object. In this way, examining an experience of place is examining the process by which self and world are revealed in a certain context. The ways in which this experience occurs *is* the phenomenon of place. Thus the phenomenology above can shed light on the ontology of place. (Place is perhaps better understood here through a more active word: 'placement.' In this way the phenomenology of place described above explores the placement of the research participants and myself in different contexts).

With the phenomenological assumptions of my inquiry more clearly in view, I can now examine how the phenomenology of place described in the first part of this chapter impacts on those assumptions. Put another way, having assumed an ontological approach to place I now explore my research findings to better understand that ontology of place. Clearly this is a circular process, however the circularity here is a quality of phenomenology rather than a failing. This point returns to discussions of 'truth' in Chapter 7 (p. 159). To reiterate that debate in this context, my approach to phenomenology, drawing from Merleau-Ponty, is a spiralling process of experience and examining experience:

It is at the same time true that the world is what we see and that, nonetheless, we must learn to see it, (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 4).

Put another way, while the world is always before our eyes, I am striving to "place [our relationship to the world] once more before our eyes," (1962, p. xx).

The quotes above help clarify how the following critique can be seen as placing my assumption, that place structures the experience of self and world, once more before my eyes, and drawing not just on my own experiences, but others' experiences too, to re-examine those assumptions. As is seen in both Section A (p. 72) and Section B (p. 102), this cyclical praxis

involves engaging and re-engaging with a certain set of ideas all the way through the research process. The definition of an ontological approach to place originated in my exploration of the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968) and Malpas (1999), so I continue to engage with these philosophers of place here.

What does an ontological approach to place look like in a specific (educational) context, for example in Glen Strae?

This question stems from concerns about the scope and scale of philosophical thought on place, and the contrast between general and universal theories and the experience of place which seems to be a highly contextualised unfolding phenomenon. In following this contextualised understanding of place, I explored educational experiences centred on Glen Strae. This limited the scope and scale of my phenomenology, and unsurprisingly topics such as learning, environment, landscape, and rural histories featured strongly in the research workshops.

The contingency of time, place and people in the research allows me to compare my smaller scope and scale with the more general and universal ideas of philosophers of place such as Malpas (1999) and Merleau-Ponty (1968). In asking what an ontological approach to place might look like in context, rather than as a general theory, it becomes clear that a specific phenomenological analysis such as mine will not yield an exhaustive description of qualities and experiences. The phenomenology of place developed in this inquiry shows how different qualities emerged for different people, leaving the possibility of other qualities and themes emerging in other times and places. The participatory approach to the research, and the contingency of the outcomes, throws into question the value and possibility of attempts to define the qualities of place experience in a general rather than specific way, seen for example in Malpas (1999) and Casey (1993).

Does a general theory of place experience serve to obscure the particular ways in which place is experienced in specific contexts? A brief comparison of my themes with the philosophical context of my research as defined in Section A: the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1968) and Malpas (1999), will shed light on this question. Comparing my themes with these philosophers' work will also examine in further detail what an ontological approach to place meant for the research participants and myself in Glen Strae. This will clarify the area in which my research findings contribute most to the debate, leading to more in depth discussion.

Quoting a section of my description of walking in Glen Strae returns the discussion to the theme of embodied place:

I get the sense that I am walking through the place not on it. This is a curious feeling of walking through something solid and unfolding, filled up with sounds and smells and sights, rather than something empty where these sensory experiences are of things far away through an empty clear space.

As place comes to life, I can become much more aware of the sensory immersion of my body through and with the world. Both Merleau-Ponty and Malpas explore the role of the body and its fundamental emergence through place. Embodiment is the central theme of Merleau-Ponty's ontology:

... my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is a perceived), and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world reflects it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world, (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 248).

For Malpas the complexity of our body and its ability to move and explore in place shapes us as individuals, allowing us to think, and to act, (Malpas, 1999).

Heightened awareness of body was a theme in the phenomenology of place developed in this inquiry. This was seen in a quote from a research participant where he queries his pupils on the nature of their experience, showing how body 'reflects' place, as the pupils' physical explorations bring to life the pool they have been jumping in. But as discussed above (p. 213), embodiment was not a strong theme in the research. Working from Malpas

and Merleau-Ponty's theories it could be argued that my research process did not explore far enough into this element of place. Yet working in the opposite direction, my research implies that embodiment in place involves much more of a cognitive element.

As implied by the theme 'unexamined place,' a person might be physically in a place, seeing a beautiful sight, yet place remains implicit. In response to this it might be argued that a person is embodied in these experiences, they might just not realise they are. But as seen in the theme 'bringing place to life' the process of becoming aware is more significant than simply noticing the way we bodily move in the world, or how it feels to touch and be touched. The research workshops show how different events (a place being under threat), or ideas (such as the intention of learning about a place) *draw the mind into place*, as much as they might reveal the body in place. The question of body and mind in place, and the process of bringing place to life will become more important throughout this chapter.

Turning to place and time, Malpas uses Proust's *Remembrance of things past* (1932) to understand the way that place structures time. His discussion of experiences of the 'embodiment of time' where "in a single moment, an entire world is opened up," (Malpas, 1999, p. 159) fit well with the participants' description of their experiences at the waterfall (p. 216). Malpas states:

...time has itself taken on the form of an open region – a place – within which a life is constituted and within which particular locations, persons and things are given identity and form, (*ibid.* p. 159).

Interestingly Merleau-Ponty does not deal with time overtly in his analysis (Langer, 2003). The theme of time in the phenomenology of place developed in this inquiry shows how place can reveal our own bodily timescales and the timescales of other 'bodies' in place: the mosses, the flowing water, and the rock (p. 216). This might imply further developments to Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the 'flesh' moving away from static bodies, to dynamic processes.

The ways in which place structures our understanding of self and others is dealt with by both Malpas and Merleau-Ponty. Malpas argues that to understand ourselves as individuals we must be able understand that others around us are individuals too, which also implies a grasp of objectivity: how other people can exist without being us:

To have a conception of oneself, then, and to have a sense of one's own identity... is to have a sense, not of some simple, underlying self that is one's own, but rather of a particular place within the world. While having a sense of place consists in having a grasp of a conceptually complex structure - a structure that encompasses different forms of spatiality, concepts of self, of others, and of an objective order of things, (Malpas, 1999, p. 152).

Malpas' explanation seems to rest on the idea of place as location, and the need for us to understand the possibility of other subjectivities in other locations. However the research groups' descriptions seem to have more in common with Merleau-Ponty's ideas, which focus on common perceptions:

...it suffices that I look at a landscape, that I speak of it with someone. Then, through the concordant operation of his body and my own, what I see passes into him, this individual green of the meadow under my eyes invades his vision without quitting my own, I recognise in my green his green... There is here no problem of the alter ego because it is not I who sees, not he who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, vision in general, in virtue of that primordial property that belongs to the flesh, (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 142).

Instead of simply locating ourselves in different areas of common places, as Malpas argues, Merleau-Ponty's description shows that we can understand ourselves and others through our very immersion in the flesh of the world. Our particular segment of that flesh, our place, is interpenetrated by others. The mutual visibility and tangibility of ourselves and the world, and the way that I might 'recognise in my green their green,' shows how important the group process was in exploring place. While bringing the groups together from various different places might have been problematic, the power of each experience to enrich others in the group, and to bring the place to life, was an important element of my research. Beyond the group context, the participants' descriptions where self and place are both revealed as place is

brought to life give context to Merleau-Ponty's twin processes of interweaving and differentiating ourselves in the flesh of the world.

What is clear from the foregoing is that the themes revealed in the phenomenology of place developed in this research have a certain amount of fit with the philosophical theory that started this inquiry. In most cases the theory presents a more thorough picture, yet the situational descriptions of the research experiences in real contexts lends an immediacy to the descriptions from my research, which the more abstract theoretical approach does not have. This adds further to the idea that the scope and scale of theorising about place is important. The themes developed here suggest the open and unfinished nature of any experience of place, a sentiment closer to Merleau-Ponty's view on philosophy as a continual process of uncovering (1962), than an assumption that a total description of place experience is possible.

While praxis between the phenomenology of place developed through this research and Merleau-Ponty and Malpas' ontology does not add much to the understanding of time, body and self in place, there are elements of the research which do offer new contributions to the debate. Arguably the two most important themes in the phenomenology of place set out in this chapter – 'unexamined place' and 'bringing place to life' - are not reflected in either Malpas or Merleau-Ponty's work. The idea that mind may have a more important role in experience of place than is featured in these philosophers' works has already been voiced above, and is particularly evident in these two themes. This is an area in which my research can contribute to a philosophy of place. Whereas ideas of body, time and self in place have received attention, the question of mind in place, as discussed in further depth in the rest of this chapter, offers an opportunity for further development.

How are we (always) in place?

This subtitle formed my second philosophical research question. This question was prompted by a particular problem with the ontological approach to place: if place structures our sense of self and other, time and world, as claimed by Malpas (1999) and seen in my 'placed' interpretation of Merleau-Ponty (1968), how is it that place is not a strong element of all our experiences? Both Merleau-Ponty and Malpas, in slightly different ways, are claiming that flesh, or place, fundamentally structures our experience of the world, and yet the theme of 'unexamined place' challenges this.

Casey argues that the very ubiquity of place might be responsible for lack of philosophical attention to place (1997), and in a more practical context, Brown and Wattchow (2011) argue that place can be 'denied' through various different educational practices and approaches to the outdoors. However the phenomenological arguments of Merleau-Ponty and Malpas seem to imply a different reason for the way place may be forgotten: it is an element of experience that has been overlooked.

The idea that place is simply concealed in some experiences initially seems to be supported by the theme developed in this phenomenological research of 'bringing place to life:' we are always in place, but our consciousness of this might vary. Yet the phenomenology of place developed in this chapter implies a slightly richer picture than simply turning our attention to experience and revealing place. There seems to be more going on with 'mind' than simply switching perspective. As I write in my description of walking in Glen Strae:

I park up, turn the music off and step out of the car. Immediately things come into focus: I feel the cold air in my lungs, and looking around the familiar mountains seem nearer. The sky is white, but a different shade of white from the mountains, where snow lies from the summits down to close near the valley floor.

Bringing place to life seems to be a 'mindful' experience (more explicit discussion of what 'mind' might be, beyond the common sense understanding used so far in Section C, will occur in the next part of this chapter).

The mindfulness of immersive place experience is supported by the themes and descriptions which emerged from the group workshops. Re-quoting two descriptions here will give further definition to this argument.

K: The waterfall, as I was sat right at the water's edge watching it, and it's just so transient, and obviously I've seen waterfalls for years, but just that moment I was watching it and that rock... cause you were talking about it, you know a hundred million years ago that was there, that's always been there for that length of time, but the water that's passing over it is just there fleetingly. And that was a real feeling of time... *M1.F.*

Also:

M: ...we got the fact that it was fresh water, it wasn't full of chlorine, and they liked the fact that it was just natural water... The water tastes better! *M3.A.*

In all three of these descriptions the experience is not simply of noticing bodily sensations, but of specific thoughts too. Seeing trees, seeing and feeling time through the waterfall, tasting the water, all involve elements of the mind too. Knowing that the trees are birch or oak, that this rock was there a hundred million years ago, that the water wasn't full of chlorine was integral to the experience. One response to this could be that the people had the experience and then explained it afterwards with understandings of chlorine, or oak trees. Yet as one participant pointed out "once you know about something it's difficult to not know about it, impossible in fact," *P2.C.* Once I know what an oak tree is I can't stop seeing this tree as an oak even if I am focusing on other aspects of it. Even more importantly for this research, as I get to know a particular oak tree, for example the one which grows on *Tom an Daraich* in Glen Strae (p. 12), every time I see it a whole series of possible thoughts may arise: memories of previous visits, thoughts about the old forms of worship that may have happened there, my understanding of the Gaelic place name.

Regardless of exact words used, or the thoughts had, the mind was an active partner in these immersive experiences. The people relating their experiences of bringing place to life would have had different experiences had they not known these things. There was mental content to the experiences, not

simply a shift of focus. Furthermore, though I have been using the words 'body' and 'mind' in the previous paragraphs, my description of being in Glen Strae shows how the understanding and the sensation can seem inseparable in the experience.

When I am looking around me, at the bare oak trees or the deep red of the leafless birch wood on the slope above, I do not need to 'bring my mind back,' it is only when it wanders that I need to, or can, pay attention to it.

In a different example, when I am there, I can't distinguish the seeing of the oak at *Tom an Daraich* from my knowledge of its meaning and significance. (Yet I can relate this knowledge after my experience. This quality of mind will be discussed further in the next section of this chapter).

This discussion implies that bringing place to life is as mindful as it is sensory. It could be argued that both Merleau-Ponty and Malpas' work imply such a position. While Merleau-Ponty's (unfinished) work *The visible and the invisible* (1968) focuses on the body, in his working notes for the rest of the book, he writes:

Define the mind as the *other side* of the body - we have no idea of mind that would not be *doubled* with a body, that would not be established on this *ground*, (1968, p. 259, original emphasis).

Malpas writes:

The structure of the mind, and of mental content, cannot, it seems, be severed from the structure of the world in which the subject is necessarily located, (1999, p. 100).

Yet neither philosopher gives further definition to these ideas.

One reason for the lack of attention given to mind in place could be the abstract and general nature of both Merleau-Ponty and Malpas' work. Describing any hand touching another hand, or generic experiences of place, may obscure the specific judgements, knowledge and thinking which occur in context. For example, in contrast to my example of the oak at *Tom an Daraich*, a generic description of the experience of a tree would obscure various elements of mind in the experience: the fact it is an oak, the meaning of the place name, the specific memories and experiences I have had there. This point reinforces the argument voiced earlier in this chapter (p. 224) that

a generic and universal philosophy of place might actually be counterproductive in understanding place experience.

To sum up the discussion in this part of the chapter, my phenomenological inquiry implies that while we are always in place, the experience of bringing place to life is as mindful as it is bodily. This provides a response to the question 'how are we always in place?' The arguments here add to the ontological work of Malpas and Merleau-Ponty. The idea of mind in place is the most interesting finding from my inquiry, and is explored further in the next part of the chapter, and also through praxis with the educational findings in Chapter 10.

9C – Mind as a scaling phenomenon

Having examined what an ontological approach to place looks like in context, and how we are always in place, the final part of this chapter deals with my third philosophical research question: how can the different facets of place: bodies, thoughts, experiences, facts, be theorised in a way that overcomes Cartesian separations between mind and matter? Or put another way, how does embodiment in place fit with 'mind' in place? This takes the argument developed through the chapter so far, of the role of the mind in bringing place to life, and explores it further bringing in relevant literature.

Throughout the thesis so far the word 'mind' has been used in a 'common sense' way: corresponding to my thoughts, experiences, knowledge, etc. Mind here is not equivalent to the brain (Clark, 1997). Section A explored the way in which phenomenologists and place scholars argue that mind-body dualism can be overcome with an understanding of the way in which we are immersed, bodily, in the world and an ontology of 'flesh.' The implication is that this immersion affects our mind too. But understandings of how we might think, and specifically learn, in and through our immersion in the world, or place, were lacking and formed a question in this inquiry (see p. 93).

The inquiry has developed using Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, and further implications on what 'mind' might be in this philosophical approach were seen in Section B. Here our unfinished understanding of our experience of the world, and our constantly directed consciousness (understood as 'intentionality'), imply the ongoing immersion of our mental processes in the world. Beyond phenomenology, there is another thriving area of philosophy that deals with these questions: the philosophy of mind (e.g. McLaughlin & Cohen, 2007). The dominant philosophical approach within this area is Anglo-American philosophy. In contrast to the experiential focus of Continental (European) philosophy, of which phenomenology is a strong component, philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition draw on abstract theoretical arguments and also findings from the field of cognitive science to create theories of mind (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991). Roughly speaking, phenomenologists explore what mind might be like from the inside – what it feels like to think, and Anglo-American philosophers of mind explore from the outside and in general – how we remember, process information, or believe things. This includes experiments in neuroscience and artificial intelligence as well as logical philosophical arguments.

While the differing approaches of these two philosophies of mind will be discussed below, there is one current stream in the Anglo-American work on the philosophy of mind which is particularly relevant to my inquiry. This is called 'externalism:' the idea that the mind is "a spatio-temporally extended process not limited by the tenuous envelope of skin and skull," (Clark, 1997, p. 221). Recently this idea that the environment is an active part of the mind has received increased attention (e.g. Chokr, 1992; Clark, 1997; Clark & Chalmers, 1998; Johnson, 1987; McLaughlin & Cohen, (Eds.), 2007; Menary, (Ed.), 2010; Rowlands, 1999; Shapiro, 2011; Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991).

In this part of the chapter I argue that the continual movement in and out of an immersive experience of place implies that the distinction between body and mind is always in flux. This draws in debate from the phenomenological and place literature which constitutes the ground of my

inquiry, but also I examine the literature from Anglo-American philosophy of mind described above.

The starting point of my argument is the description, already used above, from my walk in Glen Strae:

When I am looking around me, at the bare oak trees or the deep red of the leafless birch wood on the slope above, I do not need to 'bring my mind back,' it is only when it wanders that I need to, or can, pay attention to it.

I argued above that mind was integral in the process of bringing place to life, and that it becomes indistinguishable in the kind of immersive place experiences described in the research.

The question then arises: what kind of thing is mind (in place)? From a scientific and psychological view scholars such as Capra (1997) and Bateson (1972) see mind as a process which includes not simply what is inside humans' heads, but systems and connections between and through places and organisms. Kidner puts forward a similar idea when he argues that our subjectivity comes from the relationship we have with the world: it is a "resonance" between ourselves and the places we are in (Kidner, 2001, p. 299). These arguments are put forward in different ways within 'externalist' theories of mind (Chokr, 1992; Clark, 1997; Clark & Chalmers, 1998; Johnson, 1987; McLaughlin & Cohen, (Eds.), 2007; Menary, (Ed.), 2010; Rowlands, 1999; Shapiro, 2011; Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991). These ideas imply that mind can be involved in place, but how do we experience this?

The work of Merleau-Ponty, and thinkers following his phenomenological investigations, develop this argument, arguing that our mind is in place with and through our bodies. As already noted above, in the unfinished working notes for *The visible and the invisible* (1968), Merleau-Ponty writes:

Define the mind as the other side of the body - we have no idea of mind that would not be doubled with a body, that would not be established on this ground, (*ibid.* p. 259).

Beyond the idea of the mind as the 'other side of the body,' and its links with Merleau-Ponty's arguments about the way in which the body is interwoven

in the world, his phrase 'this ground,' has a resonance with place and context. Langer argues that Merleau-Ponty "re-establishes the mind's roots in the body" (Langer, 1990, p. 124). This is also a point developed by Abram who states that "we consistently ignore, or overlook, the embodied nature of all our thoughts and our theories" (Abram, 2007, p. 165).

Yet my research implies that the continual embodiment of mind does not seem to account for the whole picture. As I tried to describe in my experience walking in Glen Strae "it is only when it [mind] wanders that I need to, or can, pay attention to it." While the theorists described above indicate ways of understanding how mind might be involved with the body in place, my phenomenological description implies that there are many times when our mind seems distinct, and is engaging with other times, places, or more abstract ideas. In these situations the mind does not feel like the 'other side of the body.' Furthermore, my phenomenological inquiry showed that bringing place to life is a constant state of flux (p. 220), does this mean that mind is also in a state of flux?

Generally and normally I can't have the sensory experience of seeing *Tom an Daraich* unless I am there in Glen Strae. (There are exceptions to this idea such as feeling arms that have been amputated, or dreaming. But it could be argued that the possibility of dreaming or feeling an amputated arm rests on having had some normal embodied experiences). The body often seems inseparable from the experiences in which it is immersed, but I can think about the meaning of the place name, or imagine times when I was at *Tom an Daraich* when I am not there (and my body is in another place, such as in my office where I am writing this thesis). This line of argument seems to drive a wedge between mind and body: mind seems much more 'detachable' from place experience.

The fact that mind and body are not always indistinguishable presents difficulties for the theorists mentioned in this context: while we might resonate with the landscape around us (Kidner, 2001), or be part of an informational system when we are chopping wood (Bateson, 1972), it is also

possible for us to reflect and think 'internally' or apart from our bodily experience. For example it would have been possible to tell the research groups lots of the things about Glen Strae: the age of the rock, the meanings of the place-names, or what a shieling was, without actually being there. However it would not be possible to feel what it was like in the glen, or to physically explore with our bodies, without being there. While embodied perception seems to be an integral part of the flesh of the world, mind, knowledge and facts are more ambiguous. Given this argument, what is mind?

Abram's thesis in *The spell of the sensuous* (1996b) is that alphabet, phonetic language and the writing which developed through these cultural innovations, made it increasingly possible to express ideas and thoughts in isolation from the context from which they originate. The implication is that written and then spoken knowledge detached mind from its immersion in the world through the body. Abram also argued that through this development it became increasingly possible to talk or think about things which were abstract, which had no context or concrete meaning in the physical world (Abram argues that this coincides with the birth of Western philosophy in Athens (1996b)). Abram argues that such abstract thoughts came to increasingly distance our lives from the more-than-human-world (1996b).

One interpretation of Abram's argument is that phonetic language allows mind to become separate from body. But given the phenomenology examined above, this does not seem to present the full picture. Bringing place to life seems to involve a *re-integration* of mind and body, in place, despite the ability for me to speak, write and think about *Tom an Daraich* whilst being here in my office.

Given the phenomenology of place I have set out in this research, are there other ways of thinking about mind in flux, beyond Abram's linguistic focus? Another way of understanding mind stems from the idea of place as having different scales (Cameron, 2005; Malpas, 1999; Relph, 2009; Young, 2002).

Place can be understood as a nest of different scales: right here, the wider horizon of my vision, and more abstractly the region, country etc. The metaphor of scale provides one way of understanding the phenomenon of mind in and out of place.

As described in this chapter by both the research participants and myself, bringing place to life can be understood as engaging mind *on the same scale* as the body. Understanding the waterfall as it flows, bringing myself back from thinking about other places, or learning that this pile of rocks is in fact a shieling: all these experiences involved thinking on the same scale as sensory experience. In fact, developing the argument from above, this research describes how mind and body are indistinguishable, or mind is the 'other side of the body' when they are on the same scale.

While Merleau-Ponty focuses on the way we are embodied in the world as sensuous beings, my argument opens up the possibility for this immersion to expand beyond the experience of touching or seeing, to mind and knowledge. If as Merleau-Ponty suggests the mind is the 'other side of the body,' at the right scale it can simply be part of our 'reciprocal insertion and intertwining' with the flesh of the world. But the implication of my research is that mind can also function on other scales: thinking more abstractly, or about other times and places. The flux between unexamined place and place brought to life shows how mind can waver between placement and other contexts.

Does this idea of mind as a scaling phenomenon have any support from other philosophies of mind? There are significant differences and tensions between Anglo-American approaches to the philosophy of mind and phenomenological approaches (Chokr, 1992; Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991). Some of the problems with the logical and objective approach to mind seen in the Anglo-American philosophical literature are clear from my arguments for a philosophy of place that is specific, contextualised and focused on lived experience. However both Chokr and Varela point out the similarities: both disciplines are attempting to articulate the way in which

mind is immersed in the world. This makes the interaction between my research and, for example, the work of Clark and Chalmers (1998), valuable. While their work stems from current research in neuro-science and artificial intelligence and logical philosophical arguments, my phenomenology explores similar territory through examining lived experience.

The phenomenology of mind in flux gives tangible and experiential scope to theories of 'active externalism' within the field of philosophy of mind. Of particular relevance are two ideas put forward by the philosophers Clark and Chalmers (1998), who in Menary's view (2010) are the current leading exponents of 'active externalism.' These authors argue that:

...the human organism is linked with an external entity in a two-way interaction, creating a *coupled system* that can be seen as a cognitive system in its own right, (*ibid.* p. 9).

Two elements of this 'coupling' have parallels with my phenomenology of mind: the argument that if the external element of this system (in my case the place) is removed then 'cognitive competence will drop' and the ease of 'decoupling' mind from environment. I will discuss these two points in detail next.

I have argued that there is a phenomenological difference between thinking both in *and* about places, and simply thinking about them (when our body is somewhere else). This parallels Clark and Chalmers' ideas: in their terminology, the first is a 'coupled system,' the second 'decoupled.' Interestingly from both a phenomenological and a logical and scientific perspective a similar argument is put forward. Furthermore, the argument that Clark and Chalmers make is that 'cognitive competence' will drop if body/place systems are 'decoupled.' This might have interesting consequences for the value of learning in place.

Clark and Chalmers also argue that the mind is, as a part of ourselves, very portable: we move around. Thus the system of mind which engages with a place is constantly being disassembled and re-assembled ('coupled' and 'decoupled' in their terminology) as we move through environments. This is

similar to my phenomenology where mind is in flux, however the idea of scale which I put forward adds a new element to this picture. While as we move between places it is important to create 'reliable coupling' or knowledge of place, whether or not this occurs seems also to be due to the scale on which we are thinking, not simply our movement or stasis.

The idea of mind as a scaling phenomenon helps explain my experience of place coming in and out of focus as I walk in Glen Strae. My mind seems to appear when I notice I am thinking about my PhD, but then immerse itself back into place with my body as the glen is brought back to life, distinguishing oak from birch, and *Tom an Daraich* from *Tom Clach Diontaichd*. The idea of mind as a scalar phenomenon helps respond to my research question: how can the different facets of place: bodies, thoughts, experiences, facts, be theorised in a way that overcomes Cartesian separations between mind and matter? My argument here contains many implications which will not be pursued further here: the possibility that it is the flux of mind between places and scales which makes it possible to think and understand our experience at all, by bringing our minds to bear on where we are, and the implication that Cartesian dualism is not a fixed situation but the result of a particular way of thinking.

Chapter 10 – The shieling / thinking in place

The previous chapter put forward a phenomenology of place, developing themes from the research participants' discussions, setting them in the context of wider philosophical discussion, and then using them to answer my philosophical research questions. The final part of the chapter explored the idea of mind as a scaling phenomenon, which when on the same scale as our bodies, in place, can be an integral (rather than separate) element of our experience. This chapter takes the findings from both Chapters 8 and 9, comparing and contrasting them through praxis, before looking at the role place played in the research itself. Throughout this chapter, one particular place: the shieling in Glen Strae, at *Tom Clach Diontaichd*, will provide a specific context through which to understand the debate. This can be seen (highlighted in red) in the context of the whole thesis, on the conceptual map below.

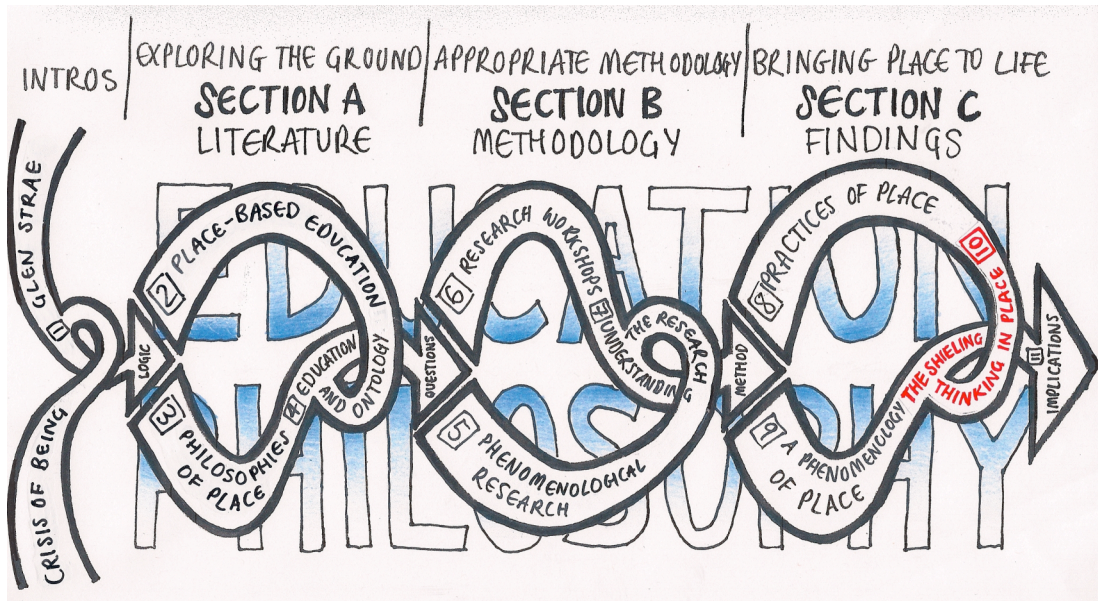


Figure 12. Conceptual map of the thesis for Chapter 10

In addition to the educational and philosophical questions, in Section A I also set out two questions which addressed the praxis element of my inquiry,

which asked 'how does place affect thinking and learning?' They were as follows:

- 3A - What is the phenomenology of learning in place?
- 3B - How does place affect the scope and structure of this inquiry?

The first part of this chapter will articulate a response to question 3A through contrasting and exploring the findings of the educational and the philosophical threads of the inquiry. The second part of the chapter will explore responses to question 3B.

It is fundamental to my methodology to engage in praxis examining the mutual implications between understandings of place-based education and the ontology of place, to draw out conclusions. Some of the questions that praxis might expose are evident from the previous chapters. Are the findings from the educational inquiry supported or challenged by the phenomenology of place set out in the previous chapter? The question of knowledge and embodiment in place-based education is raised through the participants' comments: for example where new knowledge changes somewhere from "a bit of a bleak moorland with a few stone piles, to an amazing place," Participant H, *P1.F*. How does this idea of knowledge and learning as part of place-based education fit with the idea of mind as a scaling phenomenon set out in the last chapter? A further question might be posed from the previous chapters: home was an important element throughout the educational threads of the research, but was less prominent in the philosophical inquiry. What implication does home have for phenomenology of place developed here? These two themes: learning and home, will be dealt with in the next part of the chapter.

The idea of thinking and learning in place developed in this research through the mutual interaction between my methodological concern with research in place and the research focus on understanding place (in education and phenomenology). The final part of the chapter examines this praxis between methodology and research content, describing how place has played a role in the way I have conducted this inquiry, responding to question 3B.

10A – A phenomenology of learning in place

Chapter 8 described various different journeys into the questions ‘what is place-based education?’ and ‘why go to places to learn about them?’ While there were different perspectives within the research, a common understanding of place-based education emerged: a whole person learning relationship which holds the potential to understand how people are in place(s). Unsurprisingly this has clear resonances with the philosophical findings set out in Chapter 9: both the educational and philosophical inquiries were developed from the same experiences and understandings. Chapter 9 gives a picture of (certain) experiences of place where place can be brought to life if and when our minds are on the same scale as our bodies. Phenomenologically this type of experience seems to be in flux as the mind ‘wanders’ or is integrated with the body through place.

The phenomenology of place set out in the previous chapter indicated that there might be various different factors which bring mind to place, or bring place to life: for example threat or contrast. The most important factor in this inquiry, which largely remained implicit in Chapter 9, is learning. In many of the descriptions used in my philosophical inquiry a new piece of knowledge, or a learning process, was pivotal in bringing place to life. For example: the age of the rocks under the waterfall, the question of the difference between pool swimming and wild swimming, the understanding of what a shieling looked like, all brought mind to place. While there are definitely other phenomenologies of place, and the phenomenology of place I describe might hold for other types of experience (e.g. learning which occurs outside of a structured context such as school), bringing place to life is, in this context, clearly the aim of place-based education.

The whole person learning relationship which was summed up by the first group as involving ‘head, heart and hand,’ (p. 179) is seen phenomenologically when mind is brought to place and place is brought to life. Learning about and in a place can be understood as bringing mind to place, attempting to think and learn on the same scale and in the same places

as the body. (While head (mind) and hand (body) are clearly part of this phenomenology, the theme of heart, emotion or values, was present in the research (e.g. p. 198), but remains relatively unexamined in this inquiry). The phenomenology described in the previous chapter can be understood as a phenomenology of learning in place. I will now deal with the specific questions that arise in the context of this phenomenology.

Knowledge in place

The role of learning in place as a way of bringing mind to place was well described in one particular phase of the research workshops. During the initial workshops I took both groups up to the shieling at *Tom Clach Diontaichd*, and ran some activities there. The purpose of these activities was to show how historical and cultural learning could be place-based. My intention was for this to aid in our discussion of what place-based education might be. The activities involved the research participants being learners themselves (as well as reflecting on the techniques I used), and their ideas thus help show how learning might bring place to life.

One of the activities, based on some information I relayed to the groups about shielings, was to draw a picture of the shieling at *Tom Clach Diontaichd* as it might have been when it was being used as a summer grazing. The way in which this illuminated the place is described by one participant:

M: ...I think it was you by the boulder there, and in my drawing I've got a person sitting on top of [that] rock looking after the cattle you know... most of those places where we were sitting down were the sort of places where people would have gone to sit, and sat, and would have done for hundreds of years... apart from the fact that you've got a bright red jacket on, and the fact that we were sitting down doing drawing, there wasn't an awful lot different, but there was an awful lot the same. You know, the same streams, the wind, a bit of breeze, the colours and shapes on the hill, and all that. It's all been there for hundreds and hundreds of years, and it just gives you that bit of... [insight] into something that's older and bigger than we ever can be, *M1.D*.

This description captures the way in which place has been brought to life here through bringing knowledge on a wide scale, of shielings in general, to the same scale as our embodied presence, on the hill, in the breeze, at *Tom*

Clach Diontaichd. A parallel sentiment was expressed by a participant from the first group after a similar experience:

H: ...for me the parts that you've been saying about what this is, what happened, and the actual history of what went on, has turned the colour up for me here. And it's gone from a bit of a bleak moorland with a few stone piles, to an amazing place, *P1.E*.

'Turning the colour up' seems to be another way of saying 'bringing to life.'

The idea that a whole person learning experience in place is about bringing mind to place and contextualising knowledge reflects back to the debate in Chapter 4 (p. 75). In that chapter I debated what learning in place might be, and how it related to bodily being in place. The question raised in Chapter 4 can be re-stated here as: 'how does knowledge which can be related in a de-contextualised manner (it is possible to learn about shielings without ever going to one) fit into embodied experiences of place?' One common solution to this issue seen in the literature seemed to be the idea of the 'social construction' of experience. Place-based educators such as Wattchow (2008), Somerville (2010) and Stewart (2004) and theorists such as Cronon (1995), Braun and Castree (1998) and Mackenzie (2006) argue, to various different degrees, that our experience of place is shaped - 'constructed' - by social ideas or conventions, different bodies of language and knowledge, or personal bias.

Put simply, one reading of this idea is that we carry with us a set of structures which shape how we experience places. For example, because I know that *Tom Clach Diontaichd* is a shieling I have certain types of experience there. The idea of social construction is used by Wattchow to explore how our different viewpoints shape and influence our place experience (2008). For Wattchow the process of social construction implies the existence of an embodied experience of place *before* it is shaped by "technical, cultural, environmental and social lifeworlds," (Wattchow, 2008, pp. 14 - 15). But through this division Wattchow's position seems to become another dualism between body and mind: between embodiment and social construction. We have a bodily experience and then it is shaped, understood, by the mind and the structures we carry with us.

It could however be argued that construction of knowledge out of embodied experiences does help understand how facts about the age of rocks, or shielings played a role in the experiences of place described by the participants above. Following this argument, the knowledge that this pile of rocks at *Tom Clach Diontaichd* is in fact a shieling is a piece of information that constructs or shapes Participant H's experience, "turning up the colour" on the place. And yet this does not seem to be what H is saying: the knowledge hasn't shaped the experience, but become part of it. This is common to all the descriptions used in this inquiry where place has been brought to life through new understanding. For example, in the description of the experience of time at the waterfall (p. 215), understanding the age of the rocks is not an input which determines the experience but a reciprocal part of that experience: the fact illuminates the waterfall and seeds further thoughts and feelings, and the waterfall illuminates the fact and draws out its meaning into an experience.

The phenomenology of place developed here seems to offer a more complex picture of what it means to learn in place. It certainly is the case that the knowledge of shielings that I try to convey through place-based education has been constructed. This construction occurred through knowledge gained from reading others' research (Bil, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1992; Cheape, 1996; Fenton, 1987; Holl & Smith, 2007; Jamie, 2005; Love, 1981; MacKellar, 1888; MacSween & Gailey, 1961; McOwan, 1987; Miller, 1967; Ross, 2004; The Napier Commission, 1883), and from many experiences exploring shielings in the highlands. And yet the understanding of bringing mind to place implies that learning some of this knowledge in place involves a more cyclical process of knowing rather than a one-way construction of knowledge out of experience.

In my work groups learn about shielings through educational activities I run at shielings such as *Tom Clach Diontaichd*. One example of this was explored during the research workshops. Arguably this involved the participants constructing their own knowledge about shielings, but equally, and importantly, their learning also involved a process of contextualisation.

Participants took the information I gave them and explored it through *Tom Clach Diontaichd*. Knowing was through and with the bodily experience not after or determining it. Here learning in place is not simply an experience that is predetermined by our patterns of thinking or speaking or our knowledge, nor do we simply experience a place and then give that experience our own (constructed) meaning. Rather, learning in place is an experience where the mind is on a scale where it can open up to its immersion in the world. Here, and now, mind can shape *and* be shaped by experience, through integration with the 'flesh of the world.'

That social ideas, language, and knowledge both shape and are shaped by experience might seem an obvious point, yet the important contribution that this research makes here is to show how learning in places offers the opportunity re-contextualise (constructed) knowledge on the same scale as bodily experience. Learning about place *in that place* brings knowledge to place and place to knowledge. We have the chance for 'landscape to shape mindscape,' paraphrasing Orr (1992, p. 130).

By implication learning in and about place is a very different experience from learning for example about shielings, in a classroom far removed from any shieling. The implication is that this latter type of learning is distinctly abstract and disembodied, and learning here is shaped and developed without any direct experience of the subject matter. The students' bodies are sitting on chairs in the classroom, but their minds are engaging with hills, cattle, and milking songs, for example, through words or pictures or descriptions. This reinforces the disjunction between mind and body, and between the learning self and the rest of the world. One of the important elements of place-based education in this light is the reconciling of mind and body in an experience where both can be on the same scale. Here, now, what is learnt is both sensory and intellectual, or rather such distinctions are not sustainable.

Thinking with and through place offers the opportunity to engage in a way of being that overcomes separations between body and mind. This argument

implies that Abram's position (1996b), as discussed in Chapter 9 (p. 235), does not paint the full picture: while the possibility of abstracting knowledge and thought from place is clear, it is not simply in the nature of the English (or alphabetic) language to do this. It is also perhaps a failure to engage with specific places that prevents opportunities for re-contextualising knowledge, and re-uniting mind and body. The practical concerns of the research participants, that place-based education should provide an anchor in immediate experience for issues and ideas that are wider in context, or even global, implies also that alternating between embodied and abstract thinking may actually be a beneficial process.

The argument set out so far means that while learning specific things which are unique to one place (such as the meaning of a place name) could be an important part of place-based education, learning generic things in a contextualised way (such as how glaciers shaped the land, here) also could have importance in place-based education. A place-based approach to teaching the story of the 'hamstrung cattle,' which occurred in Glen Strae, could only happen there, but teaching about the ways that glaciers shape the land could happen anywhere where there are traces of glacial erosion. Yet if this general understanding of glaciers is contextualised in the place where it is learnt about, it can still bring that particular place to life. The use of general and specific understandings may in fact be all part of one place-based learning experience. Some of the learning about the shieling at *Tom Clach Diontaichd* is unique to that place, other parts of it apply general knowledge about shielings to that one particular place. This adds further depth to Mannion et al.'s (forthcoming) idea that certain learning activities might be place-essential: it is not simply about the content of the activity but also the approach.

Other scholars have explored the idea of learning in context. Kawall argues that contextualised learning impacts on our values:

...being directly exposed to an environment can lead us to draw inferences that we would not otherwise, and this need not be a result of changed cognitive values. Consider the true proposition that Onondaga Lake in Syracuse, NY contains particularly high and

dangerous levels of phosphorous and ammonia. We can read this in a textbook (or exchange essay, for that matter). But we could also visit the lake to become directly acquainted with it and, perhaps, even perform measurements ourselves. Even if we assume that the same propositions are learned in both cases, notice that the mode of presentation can have a strong impact on how we integrate this knowledge into our general corpus of beliefs and desires. When the information is learned in a textbook we may not be quick to tie it to our moral beliefs. But when we directly interact with a place, this immersion can lead us to draw different connections, (Kawall, 2005, p. 366).

Here it is possible to see a similar phenomenology of learning in place to the one I am putting forward. Havlick and Hourdequin call this “contextualised knowledge” (2005, p. 386). They describe the need to get outside the classroom and experience ‘what’ the knowledge is about. They do not however describe the nature of that experience.

While work on context and knowledge by Preston (2003), Kawall (2005), and Havlick and Hourdequin (2005) relates to my phenomenology of place, these authors largely deal with epistemology rather than ontology. I have explored what place, mind and experience might be when learning in and through place, which is an ontological question. Whereas an epistemological question might ask ‘what makes such knowledge true?’ For example my thought that this plant in front of me is ‘ling heather’ is an example of an experience where both mind and body are in place. Whether I am correct in my understanding, or whether it is in fact ‘bell heather,’ or some other plant, is an epistemological question and does not alter the fact that experience has brought mind and body together through a place. Questions of what makes that knowledge true are left for an epistemological investigation, (taken up for example in by Preston (2003)).

Home

The synthesis between the educational and philosophical threads of my inquiry put forward here involves an understanding of place-based education as an experience of bringing mind to place which then can engage the whole person in the learning experience. The question of *where* these

kinds of educational experiences happen is important. Chapter 8 described how the research participants argued that place-based education should be centred on home, moving out from and back to home, or trying to relate experiences had 'away' to home life. Interestingly the role of home was less clear in the phenomenology of place set out in Chapter 9. This may in part be due to the research methodology, working as it did with a focus on Glen Strae as the workshop location.

Both the research participants in their educational inquiry, and the place-based education literature examined in Chapter 2 (see p. 36), argue that home is where we have time to bring to light our ways of being, and contextualise other places and global connections. Home is where we live, go to school, and return to after trips away. Malpas adds to this debate arguing that the less contact we have with places, the more abstract they become:

...any concrete sense of place is most closely tied to concrete capacities to act... and one result of this is that the less a place is encompassed by our capacity to act or to react, the more abstract must be our grasp of that place, (Malpas, 1999, p. 171).

Home is the most obviously concrete and real place to us, and it is here that our actions stem from.

While home might be where we most need to bring place to life, and bring our lives to place, it is possible to argue that home can be a place where we are most 'set in our ways.' Habits of mind and experience might make it hard to bring place to life, and reinforce unexamined ways of experiencing that place. This can be read as an implication of Dewey's work where certain types of experience "land him [sic – the learner] in a groove or rut; the effect again is to narrow the field of further experience," (1998, p. 13). This argument implies that bringing mind to place where places are familiar might pose more of a challenge.

Moving out of our habits of mind might occur through contrast with places. This was discussed during the research workshops: one participant stated:

M: ...having looked at the kids and their engagement in the school grounds, I thought there was no way could I get these kids to engage in a very meaningful way in the school grounds, without first of all taking them out to get them to relook at something, and then come back into it. Because there's an awful lot of... it's just too familiar, you know they are used to that playground, they use it all the time. And what I want them to do is start to get them to think about it in a slightly different way, *M2.C*.

This also shows the importance of places that are not home and their possible role in place-based education.

However, for this contrast to work, and experiences to shed light on home, where learners have most agency, the question of what this experience means for home, or at home, must be addressed. This 'transfer' could be understood as a process of contextualising an experience from one place into another: a process of bringing mind to place. Transferring learning from place to place thus seems in itself to be a process of opening up to place: the students need to become aware of what they have learnt and what it means for their home lives. This might be understood as a process of connection and contextualisation between places. This implies an active role for home in transfer adding to the current debate of the role of place in 'transfer' in outdoor education e.g. Baker (2005); Brookes (2003a, 2003b); Leberman & Martin (2004); Lugg (2004); Pohl, Borrie & Patterson (2000).

The focus on home here does not imply stasis, but rather that it can be the place through which we understand other places we visit or move through (and equally home itself is flexible and might take a variety of scales). While our visits to other places might prompt the feeling of being out of place there (Brook, 2003), and inevitably become abstract after our return (Malpas 1999, Young, 2002), it is through grounding in home places that these experiences can have meaning and be acted upon. Vice versa, while we might slip away from an immersive way of being in home, a trip away can bring things back into perspective (e.g. Participant M, *M1.E*), but crucially this needs to be carried back into where we live.

Beyond this issue of contrast between places, and transfer of learning, place-based education has the potential to reveal new ways of understanding home, and not just be provoked by crisis or dynamic change (seen for example in Mackenzie, 2004). In this way, bringing place to life needs to involve what we are most familiar with, and the sense of continual learning and mindfulness of that place. Furthermore, as the research groups point out, becoming more intimate with home might provide the motivation to care for that place and wider places. Bringing our care to fruition where we live might be hardest as routines and everyday life could serve to reinforce unexamined place. Nevertheless it is here that we can act, and those actions can have an effect on local or global scales.

10B – Placing this research

The previous part of this chapter fuses the educational and philosophical findings, exploring through praxis their mutual implications and creating a single picture of one aspect of place-based education: a phenomenology of learning in place. However this phenomenology hasn't simply been a finding of the research, but also a way of understanding how I conducted the research itself. Praxis occurred not just between the educational and philosophical threads of the inquiry, but between the content and the methodology of the inquiry. I set out to not just research *about* place, but *in* place, and as I have come to understand what it might mean to learn in place that has impacted how I have conducted my research. The PhD is one particular way of learning in place, specifically: learning about learning in place. In this way the PhD inquiry itself can be best understood as bringing mind to places, particularly Glen Strae.

In this section I explore all the roles that place has played in the research, and then examine one particular contextualised example: the shieling at *Tom Clach Diontaichd*. Place, and specifically Glen Strae, has been present in many different ways during this inquiry as:

- a place from which the research questions emerged

- a place to think through the relevant literature on place, education and philosophy
- a place through which to explore place-based education and the phenomenology of place with the research participants
- a place to develop and understand the research findings
- a place to contextualise the research through my own continuing professional practice

I will describe all these roles briefly.

As described in the introduction to this thesis, examining my experiences teaching in Glen Strae, reflecting on and describing them, led to the development of the research questions that I pursued through this inquiry. Put another way, the inquiry came out of my own struggles to understand my experiences working in the glen (and in other places). As I developed these questions through reading and critiquing various literatures, my ongoing work doing place-based education allowed me to live out the debates found in the literature, to think them through particular places and educational practices.

Holding the research workshops in Glen Strae opened this placed inquiry out to the research participants. These educators brought their own experiences of living and teaching in other places, but as a group the glen formed the central context for shared experiences and inquiry. The research participants explored the glen through place-based education as well as critiquing the approach. As the workshops developed the participants used their experiences in Glen Strae to examine and develop themes and educational findings from the process. As I took on these themes and findings, writing them up, developing the phenomenological inquiry, and producing this thesis, the phrase 'bringing place to life,' became the clearest way of understanding the research itself.

Bringing specific questions and ideas to Glen Strae and examining them in context through experiences and discussions, allowed the research to be brought to life. We brought our minds to that place: the practice and

phenomenology of place-based education *and* the glen itself have been illuminated through this process. Furthermore, the outcomes of this inquiry continue to be contextualised and placed in my own work doing place-based education. The last part of this chapter deals with the way in which conclusions from the research might be placed in other contexts.

To sum up, understanding the research through a specific place has facilitated the praxis approach: it is in Glen Strae that the ontology of place has been lived and experienced, and it is also in Glen Strae and the working contexts of the participants that place-based education has been explored. This leads to the idea that in this research *praxis is place*. Through (certain) lived experiences of being in place practice is theorised and theory is practiced. This part of the chapter has described a multiplicity of ways of engaging place in the research, and in the abstract this might seem quite convoluted, however thinking these ideas through a particular place, *Tom Clach Diontaichd*, makes them clearer.

At the shieling

The example of the shieling at *Tom Clach Diontaichd* can be used as a way of understanding this research. My work taking groups there and running educational activities about the shieling gave context to my research questions and revealed unexplored edges in the literature on place and education. Why go to this shieling to learn about it, what is the phenomenology and ontology of this experience? As part of exploring these questions I brought the research groups to the shieling, and their experiences there have helped understand the phenomenology of place (see above p. 242).

However, the shieling has been more than a simple location to do the research in, it has been a place to think the research through. This is particularly evident in the educational thread of my inquiry. The experience of learning about the shieling, during the research workshops, allowed the

participants to ask 'what is the point of learning about and in this place?'

One of the participants describes their understanding:

K: ... In a sense you've got the bare, the basic information about they came up here in the summer, and there was just the women and the children up here and the men were elsewhere... What also happens is that you can then think about, well if that was me and I was up here, how would I feel? And you can sort of think about, and get people to think about – are there situations where you have felt like that, and how did you deal with it? So it's bringing a relevance to it. And what you are trying to do is the people story, the human story, which essentially is the same, *M1.D.*

The experience of *Tom Clach Diontaichd* allowed the participants to think about place-based education in a contextualised manner. This also reflected on their practice:

G: ...I was just imagining working with a small group and coming to the shieling time and again. And then getting to know where the rocks are and seeing things like that and creating their own names, so the bend in the stream that's where we can build a little dam, like you say constructing... and placing their mark as well in a sustainable and non-obtrusive way that... just following that history of human connection and getting to know it, *P1.E.*

I have returned often to this particular shieling, with school groups, running training courses, or on my own developing the phenomenology of this inquiry. I too have used these experiences to understand what place-based education might mean, using the shieling as both an educational venue and a metaphor for place-based education. I will deal with these two elements in turn.

Learning about the cultural practice of the shieling can include: (changing) land-use, place-names, social interaction with the landscape, coming of age for young people, uses of plants, stories, songs and poems, survival skills and farming skills. All these things can bring focus onto the students' lives: how is our land used now, how do we name places now, as we learn up here how do we organise ourselves, entertain ourselves and resolve disputes, what rites of passage do we have that take us out into the hills or connect us with our local culture, how do we tell stories now and what are they about? Links with other rural land management practices can be drawn, to other

cultures which follow similar practices, and to wider and more global issues such as cultural survival, or upland ecology.

Beyond the variety of intersecting subject matter, the shieling provides a culturally specific, discrete and embodied example of a way of being which does not separate culture and nature. Until its demise the shieling was a system where the words 'nature' and 'culture' do not adequately describe the interdependence and mutual sensitivity of people within place. The land and people mutually benefited from the shieling process: valley ground was rested, mountain ground was only grazed for a short time. The fertility that this bestowed was such that at some shielings, despite being high in the mountains, potatoes were planted, and the vivid green, of specific types of grasses and herbs, is still a sure identifier of a shieling even if there are no ruins visible. Dispersed upland woodland developed through the practice of transhumance, giving rise to unique woodland favouring a distinct set of species (Holl & Smith, 2007). This is still visible in small groves in Glen Strae today, though it is dying out because of the current land-use practices. The knowledge and cultural forms which governed the shieling were very important, including stories of what went wrong if the proper respect for the land was not maintained (MacKellar, 1888).

Clearly the old practice of the shieling is not something that is simply going to be returned to, but the shieling both as an example of a way of being and as something which can reach into many aspects of the landscape and people in this area, can still be a venue for place-based education (with a particularly historical aspect). This is due to what can be learnt here, instrumentally covering many 'subjects' but also to the nature and possibilities of ways of being in that place. We can think in and with the shieling, matching our thinking with embodied experience and bringing the place to life, but also we can use the shieling to think on other scales, about ourselves and our lives.

Additionally the process of the shieling, where young people moved out of their village to spend time in the hills exploring, learning, maturing, working

and simply being, provides a culturally specific metaphor for place-based education itself, in my area, and perhaps in others in the Highlands of Scotland. Going to the shieling can be seen as providing a historical metaphor for place-based education which is relevant to Glen Strae, linking as it does with a very ancient yearly cycle. Young people again can go up into the hills and taking time to learn and explore. This seasonal migration may also make interesting links between home and away places, through its 'flitting' between 'summer town' at the shieling, and 'winter town' in the valley.

The preceding paragraphs show how for the participants, and especially for myself, the shieling at Tom Clach Diontaichd provided a context in which the place and the research were brought to life. The place and the research each informed the other. Bringing our minds to this place, specifically in an educational and phenomenological inquiry, allowed us to think through the place, to engage in a praxis of place. Experience and understanding shaped and were shaped by the context. This part of the chapter also gives a contextualised, specific and 'placed' way of understanding the research, which is congruent with my efforts in this research to examine the scope and scale of thinking about place.

Placing the conclusions

The previous two parts of this chapter have described the overall process of the research in two different ways: generic and placed. The ways in which the research has been thought through places such as *Tom Clach Diontaichd* also indicates how the research findings and conclusions might be understood by those interested in this research.

The understanding of place developed in this inquiry also shaped the validity and generalisability of the research findings (see p. 170). The metaphor of the research as a place itself is particularly apt here. Contingency, uniqueness, different scales of abstraction and the parallels (or not) between contexts are all qualities of place. They are also qualities of my

research conclusions. Furthermore it is through specific places that this research will be found to be useful or not. The reader will be in parallel or contrasting places or scales, at which the conclusions do or do not make sense. Understanding these findings will be a question of contextualising them within the place of the reader, bringing this research to those places may or may not bring them to life in new lights.

The mix of educational and phenomenological threads in the inquiry has allowed the research to take account of practicing educators but also to engage in sustained philosophical investigation involving scholarly and academic thought. This has brought with it disadvantages where the mix of methodologies has curtailed the full expression of the two individual strands. The reason for these constraints is in part, again, due to place. For example greater focus on the working applications of place-based education in the participants' work places might have benefited the practical inquiry, and a more technical and home-focused phenomenological approach might have benefited the philosophical inquiry. Yet the strength of my praxis approach has been to meaningfully engage with both theory and practice, and to embrace the potential and constraints of doing research *in* place.

As stated above, the research has been about place both in content and structure. It has explored one solution to Evernden's crisis of being both through asking the question 'how are we immersed in the world, here and now?' and through modelling a placed way of thinking. Evernden's crisis of being, understood as our separation from the rest of the world, required not only a new way of being, but a new way of thinking about being.

Throughout the thesis embodied experiences of place have provided contexts and scales through which the mind/body dualism comes in and out of focus depending on the scale of the thinking engaged in. Bringing mind to place and place to mind thus offers one possible example of a new way of thinking. Through the literature review, the face-to-face research and the write up, my ideas and understandings have followed this way of thinking spiralling

around a central understanding of place as the ground of self and world. I emerge with a much clearer understanding of what place can be, educationally and philosophically. The implications that this understanding holds for the various areas of research touched on in the PhD will be dealt with next in the final chapter.

Chapter 11 – Implications

In the previous chapter I examined how the educational and philosophical findings of the research combined. Through this praxis I set out a phenomenology of learning through place which formed the conclusion of the research. I also described the multiple ways in which place was thought through this research, using the particular example of the shieling. In this chapter I will set out the implications that the research holds for the different areas touched on during the inquiry. The contents of this chapter can be placed within the whole logic of the thesis (highlighted in red), as seen below.

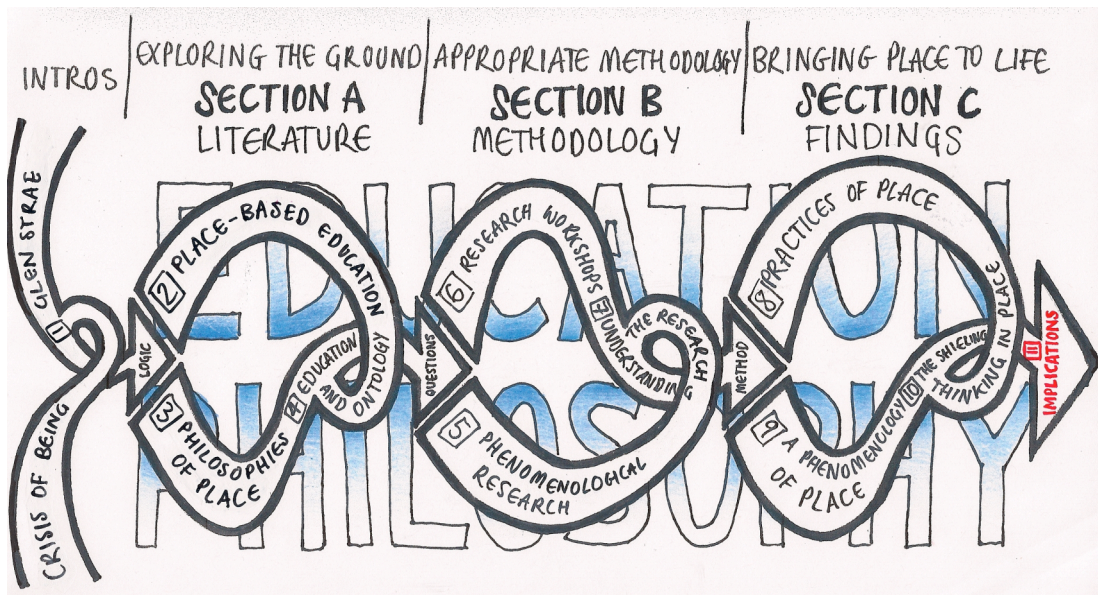


Figure 13. Conceptual map of the thesis for Chapter 11

Through the particular contexts of the participants and myself, it is possible to see how place comes in and out of focus in experience. Places can simply be unexamined backdrops to our lives. More specifically in an educational context, places can simply be locations to learn in, not to learn through or with, or they can be abstract things to learn about while sitting in a classroom. The implication of this research, coupled with the literature on which it was based, is that this way of learning can reinforce dualisms between culture and nature, between body and mind. Learning in this way

thus appears to be a part of a complex problem - the current environmental and cultural crisis - rather than part of a solution.

Where we are offers a scale on which, bringing mind to place, the distinction between thinking self and embodied self is in flux. Contextualising our thinking in the specific location we are in is a whole person experience: questioning, imagining, naming, sensing, and exploring place can all occur on a scale which is lived, and engages the body / mind. Yet mind can be understood as a nested phenomenon, which easily moves beyond these immediate contexts into abstract or general ideas and connections with other places. Grounding our thinking in a place provides a root for these 'wider scales' of thought.

This inquiry implies that it takes time and sustained inquiry to re-open established habits of experiencing place, to take different perspectives or deepen knowledge. The onward process of life makes place a constantly developing process: being in place is not something that is achieved and finished, or possible to understand in one visit outside the classroom. Place-based education as a formal engagement in this process of bringing mind to place can contribute to understanding self and place (as can experiences and learning in other less formal contexts). The onward-going idea of learning to be in place resonates with Heidegger's understanding of knowledge:

...to know means to be able to learn. Of course, everyday understanding believes that one has knowledge when one needs to learn nothing more, because one has finished learning. No. The only one who knows is the one who understands that he must always learn again, and who above all, on the basis of this understanding, has brought himself to the point where he continually can learn, (Heidegger, 2000, p. 23).

Where is it most important to spend the time engaging in such a process? Where we live: home. The participants in this research argued that place-based education can occur in depth and breadth in areas close to home and close to school. Being at home where we live can be supported by place-based education, but again this is not a parochial approach. It is through the understanding and experience of the place at the heart of the student's lives

that other places and scales can be understood. Trips or courses in other places can be brought into this context, as can global issues.

This summary presents my responses to the three research questions I defined in Chapter 4 (pp. 93 - 94) (questions such as mine are unlikely to ever be definitively answered, rather responded to). Bearing in mind the caveats on generalisability and the place-bound nature of this research (see p. 170) this inquiry also holds various implications for the fields of research and scholarship which have been touched on in this thesis. These are: place-based education, research methodologies, philosophy and the idea of 'connection' or 'relationship' to nature. I will briefly suggest ways in which this research might impact on these areas.

Place-based education and outdoor learning

As seen in Section A, globally place-based education is a diverse family of approaches. My research sits within that family as an example with considerable conceptual and philosophical depth. Many of the examples of place-based education do not engage in this level of thought about the nature of the experiences that they are providing, or the 'ways of being' involved. But without deeper inquiry it is possible that place remains a backdrop for educational lives, and the learning experiences do not immerse students in and through place, in fact re-enforcing dualisms that the approach aims to overcome. This might be particularly true of place-based education approaches which are based on work-skills or restoration projects but which do not provide the time for deeper inquiry into what it means to be in that place, or the many other perspectives that could be taken there.

In this research place required commitment: in ways of thinking and researching, but also importantly as a context for learning. My research implies that learning in a place with an activity focus, or experiencing it once without connections to home or other places might not bring those places to life. Bringing different layers of knowledge to bear, pursuing particular lines of inquiry and contextualising understandings developed in a place all

require time and intimacy with that place. Without these elements, what remains may just be a physical and sensory experience which is dislocated from wider understanding: the mind is not brought to place. This might mean that the individual is isolated in their own mind from the ongoing life of that place: the separation in understanding between ourselves and the world remains.

Learning in place, as understood through this research, is not something that just happens, it needs to be made explicit, to be brought to life. Making these deeper experiences a part of place-based education seems to require educators to be conscious of the value and role of place. The implication is that educators need to open up these areas of inquiry as part of their training or ongoing professional development.

My research provides an example of one way in which ongoing educator development could happen. The practice-based approach of my inquiry, whereby the participants thought through the research in their particular working contexts contrasts, for example, with the majority of Australian literature which works with student teachers. The example of the shieling, and its role in the research and particularly in my working life, shows how educators can immerse themselves into (parts of) their surroundings to think through the possibilities of place-based education. This implies that in placing the pedagogy and techniques of place-based education within the uniqueness of the locales they work in, educators can bring to life some of the more abstract principles of place-based education (like 'story,' or 'time,' or in fact 'place').

Clearly the process that participant's engaged with during this research asks a lot from educators. My research fits with one of the results of a conference held by the Arkleton Trust bringing together various place-based educators:

Teachers require high levels of competency to understand the curriculum in both the central and local contexts and high levels of confidence to understand themselves in the local context in order to create place-based curriculum successfully, (Gougeon, 2004, p. 10).

My inquiry shows in more depth the kinds of competencies required: openness, personal inquiry and exploration, time, creativity, knowledge. Equally as important is developing one place for learning rather than always trying to find somewhere new (this aligns with Brookes (2002b) and Stewart (2003) who point that outdoor educators have typically been very mobile).

One of the elements of the pedagogy of place implied in this research is participation. Place is our experience of being, it is both personal and interwoven with others. Thus it is important that place-based education is not delivered 'by lecture' or solely from the educator's perspective. Learners must be allowed to experience the place and examine it for themselves. There is a similar point for place-based education itself: it can be used in many different ways, to deliver different sorts of content, and must be developed in way that is place-based itself. This perhaps goes against attempts (such as Greenwood's (2003a, 2003b), Smith's (2002), and my own (Harrison, 2010c)) to give a general definition of place-based education.

Within UK and particularly Scottish contexts, this research shows how place-based education can have an impact on the field of outdoor education. The argument put forward in Section A, that outdoor education literature did not provide a suitable 'home' for place-based education, has developed further within this research: it is clear that a focus on adventurous activities and short expeditions within outdoor education will not foster an immersive understanding of place. The idea that personal and social development, and also environmental education, can meaningfully occur in a context often far removed from home is also called into question.

The understanding of place as a structure through which we experience ourselves, others and the more-than-human world, implies that personal, social and environmental education could be effectively pursued through experience of being in place. Facilitating 'transfer' in and through home places, and a much more localised approach could forge connections between home and away, placing the outdoor education experience into the ongoing lives of the students. But without structured time to explore the

multi-faceted experience of the place where the learning occurs, place will remain simply a backdrop to outdoor education. My research contributes here to the development of a conceptual justification for the role of place in outdoor education. This was a need highlighted by Nicol (2003).

The developing field of outdoor learning already works from many similar assumptions as place-based education: locality, repetition, and focus on learning rather than adventure. This research shows how place-based education can contribute to this field in Scotland and perhaps more widely in the UK. The understanding of place-based education as a whole person engagement with places means it can fit with existing programmes such as forest schools and the John Muir Award (participants from both these programmes were part of the research workshops). Answering a question posed by Beames & Ross (2010), place-based education could be both a means and an end: a way of contextualising a history lesson or a way of learning about place.

The idea of contextualising knowledge, explored in the phenomenology of learning in place set out in this thesis, is clearly a very important element of place-based education. My research adds weight to other place-based educators' critique of de-contextualised abstract learning:

Instead of generic texts or hypothetical examples, teachers must demonstrate the value of local land and living through real, local examples and proper place names, (Sanger, 1997, p. 70).

This is also stressed by Orr, who states:

...a great deal of what passes for knowledge is little more than abstraction piled on top of abstraction, disconnected from tangible experience, real problems, and the places where we live and work. In this sense it is utopian, which literally means 'nowhere,' (1992, p. 126).

Yet my research also shows how mind reaches into wider scales than our bodily emplacement, and as I point out this might not necessarily be counter-productive. As Thomashow shows (2002), digital media can help us take our grounded experience of place and bring our mind to wider global patterns.

Research methodologies

The understanding I developed in this research of the intimacy between place as the content of my inquiry and place as a method in my inquiry, has consequences for research methodologies. The ways in which place can remain unexamined in learning experiences seems particularly relevant to the specialised type of learning that is academic research. Various ideas emerged in the inquiry which might help academic research bring place to life. Two of these arguments were: the idea of place as praxis - that place provides contexts to practice theory and to theorise practice, and the idea of generalisability through place – where the situation and context-bound nature of this type of research can be understood as a consequence of place.

While the ways in which a phenomenological inquiry into place might occur have been explored in this thesis, there are implications also for action research. Action research processes were used as part of this inquiry to open out the phenomenological research into a more participative frame, and arguably my collaborative phenomenological approach could be understood as part of the family of action research (p. 155). Specifically, my research fits well with action research focused on environmental and place-based education (Gough & Sharpley 2005; Preston & Griffiths, 2004; Požarnik et al., 1993; Sahasewiyon, 2004). Yet none of these pieces of research explored the deeper experiences beyond practical pedagogical issues, they remain, in common with most other action research, focused on human-to-human interaction. In this way my research presents an example of a participative approach to inquiry with the more-than-human world. This develops Reason's (2005), deep ecological approach, and his more recent idea of 'writing the world' (2010).

Place as methodological anchor for my research shows how action research can take account not only of personal or social concerns but also of the context through which they arise. The critical relationship that the participants developed with Glen Strae gives a good example of a cycle of action and reflection in and through place. This is also supported by the

philosophical ideas developed through the research: of place as a process through which we participate in the world.

The ontology of place revealed in my inquiry could have implications for Reason's 'extended epistemology' (Reason, 1998; Reason & Heron, 2008) and the 'action turn' which he describes with Bradbury in *The handbook of action research* (2001). In both these contexts Reason and his co-authors set out to describe ways in which our knowledge and our conception of the world can move beyond simple choices between 'reality' or 'social construction' into a diverse and inherently participative framework. The place ontology I develop implies a more complex and connected picture than Reason's epistemological typology of 'experiential, presentational, proposition, and practical ways of knowing.' Bringing mind to place helps understand how these forms of knowledge might be linked in and through place. The contribution of my phenomenological inquiry to action research allies with Lukenchuck's use of Merleau-Ponty's ideas to bring an embodied focus to action research (2006), but widens the perspective to include the more-than-human world.

Philosophy in place

The phenomenological 'interrogation' of place experience in my research has spanned both educational and ontological discussions. Clearly the dense and conceptual philosophical work of Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1968) and Malpas (1999) have benefited my inquiry, but place as a methodological concern, not just as a research question, has always pushed me to explore these concepts in everyday experiences. This raises the question – what form should scholarly theory take? Snyder has a clear view on this:

Being regional, being in place, has its own sort of bias, but it cannot be too inflated because it is rooted in the inviolable process of the natural world. Philosophy is thus a place-based exercise. It comes from the body and the heart and is checked against shared experience, (1990, p. 64).

My inquiry implies that one 'bias' of place is a movement away from abstract generality and towards specific contexts and experiences.

Place, and the praxis between the practical and conceptual which occurred in this research *through place*, offers a great challenge to standard understandings of philosophy as a deeply conceptual, and often abstract enterprise. The challenge posed by place is to be both conceptual (at different scales and contrasting between places) *and* particular. Janz's 'hermeneutical circle of place' (2010), well describes this challenge and the process of my inquiry:

Places cannot be irreducibly particular—they become available inasmuch as they are imagined in the context of (or in the absence of, nostalgia for, anticipation of, memory of) other places. But they also cannot be subsumed under some universal, as instances of a type. To suppose that we have understood a place when we are able to put it in a category ("tourist destination", "home", "suburb", "atrium", "memorial site") is to miss what is human about a place. In some way, the particularities of place that are only available in human experience and the universals of place that make experience possible must be present at the same time. This is the hermeneutical circle of place, (Janz, 2010, pp. 1 - 2).

Janz's question – how can philosophy take account of 'emplacement?' was the key question for the philosophical, and also to some extent methodological, threads of my research. Beyond the ontology of place revealed in my research, the contrast between explicit and implicit experiences of place, the idea of *thinking through place*, of *bringing mind to place*, is my key phenomenological finding. The way in which mind can move between embodied scales and wider more abstract scales, helps understand how the universal and particular occur in praxis through place, fitting with Janz's description above.

Merleau-Ponty's unfinished work, *The visible and the invisible* (1968) contributes to a placed understanding of thinking and philosophy. Through his ideas on the unfinishedness of phenomenology and its constant interrogation of experience, phenomenology can be understood as inseparable from the context in which it is lived. Questions of scope and scale of thinking will always be important here. Merleau-Ponty largely concentrates on the ontology of bodily sensing, but he hints at the idea, developed in my research, of an ontology of mind which is similarly

embedded in and through the world. He describes "...thoughts that feel behind themselves the weight of space, the time, the very Being they think," (1968, p. 115), and the way that "facts inscribe their generality, their kinship, group themselves about the dimensions and the site of our own existence," (1968, p. 116). The phenomenology of place I develop in this thesis, where mind is in flux between embodied and wider scales, helps understand Merleau-Ponty's ideas.

This inquiry makes a small contribution to developing a Merleau-Pontian ontology, describing experiences of thinking through places, and the ways in which mind and facts move between contextualisation and generality. This fits well with epistemological thought such as that of Preston (2003) and developing scientific ideas on cognition and mind, as summed up by Capra:

Cognition, then, is not a representation of an independently existing world, but rather a continual *bringing forth of a world* through the process of living, (1997, p. 260), *original emphasis*.

My research indicates that the phenomenology of place has a lot to contribute to this debate.

'Connecting with nature'

How much do we actually think through one place? Examining my own life I see that most of the time my mind and body are working on very different scales. Despite the idea, described in this inquiry, that the mind-body problem collapses when thinking through place, given how much time I think abstractly and generally, it is not surprising that environmentalists are concerned with the problem of Cartesian dualism. This research implies that learning through places, contextualising knowledge there, and bringing mind to place, can present a different way of being, perhaps offering an alternative to Evernden's crisis of environment/being (1985).

Yet much of the current educational literature still replicates Evernden's problem: 'environment,' 'nature,' and 'place,' are all out there somewhere separate from us. Words like 'connection,' and 'relationship' seem to reinforce this dualism. 'Connecting with nature' is a widely used phrase

(Higgins, 1996a; Robertson et al., 2009; RSPB, 2010). The Place-based Education Evaluation Collaborative argue that place-based education fosters a 'connection' to place (PEEC, 2008), and equally common is the idea of making a 'relationship' with nature (Martin & Thomas, 2000; Martin, 2004; Nicolls & Gray, 2007).

This thesis argued that learning in place is best understood as a cyclical process whereby we shape and are shaped by our immersion in place. This implies that the idea of relationship, which was put forward in the research workshops (p. 178) as an understanding of place-based education is not perhaps the best way of expressing this process. The idea of relationship with place has resonance with people-to-people relationships (Martin, 2004; Martin & Thomas, 2000), but also seems to imply individual people in connection to external places, perhaps maintaining some sort of separation between person and world. A similar point can be made about the word 'connection,' which implies two separate entities that are to be connected.

The ontology of place described in Chapter 10 shows how place enables an understanding of ourselves and our surroundings. This happens *through* place rather than *in* place: place is not an object or location with which we have a relationship or can be un-connected to, but a process where we and the world are brought to life. The phenomenology of place seen in this research shows how we (especially our bodies) are already here, in place, in nature (if that is even a helpful term). Opening up our ways of being can reveal this immersion and clearly the way we speak about this is important. As Marietta points out: "so much are we a part of the natural world that even speaking of environment can enter a conceptual wedge into our thinking," (2003, p. 124). Thus 'connecting to' or 'building relationship' with 'nature,' may not be the best way to speak or think about the current environmental/cultural crisis.

The phenomenology of place put forward in this research implies that the concerns which resulted in calls for 'connection' or 'relationship' might be better understood through the idea of bringing mind to place. Our habits of

mind seem to contribute to this perceived separation that apparently requires 're-connection.' Is it possible that we spend so much time thinking on wider scales than our embodied experience that we come to assume our separateness from the world around us? In which case part of the solution to the environmental crisis has to involve bringing mind to place, and place to life.

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Appendixes

Appendix A – Spread of people contacted for participation

- Primary schools (9) six in Argyll, one in Aberdeenshire, two in Inverness-shire (contacts included class-teachers, a peripatetic physical education specialist, and one head teacher)
- High schools (3), one in Argyll, two in Inverness-shire
- Education officers (1) Lochaber area
- Outdoor education organizations (10) one dealing with disability access in Inverness-shire, Outward Bound at Loch Eil, Stramash in Oban, Kilbowie in Oban, Lochgoilhead Outdoor Centre, the Abernethy Trust, Benmore Outdoor Centre, West Dunbartonshire Outdoor Education, Venture Trust, Venture Scotland. This is a mix of local education area run centres and independent organisations.
- Colleges and Universities (4) Lochaber College Adventure Tourism Management course, Strathclyde University department of Sociology and Geography, Edinburgh University Outdoor Education, Stirling University Environmental Science and Outdoor Education
- Environmental organizations (10) Transition Edinburgh University, Scottish Natural Heritage (four different people in areas from policy to local area officers), Forest Schools (three different people), a nature kindergarten in Perth, Grounds for Learning, the Forestry Commission, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, Cairngorms National Park, The Green Team in Edinburgh, Edinburgh Woodcraft Folk

Appendix B – Main study flyer



Edinburgh University Research Workshops in Place-Based Education



- Be part of a cutting edge *community of practice* looking at education 'in' 'about' and 'for' place.
- Take part in three weekend workshops in Glen Strae, near Dalmally, Argyll.
- Learn experiential and educational techniques to focus people on their locality and its rich culture and ecology.
- Record your experiences putting these ideas into practice where you work in journals, artwork and digital media
- Contribute to the first UK study in this field

Sam Harrison, works in ecological education and lives in Taynuilt, Argyll – see www.openground.eu. He is studying for a PhD from Moray House School of Education, Edinburgh University and this is the second series of workshops he has run for this PhD. He is looking for committed volunteers.

What is Place-Based Education?

Place-based education is an approach to learning which engages people in developing a 'sense of place' through understanding and experiencing their locality. Through simple experiential tools, learners go out into the environments that surround them and investigate the ecology, history, culture, community, and future possibilities of the area. This is applicable in schools and outdoor centres alike.

The Research

This research aims to gather together educators from different fields: schools, universities, outdoor education centres and other educational settings, to create a community of practice. We will investigate what place-based education and 'sense of place' might mean, trialling various techniques and gaining an understanding of the ideas behind the approach. We will return to our places of work to reflect on the approach and to see where and how we could bring it into our educational practice.

The Process

The pilot study will be to run over three weekends: the first introducing ideas, techniques and the research approach, the second weekend will deepen the understandings of place, and plan areas of investigation, the third will share best practice and feedback on experiences, helping shape the research outcomes.

Logistics of the Workshops:

- You will need to be able to attend all the weekends! Dates: 5th – 7th and 26th – 28th March and 11th – 13th June 2010. Arrival will be on the Friday evening and departure will be mid-afternoon on the Sunday.
- Self-catering accommodation has been booked, at Glen Strae near Dalmally in Argyll
- Participants will need to provide their own outdoor clothing – equipment lists and guidance are available from Sam. Participants will also organise their own transport and contribute to a central food fund.
- Dalmally has a train station and pick-ups can be arranged, or parking is possible at the entrance to the estate

Please get in touch to register your interest: Sam.Harrison@education.ed.ac.uk / 07946678179

Appendix C – Participant information form (from main study)

Place-Based Education Workshops

Glen Strae – March 5th–7th & 26th–28th & June 11th–13th 2010

Participant Information

Please read through this information and sign the bottom sheet and return it to Sam, many thanks

Outline:

Place-Based Education (PBE) is an approach to outdoor learning where the place becomes the focus. Various experiential activities aim at learning about different aspects of that place (its ecology, history, current use, future, geography etc), and a variety of ways of expressing this (through drawing, discussion, poetry, presentations to community etc). The goal is to develop learners' appreciation of their places as rich and multifaceted, and through this learning, develop a 'sense of place' helping them live better where they are. Place-based education can be summed up as 'in, about and for' place.

While elements of this approach are not new, and are present in a lot of different educational approaches to the outdoors, this particular perspective – with a focus on place (as opposed to nature, or community, or personal and social development) has not been properly researched with educators in the UK. The aim of the PhD is to present a thoroughly researched and critiqued understanding of how place-based education works and might work in a Scottish context.

The Research:

This PhD is looking at the educational practice, and the philosophy, of place-based education. The pilot study will engage with the practical elements, being both a rewarding piece of professional development for you (hopefully!), but also providing a framework with which to understand PBE in Scotland. It will provide data (records of your discussions and ideas) from which I can work on the philosophical developments. (So don't worry – the workshops won't be academic or philosophical, though you are welcome to engage with me on that after the workshops, as the PhD develops).

An Action Research approach will be used, putting together a group of educators to research collaboratively and as a learning community – that's us! The approach will be for me to put forward an initial understanding of what PBE is through activities and discussions and get your feelings and experience added into the mix. The structure then becomes more and more open for the group to decide what is the best use of their time – is it developing activities, general design principles, a list of barriers and enablers, a structure to show the benefits of the approach? These questions will be developed through the first two weekends, maintained through journaling and blogging between the group in between, and pulled together in the third weekend.

The approach will be relaxed, informal and everyone's opinion will be welcome and respected (there are no experts). The idea is for the research to be with you not on you!

I ran a similar set of workshops last November, and this is the second round for the PhD. The outcomes of the first weekends were very interesting and the feedback positive. This allows me to be confident that you will take a lot from these workshops, and also to compare your experiences with the previous participants. However, these workshops will have their own character and agenda, driven by yourselves, so there will also be an element of openness and uncertainty. This is what makes it so exciting and creates opportunities for creative work.

Confidentiality:

There will be a whole bunch of ways of collecting 'data' – basically the evidence and content of our weekends. Activities will be photographed, and discussions recorded digitally, the

journals you keep will be (temporarily) handed back to me, the contents of your blogs will be used, and any outputs (statements, models etc) that we produce will be kept. All these elements will go into the PhD study, but don't be daunted – your words and ideas will be well looked after: details as follows.

Before engaging in this study I had to go through an ethical approval process with Edinburgh University and my supervisors. This commits me to getting your permission before using any of your words, photos of yourselves, or anything that might identify you. I will be the only one with access to the raw data (recordings, journals etc), and before anything is published you will have the opportunity to change or remove anything where you have been quoted directly or indirectly. (Obviously the research conclusions are mine, though your critique and input will also be sought). We can discuss at the weekends whether you want to be anonymous or not. Equally we will discuss all these issues to make sure they are clear and you are happy with them!

Commitments:

From previous experience of doing training and action research projects, I know we will enjoy ourselves and learn a lot from each other. Naturally much of this might fall outside the scope of the PhD, which is fine. However it is important for me to be clear about some basic things which I will be asking you to do, which will be fundamental for the outcomes of the research. You will be asked to:

- Turn up to all weekends!! Please endeavour as much as is reasonable to make all the weekends. Your opinion is valued, so join in as much as possible with the discussions and activities – give them a try, and be as honest and reflective as you are comfortable with.
- Maintain a journal during the weekends and intervening period. Just as you would normally make notes at a course, keep doing this in whatever style you are happiest – I will take these in at the end of our time together, transcribe them and then return them to you. Please choose your own level of expression and openness in this process.
- Blog about your experiences and thoughts when back in your work places. This is important to see how what we have discussed fits with your context. The blogs will be closed (i.e. only the group will read them), but it would be great to have thoughts, questions, photos, videos etc put up on them. I appreciate that this will be a draw on your time, however a small blog each weeks will be much appreciated.
- Phone one of the other participants in the intervening weeks to see how they are getting on. You will be partnered up, and will be asked to have a chat over the phone to see how you are each getting on, recording this conversation in a blog.

On the blogs I might put in some prompting questions, and will open up a discussion of what we will do on the second and third weekends. All the above will aid in our learning process and provide techniques which you could take on in your work. This will benefit both yourselves as education professionals and the research. Hopefully the data gathering will make sense and be a pleasure rather than a chore!

First weekend Friday 5th – Sunday 7th March 2010:

Friday - Arrive – any time from 6.30pm onwards – let me know if you are coming on the train and I can come and pick you up.

Sat - Basic explanation of PBE – as 'in, about and for.' Using journals, drawing, writing, photography. Structure of weekend.

'In' Place – Activities outside. Discussion of activities and questions such as: what kinds of place, how are we embodied, how do we use our senses, how many times do we return?

Lunch

'About' Place – Activities outside. Discussion of activities and questions such as: what elements should go into the mix, what activities work, how do you allow for different viewpoints on one place, the role of the expert?

Dinner

'For' Place – how would we educate for a place? Discussion and introduction of 'sense of place' concept.

Music / relaxation etc – bring musical instruments if you want!

Sun - Developments – opportunity for participants to develop or re-question, or do more activities – open space.

Action Research approach – explanation of the approach. Discussion of developments and moving on with the research.

Lunch

Gathering data – Journalling about things and/or blogging – importance of blogging.

Leave – a moveable feast but probably around 4 or 5 o'clock, again I can drop you off for the train

The Second Weekend Friday 26th to Sunday 28th March 2010:

Second Weekend needs:

Re-immersion – getting back into the place

Review process – what have we learnt about PBE so far?

Discuss ideas and progression

Create plan for research over next three months (till June weekend)

Second Weekend possibilities:

How does it feel to be back in the same place? (In)

What kinds of activities could you do (trial some with the group)? (About)

What evidence might we / do we need for sense of place? (For)

Solo time, work, walking?

The Third Weekend Friday 11th to Sunday 13th June 2010:

Third Weekend needs:

Review process – what have we learnt about PBE?

Create model / statements / summing up of PBE?

Review research process – is this the best research structure – what would make it better, when would make it better for next time?

Next steps

Third Weekend possibilities:

Open...

Accommodation:

For the two March weekends, we will be accommodated in a hunting lodge in Glen Strae, where I have done quite a lot of work and have a good relationship with the manager and staff. It is very comfortable – beds with sheets and duvets! – so we will be able to come in a warm up if the weather is bad. There are good cooking facilities so we should have some fun cooking together. The rooms are twins so you will be sharing, and there is a communal bathroom (and some lucky pair get an ensuite). For the third weekend I thought we could camp – which will be fun in itself but not too wild (there is a campspot at the road entrance to the estate).

Location:

Glen Strae, near Dalmally. To get there either take the train or bus from Glasgow Queen Street and get off at Dalmally where I will pick you up. Or drive towards Dalmally on the A85. There is a loop of road which goes to Stronmilchan, the B8077, which starts in Dalmally village and comes out just before Loch Awe. Take this road and follow it until you see a small green sign 'Glen Strae' and a track leading over a cattle grid. Take this track, bearing right at the first building you see and following the track until you see a bridge going right over the River Strae. Cross the bridge and drive up the hill and park near the white house on the right. You are there!

Go to <http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/getamap/> and click on the big pink circle. Type Dalmally into the box on the window that opens up and you can have a look at the map.

Food:

Please could you send me a cheque or transfer funds for £30 as a contribution to the food funds for the first two weekends. Account no: xxxxxxxx, sort: xxxxxx. This should be more than enough for Saturday and Sunday's food (breakfast, lunch, dinner, breakfast, lunch), any left over will be used for the third weekend. I will buy the food (as locally as possible)

before hand – having got your dietary needs and desires from the spreadsheet. I envisage a basic cereal, porridge and toast breakfast, a picnic style lunch of sandwiches, fruit etc and perhaps a venison and vege stew (from the glen) for Saturday night. If you want to bring a bottle of wine or a beer please do so.

Equipment:

Lots of warm layers – fleeces and jumpers, will be good. Waterproof trousers and jacket (let me know if you haven't got and I can borrow some for you), will be essential. Sturdy waterproof walking boots, or wellies (I will probably be wearing my wellies) are the best footwear with an indoor set of shoes. Hats and gloves will be useful. A thermos and lunch box for eating outside (I have a tipi shelter that will fit us all in with a nice fire too), and a small rucksack to put all this in will be needed. Pens, pencils, colours and a journal (pad or notebook) are essential. A camera would be great too.

Safety:

We will be walking and spending time out of doors – we won't be going very fast or very far (one hours walk at the most). However we will be crossing rough terrain, off the path! So please make sure you have the right equipment and feel able to undertake these activities. Please let me know any relevant health issues you might have (below). I am covered by Edinburgh University Liability insurance, and am qualified to work in these areas, however as with all outdoor activities the responsibility for your safety lies primarily with yourselves and your judgement. I will take all reasonable steps to provide you with the level of care and assurances of safety appropriate to these activities. However you should be aware that certain risks (of slips and trips, exposure to weather) remain which are part of the activity, and which can not be eliminated without destroying their unique character.

Sam's Contacts:

Sam Harrison
The Flat, Brackendale, Taynuilt, Argyll, PA35 1JQ
Sam.harrison@education.ed.ac.uk
07946678179

I look forward to meeting and working with you!
Sam

I have read all the above and am happy to be part of this research

Checklist of things for you to do:
Fill in details and answer question on participant info spreadsheet
Send a cheque or transfer £30 to Sam for the food fund
Read this info and sign below...

Medical Issues:

Comments:

Signature:..... Date:.....

Appendix D – Participant information

Occupation Details: where you work, what you do, how long you have been doing it?	Why are you coming? What interests you about Place-Based Education?
Transition Edinburgh University	Action research aspect. Interested in alternative learning formats.
Head Teacher of two Inverness-shire Primary Schools	Have done lots of education outdoors in the past, but less since I moved north 9 years ago. We are currently developing our use of our school grounds and environment as part of Curriculum for Excellence and I'm looking for a nudge and a shove with some ideas and actually putting them into practice.
Cairngorms National Park Authority and John Muir Award	'The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.' Marcel Proust. I am interested in ways of connecting people to their local place as a way of changing attitudes and behaviours.
Environmental Science and Outdoor Education at Stirling University and volunteer ranger	Outdoor education for 5 years and currently freelance, as I am in my final year (3rd) at uni studying environmental science and outdoor ed. I worked as a Ranger last year I also volunteer with BTCV [British Trust for Conservation Volunteers].
Acting Principal Teacher Development/ Art & Design, High School, Inverness-shire. Have spent past three years leading a team developing a Curriculum for Excellence pilot project in S1 and S2 covering sustainable development and global citizenship themes, linked in with the John Muir Award/Outdoor Learning programme.	Very inspired by tales of last group's work while on a course where Sam was involved. Although I am partly responsible for a lot of learning outdoors at school, it is not something I was ever involved in before. This is a chance to explore why we are doing this and ways ahead at school.
Physical Education specialist, Argyll	Several reasons - work, to look at ways of incorporating more environmental/sustainability / outdoor learning into primary PE; personal, to observe the action research method for my Mphil

Primary Teacher, Argyll	Really interested in taking more learning out of the classroom. I think it is important to learn to love your environment before you are asked to look after it. I want to inspire my pupils to want a deeper understanding of the world around them.
BA Adventure Tourism Management student [based in Inverness-shire]	As a BA adventure tourism management student I'm interested in the concept of place based education. It will give me ideas for my future business and allow me to further my communication skills. It will also be a chance for me to network with other like minded people.
Transition Edinburgh University	Really interested in the [eco-psychology project Sam was involved in] and similar things I've read about. Interested in learning more from other people in the group.
Transition Edinburgh University	Interested in how a place-based approach can enrich and accelerate the transition to a relocalised and lower-energy future, and how place-based education can bring 'Education' out of a discrete category of activities into a wider application. Also, we are wanting to model TEU [Transition Edinburgh University] activities on 'action-research' and so very interested in learning more about the design of your research and its participation/ reflection mix.
Consultant Ecologist-Environmental Educator, Forest Schools - delivering pilots, was Scottish Natural Heritage Area Officer for two years and worked in a joint post with SNH and Forestry Commission Scotland as Conservation & Education Officer [based in Argyll]	There are many elements of 'Place based education' which fit Forest Schools. There is always a need to review and develop new and innovative ways to educate children. I hope to be able to learn something new from this exercise which I can use to the benefit of children/adults.
Primary Teacher on secondment to Outdoor Education West Dunbartonshire Council	As a primary school teacher with an interest in how best to use the outdoors I am coming along to find out what placed-based education is. I also want to use the techniques and see how I could put them into practice

<p>Freelance Outdoor Education - worked for Outward Bound for a long time [based in Inverness-shire]</p>	<p>I have been fascinated with the concept or the philosophy of 'place' and what this means for me personally and what it means in my work as a personal development outdoor facilitator. Living in Scotland has heightened my awareness of the importance of 'place' in my life and work and this fact alone generates much personal enquiry! I am keen for this experience to generate plenty of enthusiastic discussion and sharing of ideas and experience.</p>
<p>Outward Bound Loch Eil [Inverness-shire]</p>	<p>I'm interested in learning more about place-based education and exploring its application in my work. I'm also interested in sharing thoughts and ideas with practitioners in other areas as well as contributing to the learning community.</p>

Appendix E – List of recorded discussions

Pilot or first research workshops

P1.A Introduction

Location: Saturday morning, lounge of Duilleter Lodge, 7th Nov 2009
Context: First sit down together

P1.B Favourite places debate

Location: Saturday morning, lounge of Duilleter Lodge, 7th Nov 2009
Context: I had asked the group to pair up and tell each other about their favourite places

P1.C Field of favourite places

Location: Saturday morning, in Field of Favourite Places, 7th Nov 2009
Context: Everyone had been invited to find a favourite place or spot within the boundaries of the field. The group were given 20 minutes to do what they wanted in that place.

P1.D 'In' place debate

Location: Saturday morning, on Drumlin, 7th Nov 2009
Context: Having done the field of favourite places activity we walked along the path up the glen chatting, and focusing on what was around us. I put in some information about the glen and what happens there. Then we walked over to the drumlin to sit and chat.

P1.E Shieling activity debate

Location: Saturday afternoon, Tom Clach Diontaichd shieling ground, 7th Nov 2009
Context: We had just walked up to the shieling and taken some time to explore it. I gave some information on what shielings are, and then the participants went off on their own to take some time to draw what they imagined the shieling would have been like with people. I then divided them into three groups and asked the first group to think up a story of what it would have been like here at the start of the shieling time, the second had the middle period, and the last group had the time of packing up the shielings. They were asked to put as much detail in as they wanted. I set up the tipi and lit a fire, and then we came together in the tipi to hear the stories and then discuss the activity.

P1.F Evening debate

Location: Saturday evening, Duilleter Lodge, 7th Nov 2009
Context: We returned to the lodge, made tea, relaxed for the evening, and this discussion was an opportunity to talk about the day

P1.G Sense of place debate

Location: Saturday Evening, Duilleter Lodge, 7th Nov 2009
Context: We went through to the lounge to talk about sense of place

P1.H Forming Groups

Location: Sunday Morning, Duilleter Lodge, 8th Nov 2009
Context: Having reiterated the cycle of action research, I asked people to decide what they want to do and how they are going to go ahead and do it. I went off to get the ipod to record and come back and they had sorted it! I started recording and they continued to discuss

P1.I Group tasks

Location: Sunday Morning, Duilleter Lodge, 8th Nov 2009

Context: Having taken some time to discuss what they wanted to focus on for the next three weeks in their groups – the whole group came back together to share what they decided.

P2.A Returning and stories

Location: Saturday Morning, near ‘the phone box,’ 28th Nov 2009

Context: Having walked up the glen just chatting and explored the waterfall and fault line, I asked the group to reflect on what it was like being back in Glen Strae, and then we did an activity to bring place-based education back into focus.

P2.B Transition report

Location: Saturday Afternoon, Kitchen, Duiletter Lodge, 28th Nov 2009

Context: Having come back in from the walk and had lunch we are sitting around the table giving reports of each group’s experience during the last three weeks. The two participants who work in the Transition movement report first

P2.C Outdoor instructors report

Location: Saturday Afternoon, Kitchen, Duiletter Lodge, 28th Nov 2009

Context: The two participants who work in the outdoor education sector, in centres or running short courses, told their story

P2.D Teachers report

Location: Saturday Afternoon, Kitchen, Duiletter Lodge, 28th Nov 2009

Context: The teachers told their story

P2.E Sam’s report

Location: Saturday Afternoon, Kitchen, Duiletter Lodge, 28th Nov 2009

Context: I told my story

P2.F Evaluation

Location: Sunday Morning, Kitchen, Duiletter Lodge, 29th Nov 2009

Context: I discussed the next study, and asked the group to evaluate their experience of the study

P3.A Reunion discussion

Location: Saturday Evening, Inbhir nan Guibhas, 1st May 2010

Context: Having chatted on our walk in, I decided to record some of the discussion

Main or second research workshops

M1.A Favourite place / intro

Location: Saturday Morning, Kitchen, Duiletter Lodge, 6th Mar 2010

Context: I asked the group to pair up and tell each other about their favourite place, and then used this to introduce what we were doing.

M1.B Is this it?

Location: Saturday Morning, Field of the Favourite Places, 6th Mar 2010

Context: We went on a walk down the high path from the lodge to the road and back up the low path to the field of favourite places. We walked and chatted and I pointed out a few things. We discussed whether this is enough for place-based education.

M1.C Field of favourite places

Location: Saturday Morning, Field of the favourite places, 6th Mar 2010

Context: After discussing our walk, I invited the group to find a place that interested them within the field and remain there for half an hour.

We then did a tour asking each why they chose that place. We then sat and discussed this.

M1.D Shieling debate

Location: Saturday Afternoon, the shieling at Tom Clach Diontaichd, 6th Mar 2010

Context: After lunch we walked up towards the shieling, stopping to do a place-naming exercise on the way. When we arrived at the shieling I invited everyone to explore, then gathered them in to give some information about shielings including a fragment of a poem, before asking them to sit and draw the shieling as they see it now, or as it might have been. We then put together two stories about the shieling times and sat in the tipi around the fire telling the stories. I played the Griogal Cridhe, a local Gaelic lullaby and story of the beheading of Gregor Roy Macgregor from Glen Strae. After that we discussed the experience of the afternoon.

M1.E 'For' places

Location: Sunday morning, near the 'phone box', 7th Mar 2010

Context: Having walked out in the morning up to the Faultline falls and spent some time there exploring, learning about the geology and writing some poems, we walked back towards the lodge. I asked the group to reflect on how we might educate 'for' place and then we stopped to discuss this

M1.F Conceptual maps

Location: Sunday afternoon, Duiletter Lodge kitchen, 7th Mar 2010

Context: Returning to the lodge, I brought out all the maps of the place and asked the group to map out their experiences this weekend in whatever way they liked, and to use that to bring together some of the themes that had come up.

M1.G Action research and next steps

Location: Sunday afternoon, Duiletter Lodge kitchen, 7th Mar 2010

Context: This discussion happened after lunch.

M2.A What happened last time?

Location: Saturday Morning, Duiletter Lodge kitchen, 27th Mar 2010

Context: A discussion to remind ourselves what we did the previous weekend and introduce the ideas and process to the participant who hadn't been able to attend the first weekend.

M2.B Returning

Location: Saturday Morning, Field of Favourite Places, 27th Mar 2010

Context: Having done some activities outside I asked the group what it felt like to return to Glen Strae.

M2.C Last three weeks

Location: Saturday Afternoon, Duiletter Lodge, 27th Mar 2010

Context: Back in the kitchen, we reviewed what we have done over the last three weeks, and how place-based education fitted into our work.

M2.D Participant activities

Location: Saturday Afternoon, Duiletter Lodge, 27th Mar 2010

Context: In the kitchen, after lunch, we discussed how we wanted to go about doing some activities.

M2.E Research questions

Location: Sunday Afternoon, Duiletter Lodge, 28th Mar 2010

Context: In the kitchen, after coming back in from doing some activities, we discussed where we were going next.

M3.A Last three months

Location: Saturday Morning, Inbhir nan Guibhas, 12th June 2010

Context: Having got up and had breakfast the group were invited to find a quiet spot to reflect on the last three months and their research question, we then joined together to discuss this

M3.B What is at stake?

Location: Saturday Afternoon, Inbhir nan Guibhas, 12th June 2010

Context: The group had a free afternoon to walk or sit, alone or together, and then we came back together to discuss the bigger issues at stake within place-based education

M3.C Evaluation

Location: Sunday Morning, Inbhir nan Guibhas, 13th June 2010

Context: Having got up and packed up we looked back at the whole experience

Appendix F – Publications

1 – ‘Why are we here?’ Taking ‘place’ into account in UK outdoor environmental education

Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning 2010, 10(1) 3-18

Abstract

‘Place’ is an under-researched and poorly documented element of UK outdoor environmental education. In the international literature, North American and Australian researchers and practitioners show considerable attention to ‘place’. Yet UK outdoor environmental educators and researchers seem to have neglected this area despite calls for increased attention to this element of education in the outdoors. This paper starts from an example of environmental education practice and develops various questions around the role of ‘place’. Investigating the epistemology and ontology of place-based education, the paper draws on the considerable and diverse non-educational literature on ‘place’. Action research is put forward as a suitable fit in the search for an appropriate research methodology for place-based education, and a further set of pressing questions are raised.

Welcome to Staoineag

Clouds of midges. Literally millions. They have formed a living ball on my rucksack strap outside the tent, and the grass around it is brown and moving with insects. The other instructor and I agree that in our (quite extensive) experience working in the Scottish hills, this is the worst that we have seen. That evening, listening to the screams and giggles of the group in their tents, we stop and I wonder why we are here at Staoineag. Why here, in this place?

The underlying assumption of the week-long programme I had been asked to co-deliver is that ‘wilderness’, or at least a remote area of wild land, would provide the location (and content) for an experience which delves into questions of personal relationship with nature, and commitment to environmental activism. There are many points on which to debate this assumption: the question of ‘wilderness’ (Nash, 1982; Turner, 1995), the validity of a ‘significant life experience’ approach (Payne, 1999), or how it could be said that this week ‘works’ (Allison & Pomeroy, 2000). However, the question I want to ask is ‘why were we there, in that particular place?’.

At Staoineag, this query had its immediate forms—‘what am I doing here in this midge-infested moor?’ and ‘how do I/ the group cope with this?’. Furthermore, it took the form of more general questions: ‘what have the Scottish hills got to do with environmental/ cultural issues such as climate change, recycling, sustainable futures?’. Equally there were grounded forms of this question such as ‘what is there about this particular tree that we might learn

from?', 'what is the nature of the relationship between ourselves and this place?', and 'what can being here, at Staoineag Bothy, as opposed to anywhere else, contribute to the group's learning?'. These questions have both practical and research dimensions: how might the education I am providing relate to this place, what are educationally significant elements of this place, and how might I research the effects of this approach?

That these questions resonate beyond this particular project can be illustrated by critically examining two responses to these enquiries about Staoineag, from the perspectives of deep ecology and eco-psychology. I have recently worked on several projects based on these understandings, which might indicate a growing awareness of such views in the UK. These schools of thought have also provided inspiration for my outdoor education practice and formed some of the unwritten basis for the project in question. Simply put, an argument from deep ecology might state that the group are exploring wild places with the aim of developing an 'ecological self' (Bodian, 1995; Fox, 1995b; Naess, 1995; Sessions, 1995) which will move them towards a different, and perhaps more sustainable, way of being.

In fact, as Arne Naess, 'father' of deep ecology, tells Bodian, the process of 'identification' moves from local places towards identifying with the universe, (Bodian, 1995, pp. 26–27) thus seeming to become more abstract and less 'placed'. Fox discusses this lack of concreteness, but fails to grasp the epistemic hole in which this puts deep ecology (Fox, 1995a). While the global sense of ecological care advocated in deep ecological 'identification' might be congruent with the aims of the project I describe, it does not answer the question of *where* this process might start. While this framework produces some educational tools (Seed, Macy, Flemming, & Naess, 1993), these seem to focus on global issues: their relevance or relationship to specific places is unclear. To rephrase this point, deep ecology does not provide illumination on the process or concepts which might enable environmental education to engage with a bothy in the middle of the west highlands of Scotland, or any other specific location.

If deep ecology can't help us to answer the question of 'place' educationally or conceptually, then perhaps eco-psychology (Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner, 1995) can achieve this, being closely related (Bragg, 1996), and arguably less philosophical and more practical in focus. An eco-psychologist might argue that the group are forming healthy relationships with the environment around Staoineag, providing a chance to access deep feelings about themselves and this place, and understand its significance in their lives (there are many examples of this practice: Birrell, 2001; Horesh, 1998; Rogers, 2000). Yet, while these authors maintain the eco-psychological idea of healthy relationships between people and places (Conn, 1995, p. 163), what is the nature of this connection? What relationship have 'my' group really got with *this* bothy, *this* glen?

The group will be at Staoineag for two days and then, most likely, will never return. Comparing the relationship with this place to a relationship with a human sheds light on this problem. While we all might recollect meeting someone very briefly who had an impact on us, is this the metaphor that we want to build an educational project on? Martin and Thomas (2000) suggest that if we use this metaphor, time and effort are needed to develop a sense of connectedness, and that relationships need to be allowed to progress from acquaintance to intimacy, to result in care for places. This implies that one trip simply isn't enough. Furthermore, Martin's research with some of these approaches, provided testimony from one student who, being asked to feel 'at one' with nature before getting to know it, compared this to a one-night stand (Martin, 2004, p. 25).

The questions of time and breadth of relationship with place are not dealt with in the majority of the eco-psychological literature. This discipline, largely, can be seen to imply a relationship with 'natural' places based on very brief, possibly intense feelings, without any context or other forms of knowledge. Thomashow relates his experience of eco-psychological approaches that are limited to subjective or emotional understandings:

...as I observe and participate in a sampling of these gatherings, I notice the glaring absence of any attention devoted to basic ecology and natural history. People who are delighted to open their sensory awareness to a beautiful tree or landscape often have an extremely limited understanding of the natural history of the site, thus totally lacking an ecological context for what it is they are looking at. The risk here is that their impressions of the landscape and ecosystem are projections and fantasies, filled with whatever idiosyncratic or group-constructed unconscious contents are at their disposal. This may be great for cultivating the spirit of imagination or opening the gates to deep personal issues, but it is ultimately anthropocentric, neglecting the rich natural history tapestry that nourished a deep sense of place (Thomashow, 1998, p. 284).

Deep ecology and eco-psychology have a lot to offer outdoor environmental education, but the brief discussion above shows that they have yet to develop meaningful responses to the question 'why', or, 'what about', here? More importantly they draw out the discussion of one example of environmental education (at Staoineag bothy), to imply wider questions and clarifications. These queries involve epistemology: what ways might we come to know places—how much time would we spend, and with what approaches? How might we know what has happened? They also involve ontology: what is the nature of the place we are engaging with; a physical location, a way of being somewhere? As should be clear from the foregoing discussion, these debates are not purely conceptual but have a strong impact on research, practice and practitioners.

Existing literature and practice

These questions aren't without precedent. Considerable time has been spent theorising, and increasingly, researching with participants, the role of 'place' in outdoor environmental education. Within the English-speaking world, this writing can be largely divided into two areas: American 'place-based education' (Bishop, 2004; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Knapp, 2005; Orr, 1992; Smith, 2002; Sobel, 2004; Woodhouse & Knapp, 2001), which is focused on educational institutions embracing the local community and environment as part of the learning context. The second area consists of considerable Australian and Canadian writing on 'place' in outdoor environmental education (Brookes, 1998, 2002a, 2002b; Curthoys, 2007; Gough, 2008; Henderson, 2001; Preston, 2004; Preston & Griffiths, 2004; Slattery, 2001; Stewart, 2003, 2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2008; Wattchow, 2007, 2008). The focus of this writing is on outdoor educators and the presence, or lack, of place-responsiveness in stand-alone environmental education programmes. This deals predominantly with the places which are visited as part of these programmes, but are not necessarily lived in by participants or facilitator.

The aim of this paper is not to provide a review of this literature, but to look at the epistemological and ontological framework that underpins this approach, moving towards the question of appropriate methodology for researching place in environmental education within the UK. Therefore a brief sketch of some of the projects described in the above literature will be sufficient to outline the place-based practice of environmental education.

In Australia, Lou Preston describes a project that she undertook with higher education students, where the students visited a chosen special place within the local area a number of times:

Each experience in our particular place was framed with a specific intention in mind, for example, to explore the place experientially, to discover the European history of the place, to identify the flora, to paint a picture of the place, or to search for Koorie food plants (Preston, 2004, p. 15).

These experiences were recorded in diaries and other media. Again in Australia, Andrew Brookes writes about a project which involved students regularly visiting a local woodland and exploring the lifeforms in the hollows of trees. Each return visit built up an understanding of the area, and also a process of naming (Brookes, 2002a).

In America, David Sobel describes a project where a school took on a 'neglected tract of weedy forest', in their locality and turned it into a learning laboratory. Their studies were practical, engaging in ecological, community and design issues (Sobel, 2004). For Sobel, place-based education *is* environmental education (Sobel, 2004, p. 9). Sharon Bishop writes of her project with high school English students:

I chose stories as the centerpiece that would direct our study of place . . . Reading

would lead us to exploring our area through research, interviews, writing, and photography. The sources would be the students, community, and land (Bishop, 2004, p. 66).

The students went out and visited the prairies described in the local authors' work, and developed their own stories of their place. Evidence for the purpose and success or otherwise of the projects described mostly involves quotations from student journals and written work, and observations by the facilitators.

Despite these minimal descriptions, and while acknowledging that there are many different approaches within this field, the literature implies that place-based environmental education usually consists of:

- a series of visits to one locality;
- a diverse, and increasingly participant-directed, experiential approach to understanding the place—through ecology, cultural history, geology, geography, place-names, story, interactions with local community, work projects and more. This results in a variety of ways of recording and linking these experiences to wider issues—discussions, journals, artwork. Building up a body of work to which participants and community members contribute; and
- an action research approach, where students direct and shape their own learning, contributing to the place in various immediate or long-term ways.

Adapting Lucas's (1979) approach to environmental education, this can be summarized as 'in', 'about' and 'for' place.

David Gruenewald describes the key elements of place-based education as 'natural history', 'cultural journalism' and 'action research' (Gruenewald, 2003a). For Gregory Smith, place-based education involves 'cultural studies, nature studies, real-world problem-solving, internships and entrepreneurial opportunities, and induction into community processes' (Smith, 2002). However, the above model seems to capture the widest description of the core process as described in North American and Australian literature.

During my work and PhD study, I have come across a small but growing interest in this model of place-based practice within UK environmental education. The Carnegie Commission for Rural Community Development has called for rural schools to engage in place-based education (CarnegieUKTrust, 2007), and with the Eden Project and the Sensory Trust organized a conference on place-based learning in September 2009. This interest is also bearing fruit on a practical level, where Forest Schools take children regularly to one place to learn outdoors, and a recently commissioned study into the possibility of forest kindergartens in Scotland, inspired by Scandinavian practice, mentions place-based education in its appendices (Robertson, Martin, Borradaile, & Alker, 2009). Other examples

include the author's work (www.openground.eu), Dr Simon Beames's development of and research on Outdoor Journeys (www.outdoorjourneys.org), the Bishop's Wood Centre (<http://www.worcestershire.whub.org.uk/home/wcc-edu-bishops-wood.htm>), 'grounds for learning' (www.gflscotland.org.uk), and www.placebasedlearning.co.uk.

To a great extent these programmes fit into the practice of place-based education described from the literature above, however there are two pressing issues: the first is that often these programmes are only incidentally place-based. The majority of justifications for regularly going out to an area outside the school, for example, are those which are commonly applied to all outdoor learning: increased physical activity, building confidence, increasing personal and social development, e.g. Robertson et al. (2009). Significantly a greater understanding of place is often not mentioned at all. This leads to the second point, which is central to this paper: when specific attention is given to the question of place, there is very little research to draw on from inside the UK.

Given the strong dialogue on place in outdoor environmental education publications in North America and Australia, it is surprising that there is little research apparent within the UK. Ten years ago, with regard to 'place' in outdoor environmental education, Nicol and Higgins stated that 'the outdoor literature in the United Kingdom is conspicuous by the absence of any treatment of this relationship' (Nicol & Higgins, 1998, p. 53). Very little has changed since then; the two UK papers which deal with this (Nicol, 2003b; White, 1998) are very hard to access, and rarely cited.

Clearly a methodology for research into UK place-based environmental education is required. Furthermore there is little deep reflection about such methodology in the international research on education in place. For example, US place-based education literature tends to rely on descriptions of projects and participant testimony, e.g. Sobel (2004): and Gruenewald calls for more theoretical development (Gruenewald, 2003a, 2003b). In an Australian context, Preston's two papers on her project (Preston, 2004; Preston & Griffiths, 2004) do not ask why action research is an appropriate methodology nor do they explore some of the deeper epistemological and ontological questions which could be raised. The questions might be 'what is "place"?' or 'how do we come to know places?'

It is clear that researching 'place' in UK outdoor environmental education and an ontological and epistemological framework for such an effort are important issues: they will form the focus of the rest of this paper. Searching for an appropriate methodology will draw on the wider non-educational literature on place. The small amount of critical literature in the field of place-based education draws on human geographical writing on place (such as Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1974, 1977), and phenomenologists such as Heidegger (1971), Merleau-Ponty

(1968) and Casey (1993). However anthropological and environmental psychological writing (for example Feld & Basso, 1996; Schroeder, 2007) also has bearing on the role of 'place' in environmental education. The approach in this paper is to draw from these disciplines where they either help to elucidate distinctive features of UK relationship to place, or where conceptual development proves useful in articulating a theoretical framework for education in this area. More concretely, I will draw on my practice as an outdoor educator in Scotland and use these examples to relate the discussion to practical concerns.

Discussion: an ontology and epistemology of place

We are up at the shieling ground, half an hour's walk from the estate house. It is the last of six Friday visits to the glen behind the school, and the children have voted to return to their favourite location. Even the boy who had grown up in the glen, the son of the estate manager, had expressed his interest in the shieling ground. He had never been there before the project, and found it amazing that so many people had use this place through time, bringing their livestock up from the settlements for summer grazing.

The foundations of the shieling huts are visible on the flat ground, and the group are sitting on the walls of an old animal enclosure. We discuss what we have learned over the trips and plan the upcoming presentation evening where members of the community will have a chance to share in what the students have done. There was the 'field of the favourite places', the drumlin where they learnt about rocks and glaciers, the mountains around the glen for which they had invented new Gaelic names, the barn where they got to comb the bull, and of course the shieling where they had acted out the story of 'the field of the hamstrung cattle'. The children also made plans to show the poems and stories they had written, and the maps filled up every week with each new adventure.

Along with these discussions was time to relax and explore, time to sit in the sun and eat lunch, and time to ask me what they would do with their Fridays now the project was coming to an end!

This is a description of a recent project I ran called 'Learning Landscapes' with a rural school in Argyll, Scotland. The glen we explored is visible from the classrooms and was just 10 minutes drive from the school. The project was inspired by ideas from place-based education and fits with the model described above. I will use this example to provide context for the questions I want to ask.

The need to develop an epistemological and ontological framework and an appropriate methodology for research, can be seen through the above story. This takes the form of various enquiries: What is the purpose of this project? Will this project help the pupils to live better in their places? Whose viewpoint are we looking at, the student's or the educator's?

Also, how would we research the effects of this project?

Why?

Talking with teachers, parents, the staff of the estate, the local member of the Scottish Parliament and others, it was clear that they felt the project was important. They said that understanding the local landscape and history was beneficial for the children. The literature confirms this and develops the claim that place-based education helps us to live better where we are. For example, David Orr writes that place-based education works by:

...re-educating people in the art of living well where they are . . . Good inhabitation is an art requiring detailed knowledge of a place, the capacity for observation, and a sense of care and rootedness (Orr, 1992, p. 130).

In this context, Bob Henderson writes about moving from ways of knowing towards ways of being:

a way of belonging that allows us to be engaged with the place as home, as a meaningful and alluring place which not only offers comfort but also demands responsibility (Henderson, 2001, p. 15).

There are various words that are associated with this 'way of being' such as 'sense of place', or 'place-attachment'. The Gaelic culture of the west coast of Scotland where this project took place has a rich concept of similar meaning which signifies a 'sense of place' and hereditary connection to landscape: 'dùthchas' (Mackenzie, 2002, 2006a; McIntosh, 1999, 2001; Murphy, 2009).⁴ In the field of environmental psychology, considerable quantitative research has been conducted into measuring 'sense of place', 'place-identity', and 'place attachment' (Hernandez, Hidalgo, Salazar-Laplace, & Hess, 2007; Krupat, 1983; Sarbin, 1983). This quantitative research provides measures of these indicators and also evidence of ways in which people and places form complex and dynamic relationships which can prompt ongoing learning and constitute a locus for responsible action (Rogan, O'Connor, & Horwitz, 2005; Schroeder, 2007).

However, the key question for any educational research into sense of place, is whether the process of learning, the trips that we took out into the glen every Friday, are converted into this way of being. If, as many philosophers and geographers argue, 'place' is a 'co-creation' between people and a physical venue (Mackenzie, 2002, 2004, 2006a, 2006b; Malpas, 1999; Massey, 2005), then what a 'place' is, its ontology, is in fact a relationship between us and our surroundings: a way of being. We can then put the question of effectiveness another way: if we know about the place, will we live well in it? Does the epistemological lead to the ontological? While the environmental psychologists cited above may measure people's sense of place, and what that leads to, research into place-based environmental education needs to look at the previous step: what promotes a sense of place? Only then will we be able to say

that a programme was effective (if its goal was indeed increased 'sense of place').

A further goal of environmental education is to understand global issues and processes, and to comprehend how our actions affect ecosystems (Havlick & Hourdequin, 2005; Higgins, 1996). If it is to meet this challenge, place-based environmental education needs to reach out to more than one place (Orr, 1992, p. 131), again this is both an epistemological and ontological challenge. The epistemology requires knowing about other places and relationships between these places. With the school children on the Learning Landscapes Project, we identified which things they learnt that were just about the glen, and which things could be applied elsewhere. We also investigated ecological systems bigger than the glen, and the time in class between trips developed some of these themes. However the ontological challenge is harder: if the outcome is healthier living within these wider ecosystems, then place-based learning needs to help the students acknowledge their agency in the ongoing story of the wider ecosystems that they are in.

This challenge is deepened by the fact that many of the places where environmental education and place-based approaches occur are not the places where the students live (e.g. projects such as those described by Preston (2004) and Brookes (2002a)). Again this implies both that the learning can take account of other places, and that the end result is care for these distant areas. When as educators we get in a mini-bus and drive our students to a venue, for example in the Scottish Highlands, can we still do place-based education? Young develops this question in a philosophical direction, pointing out the contradiction between the Heideggerian idea of dwelling in, and authentically speaking for our home places (Heidegger, 1971),⁶ with wanting to speak for endangered and threatened places around the globe: places where we are not 'at home' (Young, 2002). Young concludes that to avoid the abstraction of talking about places far away, we need to experience and creatively 'open ourselves up' to them.

This theme is also investigated by Szerszynski, who characterizes the different ontologies, or 'ways of being', of newly settled and 'local' people in Northern England (Szerszynski, 2006). He contrasts the 'aesthetic' approach of newly settled residents who describe the place in terms of its beauty, with the 'relationship' orientation of people who have lived in that place all their lives, and concentrate on their relationships with people. These ways of being offer an interesting possibility for place-based education if attention can be drawn to the contrast between what it is like being at 'home' and what it is like 'away'. Both this research and Young's arguments support the idea of place-based environmental education away from home, but imply different place-responsive practices for 'home' and for 'away' and the need to develop links between the two.

Who?

The question of whose perspective both the practice and research of place-based education reflects is a difficult one. The extent to which the facilitator chooses the subject matter of the project and its approach, will determine what understanding of the place is developed. However, this will be adapted as the young people bring their own sense of place to the project. The ability for students to shape their own learning and direct study towards their own interests is reflected in the call for an action research approach to place-based learning. Both these factors will affect research findings.

There are positive reasons, as a facilitator, to directing the learning. As someone who hasn't been living in the area all my life, I was on a similar journey as the school children in the Learning Landscapes Project. I was also learning about the glen, its history and geography, and was able to seek out the support of local experts. However I was acutely aware that, as implied by Szerzynski's research, the perspective of an 'incomer' can be different to a 'local'. The differences in sense of place between 'incomers' and 'natives' have been researched by environmental psychologists (Hernandez et al., 2007), and geographers (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1974) and the implication for place-based environmental education is that the ontologies, or the ways of being, of these two different categories will be reflected in different epistemologies and approaches to learning.

This issue is dealt with by the Scottish historian James Hunter. In his book *On the other side of sorrow*, Hunter describes the ways in which Highland and environmentalist conceptions of the Scottish landscape developed and, more recently, clashed (Hunter, 1995). Hunter analyses the root of viewpoints on the Highlands which see a beautiful landscape and yet fail to acknowledge the often tragic human history. This view of the land as a purely natural place often follows the fault-line of 'incomer' and 'native' (Mackenzie, 2006a) and is prevalent in outdoor environmental education in the UK, as White's research shows (White, 1998). White contrasted the views of those who lived and worked on the land with the views of outdoor educators, calling for them to become much more aware of the culture in the landscape (White, 1998, p. 2). Implicit in these ideas is a respect for different viewpoints on place, yet a call for people to step outside their usual perspectives.

These questions also form an integral part of land politics in Scotland. Fiona Mackenzie has spent considerable time recording testimony from community land buy-outs in Scotland (Mackenzie, 2002, 2004, 2006a, 2006b). She theorises place as a process through which communities negotiate their sense of themselves and the politics of the land. Significantly she highlights the community practices which break down the 'native *versus* incomer' barriers, practices which include learning about place and creating artwork together (Mackenzie, 2002, 2004). In contrast to White, Mackenzie's work implies that the categories

of 'incomer', and 'native', might not always hold. Interestingly this also implies that an epistemological approach has the ability to alter ontological status. For place-based learning this might mean that all involved deepen their understanding of a place, sharing different perspectives, but in the end develop a rootedness in place which transcends these categories.

A possible research methodology

The discussion of 'why' engage with place-based approaches to environmental education implies a research methodology that does not simply measure sense of place, but looks at how it is developed, investigating the relationship between epistemology ('place-based learning') and ontology ('a sense of place'). Furthermore, with regards to care and responsibility for more distant places, the research method requires the ability to move across different scales, negotiating what Malpas calls the 'nested' character of place (Malpas, 1999): the glen, the watershed, the region, etc., and follow the interconnections of modern life. Enquiring into 'who' place-based education and research is about, also implies certain constraints to a research methodology. The voices, perspectives and backgrounds of both the learners and educators need to be recorded, as does the development of these elements over time. Also, the project described at the start of the discussion involved a variety of types of learning: from story-telling and interpreting the landscape, to learning plant and Gaelic place-names: these ways of knowing need to be accounted for in any possible research methodology.

Action research is mentioned as a part of place-based education (see for example Gruenewald, 2003a), but also seems to be a suitable candidate for research *on* placebased education. Action research is fundamentally a learning process that records different perceptions, feelings and experiences over a period of time, and engages the participants in reflecting on these and shaping their own projects and research (Reason & Bradbury, 1999). As such it is an approach which could become part of the place-based learning process, as well as producing research findings. Furthermore, action research has an ontology which fits well with the idea of place as 'co-created' (Ladkin, 2005; Reason & Bradbury, 1999). I have argued that a sense of place is a dialectic between humans and their environment,⁷ and as such it involves both values and things, subjectivity and objectivity. Reason describes the ontology of action research, the 'participatory world view', in a similar way:

The participative perspective sees a world not of separate things, as a positivist view would have, nor as a socially reinforced construction of the human mind as held by the various relativist perspectives, but rather of relationships which we co-author (Reason, 1998, p. 157).

Action research also describes an epistemology which could account for the richness and dynamism which are part of the place-based projects described here. Reason's 'extended'

epistemology captures a variety of different ways of knowing ‘experiential’, ‘presentational’, ‘propositional’ and ‘practical’ (Reason, 1998; Reason & Heron, 2008). This epistemology allows differentiation between direct personal experience of things, representations of these experiences, various bodies of theoretical knowledge that we might bring to bear, and practical understanding. These are not isolated elements: for example, this extended epistemology might account for a visit to the shieling (experiential knowing), and a variety of forms of expression of this visit—drawings, discussions, memories (presentational knowing). Different conceptual developments of that experience are possible: an understanding of the practice of transhumance, or of Gaelic place-names associated with shielings (propositional knowing). It might inspire action grounded in this understanding: the ability to spot other shielings in the hills, taking someone else to see them (practical knowing). Further work needs to be undertaken to see how this extended epistemology impacts research processes.

Concluding questions

In response to a lack of UK research into place-based environmental education, and the need for deeper analysis of the epistemological and ontological implications of this approach, I have used examples of my practice to develop the discussion. The implications for an appropriate research method are many: the need to understand the relationship between learning about places and living well in them, the role that our identity plays in shaping our experience of place, and the fluidity of both this identity and environments themselves. I have shown how action research might be a suitable candidate for researching these issues, however this paper gives rise to more questions than it answers; for example, is action research the only method, will its open approach clash with set curricular requirements? Also, does this ask too much of the practitioner—do they also need to be the researcher?

Having referenced place-based outdoor environmental education practice which seems to have developed congruently to, but sometimes with very little concern for, the philosophical questions investigated here, the query arises ‘what is the point of all this theory?’. Educators who do research and researchers who do education may ask: having developed an ontology and epistemology of place, what kind of research would have an impact on that theory, rather than just being inspired by it? There are more questions: What sort of evidence might justify a place-based learning project, would it solely be provided by humans or might there be environmental data also? What academic writing styles and logic might reflect this knowledge of place? I have not put place-based outdoor learning into a wider context: the impacts on sustainability education, mental and physical well-being, personal and social education in the outdoors, community development and more are beyond the scope of this paper and my research. However, the implication is clear: there is a rich vein of research and practice yet to be tapped within UK outdoor environmental education.

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2 – Place-based education and a participative pedagogy

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Summary

Place-based education engages learners experientially 'in', 'about' and 'for' the places where they live. This paper argues that schools and other educational organisations can become more place-sensitive. This might occur, for example, through experiencing and studying the local geography or talking with landmanagers and tradition bearers. This type of contextualised learning and creative participation in the locality can provide opportunities for students to investigate and deepen their relationship to their home places. Place-based education provides the opportunity for students to learn in real world situations and link issues such as local woodland cover, or social history to global issues. Place-based practices and ethos are discussed. The paper argues that:

- *Time and interdisciplinary work are key elements of place-based learning. These two factors present considerable challenges, yet place-based education can be low cost and may not require technical equipment or expertise. Neither does it involve high risk outdoor pursuits.*
- *Place-based education implies a pedagogy which is participative and experiential, challenging the idea that contextualised learning can be delivered to students.*

Keywords: place-based education; outdoor learning; curriculum for excellence; sense of place.

Introduction

Place-based education engages learners in understanding and investigating the richness of their locality. It is an experiential approach which involves linking the outdoors with the classroom, and which crosses disciplines. Repeated focus on the locale allows the learners to follow their own lines of enquiry, revealing the way subjects such as ecology, history, and geography connect outside the classroom. The challenge of encouraging widespread adoption of this approach, and supporting existing good practice, is to embed a flexible and participatory pedagogy within schools and other educational establishments. Whilst the Curriculum for Excellence (LTSScotland, 2004) legitimates place-based education, practical and conceptual development is required for educators to confidently contextualise pupils' learning.

This briefing paper outlines the development of place-based education and similar approaches, providing a background for recent interest in place-based pedagogy within schools. Explaining the process and content of place-based education as 'in,' 'about' and 'for' place, this paper then highlights the associated challenges and tensions for educators and policymakers. Policy implications are drawn to aid the implementation of place-based education in a variety of educational circumstances.

Research and Policy Context

Place-based education has many roots: from the age-old practice of learning from our surroundings, to the ideas of Dewey (1929) and Geddes (Higgins and Nicol, 2009). However the phrase became popular in the last two decades in the United States through the work of the Orion Society (2010) and educators such as Gruenewald (2003), Knapp (2001) and Smith (2002). Place-based education marks the development of environmental education to include local as well as global issues, and engage learners with the interdependence of ecological and community issues around them (Smith, 2002). Globally, place-based education resonates with trends to revitalise indigenous education, and closer to home has links with Scandinavian ideas of *friluftsliv* – 'outdoor life.' In the US, there has been widespread uptake of this approach within the schools system, and considerable documentation of this exists (Gruenewald and Smith, 2008). In Australia, following a similar concern for context and localisation, outdoor educators have put the case for more 'place-responsiveness' in their work (Cameron, 2003). In the UK, despite calls for increased provision of place-based education (for example in Carnegie UK's Rural Charter), there is little documentation of place-based practice (Harrison, 2010). However there is anecdotal evidence of best practice within some schools.

Given the low cost and resource needs involved, the main focus in this paper is on enabling teachers to deliver school provision. However, following the Australian example,

outdoor education centres (from field studies to outdoor adventure) can also ask the question: what relationship do we have to the venues we use? While there is considerable support for holistic outdoor learning within Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence, current research on outdoor learning techniques, such as Forest Schools, reflects a focus on the instrumental benefits for the learner: for example increased physical exercise or attainment. At the heart of place-based education is much more challenging question: how do we develop a 'sense of place'? The aims of this approach encompass the instrumental while ambitiously striving to increase learners appreciation for the close at hand, to develop their own critical awareness of their locality, and take part sustainably in the life of their home place.

This is based on a project with Dalmally Primary School P6/7 composite class in 2009

- 6 day-long visits were made to the glen opposite the school throughout the summer term, with the author and the class teacher.
- The class looked at experiencing the place through different senses, through different people's stories and through artwork such as journaling, mapping, poetry, drawing, and story telling. The students learnt about the ecology, geology, geography, history, Gaelic heritage, and land-use in the glen through interactive experiential exercises and talking to estate staff.
- The trips involved considerable physical exercise, and helping in simple tasks on the farm, such as folding fleeces and collecting pheasant eggs. The project involved imaginative activities such as a reenactment of a story from the glen, and also allowed time to explore.
- The work from each trip was taken back into the classroom where further study was completed, and artwork refined and produced. The students compiled all their work and presented it over an evening to parents, local community and estate staff. outdoor learning can become integral to the school timetable, as it is interwoven with classroom based research, planning and writing up.

Place-based education in action

The practice of place-based education can be summed up as 'in,' 'about' and 'for' place. Going outdoors to directly experience the area in which the learners live through walking, talking and learning is fundamental to this approach. A series of explorations spread over time which allows for the place to be seen in different seasons, weathers and perspectives: students can develop their own inquiries, creatively express their experiences, and exchange can occur between the classroom and outdoors. This means that outdoor learning can become integral to the school timetable, as it is interwoven with classroom based research, planning and writing up.

The second key element of place-based education is to engage with the human as well as

physical elements of the area. This challenges the typical 'environmental' approach to the landscape (Hunter, 1995). An interdisciplinary approach breaks open the boundaries between subjects and allows pupils to understand and experience the relationship between people and land- or city-scape. A study of place should allow learners to locate themselves physically, emotionally and intellectually within their surroundings. Simple interactive exercises can be developed from this premise. One such example, developed by the author in a Highland context, is to invite students, having grasped the basics of hill shapes and colours, to name hills in Gaelic. From their own experience of naming the landscape, discussion of other placenames can reveal rich cultural and historical knowledge embedded around them. Place-sensitivity supports educators in creatively developing and adapting a wide variety of exercises and lessons to fit within their location. The aim of place-based education is for students to learn "the art of living well where they are" (Orr, 1992). This means learning and acting for place. This can be understood in a variety of ways, from helping to maintain paths, or plant woodlands, to longer term lifestyle choices which support local culture and economy. Deepening learners relationship with their surroundings can counteract one current measure of educational success: leaving home areas to compete on the 'global stage'. Equally, valuing local knowledge and embodied experiences, place-based education highlights positive connections to the environment, rather than attempting to motivate pro-environmental change through learning about global catastrophe. This suggests an alternative approach to sustainability education.

However, place-based education should not mean taking a parochial approach. It is also about relationships between places: the school, the glen, the region etc. This allows for global issues to be brought in and contextualised within the immediate lives of the pupils. For example students can experience their local woodland through place-names which reveal historical cover, through understanding land-management practices and the ecological significance of trees. This process of exploring, mapping and planting will provide a multifaceted experience and knowledge which then can be connected to global forest issues.

Challenges: subject silos, cost and risk, and participatory learning

In an important paper, Beames, Atencio and Ross (2009), describe the basic difficulties of bringing outdoor learning approaches, such as the one described here, to fruition. One of these problems, which manifests more clearly in secondary schools, is the compartmentalisation of subjects. Experiencing places necessarily lends itself to crossing disciplines: once the students know what species grow in this spot, they might want to know how our use of the land affected this, or how this place came to be named after an extinct species. The separation into subject areas such as history, geography

or biology poses both timetabling and assessment challenges for the holistic nature of place-based education. The perception of outdoor learning as expensive, resource intensive and needing specialised training is also dispelled by Beames, Atencio and Ross (2009). Their programme of Outdoor Journeys, and the small number of documented place-based projects in Scotland, show how simple it is for teachers to work around their schools, eliminating the necessity for transport or specialised equipment and training. Educators are often cautious about outdoor education and field trips because of fear of risk and accidents.

However, place-based education is not focussed on outdoor sports or “adventure,” and as such risk management is considerably simpler. Health and safety concerns should therefore not be a major obstacle to place-based education in schools. There is a deeper level of challenge for educators, both in schools and other educational establishments: the necessity for a change in pedagogy. Conceptions of learning as content delivered to pupils, as abstract and purely intellectual, and as homogenous and ‘place-less’, prevent place-based learning from being operationalised.

At a more fundamental level, place-based education follows a philosophy which does not ‘essentialize’ place, what this means is that ‘place’ is not a fixed location which you are from or not from (Mackenzie, 2006). This implies that place-based learning needs to address some of the barriers and conflicts which arise in places. This is an understanding of place as the evolving context in which we live our lives, and sheds light on our identity as well as our landscape. It is through our examination of where we are that we glimpse our interdependence with our surroundings and learn about ourselves (Cannatella, 2007). The implications of this ethos are that place-based education could never be delivered by a lecture: it implies personal involvement and inquiry, and requires a participatory approach. Moreover this ethos turns on the possibility of change, it sees our ‘emplacement’ as a process which we need to make explicit in our lives. This creates the means to overcome the rigid politics of ‘native vs. incomer,’ of environment vs. community.’ The philosophy of place-based education, combined with creative practices, can help envision new ways of living well where we are.

Policy implications

Place-based education is simple: it involves taking learners out into their surroundings and supporting them as they make connections. However, as this paper shows, this can be a technical and pedagogical challenge.

- In common with current thinking about fulfilling the Curriculum for Excellence, educators need support and confidence to develop their own approach to place-based education. Further, place-based education can be seen as one way to achieve the interdisciplinary and real-world learning aspects of the Curriculum for Excellence.

- Place-based education is open to a huge variety of creative interpretations, yet a 'cookbook' of techniques will not provide the requisite aid for educators to move from generic to contextualised teaching. Training opportunities need to allow considerable time for reflection, examination of the educators own sense of place, trialling of new techniques and development of a place-responsive ethos.
- The current trend in outdoor education for short sharp adrenaline-filled outdoor activities mitigates against the required time to develop a 'sense of place.' Equally it reinforces the perception that all outdoor learning is technical and expensive.
- Successful implementation of this approach offers the opportunity for teachers to bring outdoor learning into the regular rhythm of school. However, practical solutions will need to be found which challenge the compartmentalisation of learning, permitting cross-disciplinary projects based on a holistic approach to learning.
- Finally the question of what constitutes evidence for place-based learning will need to be examined. While evidence for learning 'about' places will be abundant, if the long term aim of increased 'sense of place' is to be considered, educators and policy makers alike may have to accept that significant outcomes will be hard to capture. However, one important indicator of success could be increased community and parent involvement within schools.
- Current action research with educators being undertaken by the author indicates that 'place' can become an integral element of pedagogy but this requires flexibility on behalf of the educator. Rather than needing less planning, this actually requires more: developing an intimacy with the locations used and the ability to follow the lines of investigation put forward by the learners. Place-based education develops the popular but vague idea of 'connection to nature' by revealing and tracing the specific ties and connections that exist between natural and cultural communities.

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