

## Transforming Multicultural Classrooms through Creative Place-Based Learning



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Imagine that a teacher inside a classroom filled with a culturally diverse student population looks up at the ceiling, and begins to see cracks appear. At first, there is fear that the classroom ceiling is going to cave in on the classroom. But in actuality, it is the breaking away of the roof that unveils something much grander than the classroom in the teacher's mind. What once feels like the world coming crashing down, now leads to a whole new perspective and understanding; the roof is not caving in, rather the classroom

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is opening up to the world. This idea of transformation of perception is at the core of educators' roles in addressing the global ecological degradation that is inflicting our planet. It is the responsibility of the teacher education profession to inspire and train teachers to transform the classroom experience they offer into an engaging learning environment for students of all cultures. Classrooms are spaces where diverse cultures have the potential to share lived experiences and gain insight from each other's "spatial, geographical, and contextual dimensions of existence" (Gruenewald, 2008, p. 310).

Society bombards humans' senses with the message that civilization is connected to consumerism, mechanisms of efficiency and power, individualism, sexual prowess, and medicinal fixes—all influences embedded

within contemporary media. Place-based pedagogy has the ability to assist learners from oppressed cultures in "linking place to cultural struggles and empowering diverse learners to name and transform, or decolonize, their own geographical situationality" (Haymes, 1995, p.129). Pedagogy in the field of eco-justice reinforces the perception that sustainable development, human needs, creation and management of waste, and protection and stewardship of the natural environment are critically important concepts to be integrated into meaningfully exploratory activities within classrooms (Capra, 2003).

Pedagogy focused on multicultural environmental education also needs to be supported by exemplary interdisciplinary curriculum, while also utilizing local cultural intergenerational knowledge (Dawson Jr., Dickens, & Hunter, 2011). Collectively,

learning communities have the capacity to carry out actions and habits of living that are viable and aim to support sustainable community activities. Students should acquire from their education the ability to “know how to think in whole systems, how to find connections, how to ask big questions, and how to separate the trivial from the important” (Orr, 1994, p. 23). Cultures from around the world and within the classroom all need to collectively address issues of sustainability through place-based conservation pedagogies.

Sustainability of ecosystems and environmental health can be fostered through eco-justice lessons when the focus is on connecting learning to students’ lived experiences (Orr, 1994). The lived experiences of students engaged in school gardens as learning places are interconnected with a myriad of multicultural educational opportunities. Teachers can use plants being grown in the garden as a cultural time-line linking the present to the past. Simply asking questions about the origins of vegetables and the ways various cultures grow and use vegetables in cuisines opens avenues of conversation by which students through participation share cultural perspectives and voices in classroom conversations.

Carrots are an excellent and fascinating plant by which to explore the origins of where, who, how, and when carrots were first grown and spread around the world through exploration expeditions and nomadic cultural geographical movement. Students become fascinated at how the original carrots were not orange but rather a purplish color, and the role that Denmark had in creating the orange color of carrots that we eat today. Students can also research herbs that are grown in their school garden and report to the class the various cultural ways in which the herbs are used in cuisine, medicinal ways, household uses, and religious connections.

Approaching education through a place-based lens that takes multicultural education into account allows ethnically diverse learners to seek out a pedagogy where students “regulate and control how they organize their identity around territory and marginality” (Haymes, 1995, p.114). Cultural traditions and customs must be taught and respected within all classrooms, while reinforcing the belief that the process of increasing learners’ eco-intelligence is deeply embedded in community (Armstrong, 1999). Sobel’s (2005) place-based learning framework address ways in which culture and local environments make up the community students and teachers

reside within, while being stewards of their local ecological habitats. School gardens are learning places on campuses where all academic topics have content, curriculum, and cultural connections embedded within the school garden.

Within school gardens exists the transformative power of nature (Capra, 2003). As a place of learning the food collaboratively grown in school gardens provides opportunities for teachers to implement a “culturally-focused environmental education program” (Cutter-Mackenzie, 2009, p.122) addressing the needs of multicultural and multi-linguistic students. School gardens provide a place for students to learn and a space for members of the school site and community to come together and foster a learning environment that promotes a connection and feeling of belonging for the students

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and all stakeholders in the culture of the school. Cutter-Mackenzie (2009) conducted a study on the creation of garden spaces for the purpose of learning about the multicultural concepts of “language, culture, and environment” (Mackenzie, 2009, p.122), and concluded that students benefited in gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the English language, the students’ cultural identities, and developed an awareness of the interconnected nature between students and the local environment by taking part in school garden activities of “growing food, gardening, and cooking” (Mackenzie, 2009, p.122).

The opportunity to establish and sustain relationships and systems thinking between learners and nature represents the interconnectedness of the indoor classroom, culture, and the garden. School gardens provide insight into the ways that “people can manipulate nature through gardening, and the ways in which the practice of gardening returns the favor by changing people” (Pudup, 2008, p. 1232). Exploring learner’s interactions with a school garden offers opportunities to research ways in which ecological place-based learning is linked to “spatial aspects of social experiences” (Gruenewald, 2008, p. 308). Learner’s interactions foster lived experiences and opportunities to celebrate diversity. Biol-

ogy needs diversity to thrive just as teachers need to use engaging curriculum and pedagogical approaches to promote active student acquisition of knowledge and cultural competencies (Capra, 2003). It is the transformative change embedded in social experiences that provide foundational knowledge for teachers to connect their pedagogical approaches to the needs of a multicultural diverse classroom.

In the state of California alone there are around 4,000 school gardens being utilized for experiential learning, mainly in the field of environmental sciences (Blair, 2009). The challenges of the ecological crisis that plague our planet are directly connected to cultural habits of living. Pedagogical approaches to instruction or curriculum choices are being developed and utilized in elementary schools across the U.S. (Bowers,

2005; Cassell & Nelson, 2010; Gruenewald, 2008). Teachers’ interactions with school gardens are instructional catalysts that inspire teachers to utilize their pedagogical approaches and curriculum choices to engage learners with reflexive inquiry and experiential place-based learning strategies that heighten students’ ecological literacy, while strengthening their relationship with their school experiences and surrounding community (Capra, 2003).

Place-based learning provides an instructional approach that allows for the transformation of the classroom (Sobel, 2005). This transformational learning process influences learner’s perspectives on the world (Lou, 2008). Through connecting the learning process to place, student’s educational journey sustains their passion for learning. When students invest their cultural contributions into the learning process, a shared educational experience is fostered (Lowe & Mathews, 2008). Multicultural educators benefit from exploring how engaging in place-based learning fosters a deeper understanding of the need for educators and culturally diverse learners to connect academic concepts through viewing the world as our classroom.

### Place-Based Learning Approach

We live in a world where the concept of physical location doesn't mean nearly as much as it used to. The technological advancements, opportunities for distance learning, and nanotechnologies of the 21st century have sped up information delivery and digitally-recorded images at a quantum pace. Technology has the ability to connect humans and environments through virtual portals; however, these virtual connections many times result in a creative distance between learners, nature, and the root of the ecological degradation occurring globally (O'Sullivan, 1999). People feel connected by the Internet when really it is the ocean's ecosystems that connect us all (Louv, 2008). The generations that grew up during the 21st century and beyond are "wired to each other as no previous generation, and look to one another for reliable information, while deriding sources older generations have relied on" (Goleman, 2009, p.110). Using place-based learning to make connections should be the transformative educational vision for today and beyond.

Using inquiry and place-based learning to transform learners' perceptions of the ecological degradation effecting Earth helps connect learner's to nature and the world around them. Basic explorations of a learner's world are creative exercises in problem-solving; this exploration is a catalyst for a learner's lifelong process of inventing themselves (Goleman, Kaufman, & Ray, 1992).

Teachers facilitate multicultural perspectives being integrated into curriculum by analyzing data at school sites and discussing the cultural influences and norms that occur in and around their school. Through pointing out, discussing, and inquiring about language found within classrooms and campuses, growing a school garden, collecting daily litmus tests on drinking water, experimenting with life labs in the classroom, taking and analyzing inventory of flora and fauna found on a campus, collecting nutritional data and documenting supplies and waste management of school lunches, classroom learning communities transform daily routines into effective practices and integrate school cultural norms into everyday learning opportunities.

These learning opportunities are all examples of place-based learning activities that guide the learning experience towards understanding through how school, classroom, and personal cultural identities

and norms leave local ecological footprints within and around school campuses.

In today's world education needs to leverage the creativity and imagination of learners through critical reflection and problem solving multicultural pedagogical approaches in addressing human survival. Teachers when presenting place-based learning techniques within lessons are referring to the "survival of the life systems of the planet within which our own survival as a species is secured" (O'Sullivan, 1999, p. 129). Fresh drinking water is becoming scarce, climates are becoming increasingly inhospitable, the global fish population is rapidly disappearing, and the heaps of trash being created by inflating global populations are beyond generational control, yet academic systems around the world use curriculum, construct pacing guides, develop standards documents, and adopt framework that fail to mention let alone adequately address the ecological degradation plaguing Earth (Goleman, 2009; Gruenwald, 2008; Orr, 1994).

Place-based learning offers a transformative curriculum that enhances learners' feelings, advocating for an emotional attachment to place, culture, and the learning experience (Dawson Jr., Dickens & Hunter, 2011). There is no way to separate feeling from knowledge. Therefore, "there is no good way and no good reason to separate mind or body from its ecological and emotional context" (Orr, 1994, p. 31). Educators who utilize pedagogical approaches that facilitate the knowledge acquisition of both place and culture enhance students' holistic understanding of interdisciplinary content knowledge.

Place-based learning is a pedagogical approach that promotes students interacting with their environment and surroundings to gain a historical, cultural, and ecological perspective, while advocating for active stewardship and community participation (Capra, 2007). Place-based pedagogy promotes learners getting a hands and minds on experience in which students actively develop an understanding of systems, their connection to nature, patterns of development, historical roots, multicultural connections, and how to approach the process of inquiry through an interdisciplinary lens (Stone, 2007). Place-based learning heightens a learner's awareness of their role and connection to culture and ecosystems. This cultural and ecological awareness brought on by place-based learning helps to transform teachers as learners and learners as teachers; thus promoting reciprocal learning.

Planting and tending to a school garden allows for relationships with ecosystems to blossom, provides a chance to engage learners with the process of inquiry into scientific methodology, and fosters advocacy for intergenerational knowledge to be shared from community members within and beyond the school grounds (Lowe & Mathews, 2011). Gardens, classroom pets, nature/community walks, and art projects promote a professional learning community that embody the "living process that interacts with the vast and ancient body of intricately connected patterns operating in perfect unison," (Armstrong, 1999, p.1) that allows for meaningful place-based learning to occur. Culture, nature, and the environment surround us at all times and are integrated into the essence that makes us who we are. Conditioning the mind to inquire about the placement, patterns, and origins of our surroundings allows for learners to acquire a deeper understanding of culture and place. Connecting with the culture and place in which we are learning in or learning about enhances the comprehension and cerebral engagement of all those participating in the learning process (Capra, 2007).

A sense of wonder and joy should be at the center of educational experiences. Learning is a science; however, imaginations make the process seem like magic. As educators we need to assist learners in connecting with multicultural competencies and ecosystems while utilizing their imaginations (Orr, 2004). The classroom space is more than doors, walls, chairs, desks, a roof, and technology. The classroom as a concept should be represented by teachers as a dynamic place that never grows stagnant or contextually defined by being in or out. The classroom represents a place of learning that inspires learners to connect their educational experiences beyond the traditional walls surrounding the classroom, and holding up the roof over their heads. Cultural experiences and identities represent the foundation of learners' educational experiences. Teachers are the guides who assist learners on their educational journey through the realms of academia and beyond.

### Healthy Hearts and Minds

It is important to have high academic expectations that are connected to learners using their hearts and minds well. Instructing with high expectations that address habits of mind that support creative thinkers takes a collective responsibility by all staff as well as learners invested in

the school culture. School districts across the nation are promoting directives for schools to implement professional learning communities, instructional interventions, and common core curriculum (Lowe & Mathews, 2011). Teachers, students, and community members at times tend to approach change with fear and restraint. Effective teacher educators embrace changes, while advocating for healthy hearts and minds of all involved, by creating discourse around the changes happening on a local and national level, thus converting the change that is occurring into creative opportunities (O'Sullivan, 1999).

Fostering healthy hearts and minds that are resilient requires teaching with a rigor that is "both beyond that expected in most classrooms and beyond what most adults expect of themselves" (Krovetz, 1999, p.76). Teachers and students must believe in themselves and feel connected to nature and the learning community in order to develop into systemic agents of change. Teachers provide experiences and opportunities for learners to interact with their environments and explore cultural competencies in order to enhance place-based learning. These experiences are integrated into the curriculum through students doing family cultural presentations, having cultural food classroom conventions where students bring in a cultural dish their family enjoys, and through listening, discussing, and creating multicultural prose, art, and music. Connections between multicultural education and place-based learning must be embedded in learning communities.

One way for students to actively develop an understanding of multicultural education, place-based learning, and sustainable living is to provide classroom learning communities with the opportunity of experiencing environmental place-based projects in a landscape with flora and fauna they are familiar with and which connects with the students' cultural identities (Stone, 2007). A garden where students are growing tomatoes, jalapenos, lemons, peppers, basil, and lavender lends itself to various multicultural learning opportunities. Through taking the products of the garden and creating cultural cuisines, herbal oils, and composting, students are provided with applicable learning opportunities that connect the learning process with culture, purpose, and sensory integration (Stone, 2007).

Creating and utilizing energy usage logs that students fill out at home and school that analyze what types of energy

are being used, when and where the energy is being used, how the energy is being used, and ways to reduce the amount of energy and resources being used leads to powerful perception changes, connections to community and environment, while also promoting environmentally friendly actions. Data collected from habits and patterns of energy use tell a story and helps learners understand how ecological degradation affects everyone, and how everyone plays a part in the destruction of natural resources.

Transformative power exists within stories. The environment, a student's walk to school, our universe and space, are best understood as stories. Teachers must summon the courage and imagination to share

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the stories of the causes and effects of the global degradation crisis inflicting Earth, while making their own cultural connections. We, as living consumer organisms, have a profound effect on the global ecosystem. As educators we must transform the classroom and connect conceptual learning to multicultural education and place.

Just as the fictional character Max, in Maurice Sendak's famous story, *Where the Wild Things Are*, transformed his bedroom with his imagination into a wild far off island, educators must take it upon the academic community and each other to utilize our collective imaginations to creatively enhance and transform classrooms. What is truly needed is a "radical change in perspective within educational institutions to deal with the magnitude of the problems that we currently face at a planetary level" (O'Sullivan, 1999, p.47). Culture and identity do not exist in isolation. Place and community connect identity with culture.

### **Connecting Place to Identity and Identity to Community**

Meaningful transformation of learners' perceptions of their role in addressing the ecological degradation inflicting Earth is rooted in how we look at our connections to nature and culture. A powerful shift of perception occurs when a learner changes the message of "I want to protect the rainforest" to "I am part of the rainforest that

needs protection" (Fleming, Macy, Naess, & Seed, p. 36, 1988). Teachers engage students in cultural and reflective conversations by providing students with cultural images and stories of indigenous tribes, such as tribes who reside in the Amazon rainforest and have had little to no interactions with humans outside of their own tribes, and learn about the daily lives and cultures of these indigenous people while reflecting and making connections with their own cultures.

As a learning community, learners and teachers identify the cultures within their classroom, school, and family. Discussions that are collaborative amongst classroom learning communities are used to identify what elements are needed for survival, com-

fort, and advancement in the school, classroom, and home cultures, what steps can be taken to help protect the local environment, and then compare how these concepts are similar and different to the tribes residing in the Amazon rainforest. This exercise facilitates students formulating a school, class, and home cultural identity, while also addressing ways to conserve and preserve local environments. Teachers of the 21st century have taken on the task of preparing civically responsible and environmentally cognizant global citizens.

Our identity is directly connected to the global community. In preparing teachers to educate learners, the topics of global societal needs must be discussed. Some of the needs and challenges that connect humans to place and represent our survival identities are: access to clean drinking water, employment that supports individuals and families, protecting global flora and fauna, affordable healthcare, adequate housing, sanitation needs, nutritional needs, managing the waste, and sustaining ecologically friendly renewable forms of energy for a rapidly growing population.

All of the cultures that make up the global community address ecological challenges in diverse ways. Teachers provide examples through stories, pictures, inviting guest speakers to the class, and carrying out experimental projects in school gardens in order to illustrate cultural approaches to water conservation, reducing

ecological footprints, utilizing renewable forms of energy, and addressing sanitation needs. Many students are amazed to find out that billions of people around the world live without any running water, electricity, and any form of computer access. School experiences support cultural awareness of diverse ways of living.

Students benefit from growing a garden dedicated to breakfast. All plants in the garden bed—potatoes, onions, strawberries, rosemary, peppers, oranges and grapefruit—are cultivated, harvested, and the end result consists of a student created breakfast with a presentation of the cultural connections to the origins of the food and cuisine being served. The teacher then connects the garden to multicultural breakfast tables across the globe. Students are assigned a country to research on what cuisines and types of food they would find if they were to sit down at a table and eat breakfast in the country they were assigned. A broadening of ecological perspectives is created when students are asked to plant, nurture, cultivate, and harvest plants they have grown from the seed stage. Students across the nation benefit from discussing how place influences the ecological conscience of people from diverse world cultures.

Place is connected to ecological conscience. Ecological conscience is part of our identity. Our identity is interwoven in our intelligence. Intelligence brings community together. Communities represent effort, sacrifice, change, and philosophy of values (Bowers, 2002). Effort, sacrifice, change, and philosophy of values are all concepts that need to be developed and explored within the culturally diverse classroom experience. A classroom as a place represents an area filled with learning potential. This involves ideal learning places that “are places that feel good to us: human-scaled places that combine nature, interesting architecture, materials, natural lighting, and white sounds in interesting ways that resonate with our innate affinity for life” (Orr, 1994, p. 115). Educators must prepare learners by providing them with the tools and skills to build habits of mind that lead to the development of essential place-based learning techniques, thus, tapping into the learning potential that exists indoors and outdoors on school campuses.

It is free to imagine, and it takes effort to truly transform. All learners must be receptive and responsive to this possibility (Goleman, Kaufman, & Ray, 1992). Place-based learning acts as a catalyst for transformational learning to occur. In order

to transform habits of mind an “internal change in our intellectual emphases, our loyalties, our affections, and our convictions” (Leopold, 1947, p. 338) must occur within place, identity, and community. It is by developing resilient habits of mind that teachers will be able to engage the imaginations of their culturally diverse learners.

### Sustainable and Eco-justice Habits of Living

Learning from risk and adapting for survival entails experimentation mixed with the freedom and flexibility to explore new directions. In order to truly sustain our existence through eco-justice habits of living, we must break away from the comfortable patterns of existence and rediscover what the terms necessities and community mean. We must allow for educators to engage in work that is meaningful, connected to rigorous concepts, and which fosters a learning environment where both teachers and students blossom (Lowenstein, Martusewicz, & Voelker, 2010).

When communities of learners engage in topics around addressing the global ecological degradation plaguing Earth, they have the potential to harness insight into wisdom. The wisdom created from place-based learning has the capacity to breed creative thinking and broadening imaginations, thus leading to the facilitation of community renewal. Within people exists the capacity to develop insight; however, most people exist in subjugation to their own thoughts (Louv, 2008). Educators must strive to elevate the ecological consciousness of learners to foster eco-justice habits of living. Sustaining learners’ passion for promoting and exploring eco-justice habits of living is rooted in the empowerment of communities inside and out. Increasing civic engagement through educating learners about the power of shared values is a vehicle for the empowerment of learners to sustain change that makes a difference.

Educators have the ability to empower their students to believe in themselves, to believe that they can change their lives as quickly as they can change their minds. Changes that occur in peoples’ lives are small within their own personal contexts; however, ripples created by those changes potentially reach out to the greater community and beyond and transform collective consciousness and habits of living.

### Fostering the Engagement of Imaginations

Knowledge empowers, experiences

transform, and place-based learning fosters the engagement of imaginations. It is my belief that teachers do not use the concept of *imagine* enough. Albert Einstein, a timeless highly-respected intellectual, is attributed with saying that imagination is more powerful than knowledge. Ask yourself, ask your students, what is evolutionary remembering? What would you have seen, felt, or heard when every galaxy, star, planet, and particle that exists came into being? These same particles which make up you and me came into existence billions of years ago. Our histories and cultures link all humans as one race and connect us with nature. Educators are given the opportunity to provide learners with the concepts and experiences that foster levels of understanding in the ways we are connected with our living planet Earth in order to sustain our world for a better tomorrow (Fleming, Macy, Naess & Seed, 2007).

The empowerment and transformation of our intellect is not rooted in what we know, rather it stems from our actions and what we do with the knowledge we contain. Engaging students’ imaginations is done through providing students with cultural experiences that offer access to touch, manipulate, construct, and dissect the concepts and standards they are learning about (Eijck & Roth, 2010). The creative spirit that enhances imaginations exists amongst the mystery, surprise, and intrigue that multicultural and place-based learning offers students.

Through the access students have to television and the internet today, they have a higher exposure to a variety of things and information, but they understand less due to less meaningful lived experiences (Goleman, Kaufman & Ray, 1992). Today both subtle and overt forms of ecological degradation exist. Most curriculum does not address the massively reduced oceanic life forms, the “near-extirpation of birds and animals of prey” (Leopold, 1935, p. 228), and destruction and extinction of vast species of flora.

### Connecting Concepts to Conscience

There exists many obstacles to the inclusion of education for “sustainable living in school curricula” (Stone, 2007, p.20) that could heighten learners’ awareness and make connections to the ecological degradation that plagues Earth. Connecting the concepts of place-based learning to students’ conscience is directly related to understanding complex systems, global connections, and ecological perspectives that address ecological relationships

and interconnectedness (Capra, 2007). Students believing that all education is environmental education leads to students exploring intergenerational knowledge and skills, beliefs and values, expectations, and narratives that explore the needs of the Earth's ecosystems (Orr, 2004). Teachers need to be trained in how to utilize an eco-justice framework that supports student's exploration of the Earth's ecosystems through analyzing effects of erosion, global warming, over fishing, and other forms of degradation plaguing the Earth (Orr, 2004). Learning about the destructive effects of collective and individual human choices and actions offers "teachers and students ways of responding in their own communities" (Lowenstein, Martusewicz, & Voelker, 2010, p. 101) to ecological issues plaguing the environment they live in.

Teacher educators have the opportunity to prepare teachers to educate others about special places and their cultural histories. The world's most precious resources are children and their dreams—second only to clean drinking water. Teacher educators foster the development of learners' spatial range by taking the class out of the classroom, assigning nature walks, taking part in nature writing, and volunteering or creating community/school gardens. Professional development activities embedded in pedagogical practices model for and heighten students' knowledge of the community, culture, environment and natural characteristics and components surrounding the classroom (Louv, 2008).

Educators of all content and all cultures should take the viewpoint that all education is environmental education (Orr, 2004). Rigorous pedagogy embraces the belief that concepts are best taught through connections and root knowledge rather than in isolation (Bowers, 2002). Those responsible for educating the work force in charge of instructing the future thinkers of our world must mindfully embrace, conserve, and sustain the cultural and environmental commons—environmental universals, historical connections to natural resources, and the sharing of aspects of cultural life (Bowers, 2002). Environmental and cultural concepts signify a vital role in humans' attitudes, thinking patterns, and our relations with each other and Earth.

### Conclusion

Future teachers, educators, and generations of culturally diverse learners should have the chance to be transformed by place-based educational experiences rooted

in multicultural approaches. Through storytelling, poetry, music, gardening, and food students connect their own cultural identities with world cultures. The act of gardening helps to bring the cultural connections of food, environmental practices, medicine, and world religions onto school campuses.

The root of place-based learning is enhancing the learning experience through direct engagement and inquiry into place, community, and culture. Multicultural education utilizing place-based approaches to pedagogy prepares teachers to successfully engage their students by providing them with the tools and skills to build habits of mind that lead to the development of essential place-based learning techniques, thus, tapping into the learning potential that exists indoors and outdoors on school campuses. Students sharing what cuisines they eat at home with their class then bringing food they grew in the school gardens home helps to acknowledge the role culture plays in the lives of students both at home and at school.

In preparing students for the transformative experiences of turning classrooms into living places for learning, teachers foster learning communities within their classrooms and the local community in developing a place where students can create place-worlds connected to their cultures and imaginations (Sobel, 2005). The empowerment and transformation of our intellect is not rooted in what we know, it stems from our actions and what we do with the knowledge we contain.

In today's educational landscape of standardized lessons and directives of fidelity to the core curriculum, it is needed now more than ever for instruction to be delivered with unique kinds of creativity that provide for the educational ventures students must engage in to thrive within tomorrow's culturally diverse and ecologically devastated landscape (O'Sullivan, 1999).

In a community of learners, access to information and sharing of imaginations occurs through the exploration of culture and place. We are surrounded by culture and place. The Earth is a place currently being devastated by an ecological disaster from poisons, toxins, drought, erosion, and over-population. Culture is everything from the clothes we wear, music we listen to, food we eat, and language and sayings we use. It is imperative that place-based learning and multicultural education are embedded into all classroom instruction.

Through the connection to place, learners begin to transform the world

around them through an emerging ecological understanding (Sobel, 2005). The sustainability of our planet is based in learner's ability to understand social, economic, and environmental aspects of life. Transforming classrooms through creative place-based learning leads to teachers implementing community designs for sustainable living and multicultural competence.

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