

The social ecology of movement, environment and community (MEC)

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Introduction -- Abstract/Summary of Symposium. Chair = Phillip Payne

The silences in pedagogical inquiry and research development about the transdisciplinary nature of complex, human-issues based curricula does, indeed, require a climate change of revolutionary proportions, as promised by the now Prime Minister in the lead up to the 2007 Federal Election and, as indicated by the theme of this conference: Education for Sustainable Futures.

In this symposium, we outline how each of the concepts of Movement, Environment and Community contribute to the (r)evolutionary of a 'social ecology of education' and its sustainability in practices, with examples drawn from our research efforts in pre-service teacher education in Sport and Outdoor Recreation. The curricula areas we have in mind are physical, outdoor, environmental and health education. Our broader interests include the promotion of health, wellbeing and sustainability. So, our social ecology is also applicable to a range of other pedagogical, curricula, policy and human/social capacity-building areas that now demand an overarching theoretical frame relevant to the cultural-ecological-global challenges the next generations are destined to confront.

Our particular question is 'how can health, wellbeing and sustainability promotion occur in education?' and, therefore, 'what initial conceptual frames are needed for this revolutionary climate change in pedagogy?' Our transdisciplinary study of movement/physical activity (M), in various environments, places and natures (E), in relation to community capacity-building (C) departs from the mainstream political, social and educational discourses that negatively dwell, often individualistically, on the 'obesity' and 'ecological' crises that we now so earnestly fear.

The development for education of a social ecology is rare, let alone for the uniqueness of its (potential) pedagogical and research applications in, for example, physical, outdoor, environmental and health educations. The locus of this ecology is found in the 'primacy' of our physicality,

embodied practices and their relations to social and geographical opportunities and constraints. Movement (of humans) in time and space, is 'primordial,' thus our social ecology is suggestive of a revolutionary 'corporeal turn' in education.

The first three papers address the concepts of movement (M), environment (E) and community (C). No singular definitions of each will be offered. Instead, we outline the major characteristics of the three concepts. We research vignettes that 'ground' those interrelated concepts in our pedagogical and curricula practices in pre-service teacher education. At the end of each paper, questions about the concept will be invited.

The fourth paper brings together the 3 papers so that the transdisciplinary 'social ecology' of MEC is articulated, as will some implications for a) particular curriculum areas and b) the pedagogical approach called 'experiential education' and c) preliminary modeling. Questions will be invited about our research findings.

Paper 1 Abstract: The concept of movement and its social ecology.

*Trent D. Brown

Phillip G. Payne

There is a pressing need in educational discourse for the ongoing development of the concept of movement and practices of movement education as both imply alternative pedagogies in, at least, physical education, sport/coaching/fitness leadership and outdoor education. Movement is basic to bodily practices but this primacy is not well appreciated in the current education literature and health promotion discourses.

As we see it, the challenge for teacher education research is to develop philosophical, theoretical and empirical understandings about the centrality of movement experiences so that future educators and professionals concerned about health and wellbeing promotion can critically examine their current practices and policies. A revitalized notion of movement, and the various contexts in which movement occurs, will enable deeper consideration of how the discourses of physical education, human movement and outdoor education might be reconceptualized in school-based pedagogies and related community development initiatives in sports and outdoor recreations.

To be sure, movement, both situationally and contextually, is inextricably linked to the affordances, enablements and constraints of the various environments that spatially and geographically influence

the human and social experience of movement. In addition to the spatialities of movement, their geographies also shape how communities act as the ‘driver’ of social and environmental capital and their sustainability. The phenomenological, or ‘micro’ study of the body in movement provides a window through which the social, cultural and ecological ‘world’ might also be examined.

This social ecology of movement therefore addresses at different levels the relationships between human, social, built and natural environments – a prerequisite for the promotion of health, wellbeing and sustainability .

In this paper, we focus on the qualities and intricacies of movement and therefore their contribution to the education of the practitioner, be it physical/outdoor education teacher, recreation planner or health promotion professional. Drawing upon the literature from the phenomenology of movement in physical education, it is timely that we identify the ‘other’ qualities, characteristics and ‘wild’ dimensions of movement. The revitalisation of movement and movement education may partially contribute to intelligent responses to the deficit-discourses and rhetoric about lifestyle diseases such as obesity, diabetes and physical inactivity.

Our task is to locate the ‘alternative’ literature in physical education about movement from the past 15 years into a broader, non-reductionist theoretical framework of social ecology that informs pedagogical and curriculum inquiry and critical research development. To those ends our initial aim here is to outline a spatialisation of movements and its phenomenologies as part of a broader geography of movement and physical activity, That is our interest here is in formulating a social ecology of movement education and in doing so, make a unique contribution to physical, outdoor, health and environmental education discourses.

Paper 2 Abstract: The concept of environment and its social ecology.

*Brian Wattchow

Amy Cutter-Mackenzie

Geraldine Burke

‘Environment,’ like ‘nature,’ is an ambiguous term because of the many environments that do exist and the different ways in which they are perceived and constructed by individuals, societies and cultures over time and through space. Educators must be careful about the way meaning is ascribed to ‘environment’ and ‘nature’ if sustainability is to remain a plausible proposition. Environments can be personal, social, historical, built, natural, tame, wild or ecological. Notwithstanding these

and many more variations, the integrity of each environment warrants study; as does how different versions of environment shape the study of human movement experiences and physical activities and, therefore, the creation of active communities and promotion of health, wellbeing and sustainability.

Hence, a 'social ecology' of the complex term 'environment' is urgently required to enhance our pedagogical and research efforts in outdoor, environmental, movement, physical and health educations. Clearly, a 'social ecology of environment' also defies easy definition because of the ambiguity of the 'parent' term 'nature' and its equally messy relations to nature's various spaces. Suggestive, however, is the need for a conceptual shift in our thinking and bodily practices to a 'ecocentric' posture; a philosophical frame quite different from the anthropocentrism, or human centredness of all education discourses which, if so, undermines the prospects for any climate change to sustainable futures.

In practical terms, a social ecology of the environment, in relation to the study of movement and community experiences, entails in pedagogical practices a range of human-environment interactions, be it open-space play, walking to school, wilderness expeditions, running a half marathon, wave surfing or cycling around the bay. A constant in these examples is the taking of education away from the environmental constraints of the 'indoors,' and its privileging of mind/learning/knowing, to the environmental enablements of the 'outdoors' and body/mind doing, meaning-making and becoming. A social ecology of these human-environment interactions and relations address various 'other' and 'wild' forms of expression and performance -- be it strenuous activity in space, graceful movement in place, or kinaesthetic appreciation over time in different places.

This paper addresses some of the more 'ecocentric' and wild, less tamed concerns outlined above and leaves others to the 'Movement' and 'Community' papers. Simply, our aim is to outline the major distinguishing characteristics and dimensions of 'environment' so that inquiry of an ecological type can proceed into the qualities of movement, physicality, their spatialities and geographies, and generation of active and sustainable communities.

To ground this in our research efforts, we focus on 'place' study -- an important derivation of the nature/environment concepts. We offer vignettes about 'the experience of river places in outdoor education,' 'children's playgrounds' and, methodologically, 'artistic representations of pedagogies of place'.

Paper 3 Abstract. The concept of community and its social ecology.

*Justen O'Connor

We present a case for physical education that situates it within a social ecology of movement connected to community, as opposed to one that is defined by the activities that physical education (and outdoor) traditionally privileges. To be a 'physically educated' member of a 'community' is a confused notion with its performative, socially critical and public health paradigms all competing for territory in physical education discourses.

The term community itself is vague. It refers to a geographically defined social group. Expanded, it accommodates collections of people integrated within a particular social structure, or who share a sense of identity or belonging to a 'group' or 'network' extending beyond geographical boundaries. Physical educators are now being asked to develop understandings of 'wellbeing' that move beyond the focus on the individual and his/her performance and health into a 'post-traditional' climate that will enable future citizens to participate in creating healthy and active 'communities' for selves and others.

Provision exists in various national and international curriculum frameworks for physical education to supplement the dominant performative sports and activity-driven discourse. Physical educators have struggled to find a coherent theoretical frame through which connections can be forged between physical education and community wellbeing. In the same way, emerging socio-ecological models in the discourse of health promotion are now being applied to populations and (macro) 'communities'; they can be 'drilled down' to the (meso-level) school community as a neighbourhood-type version nested within broader populations. And, to the micro and situational level of the home and family.

In schools, in addition to the provision of structured activities like sport education or teaching games for understanding, the Health and Physical Education curriculum now entertains unstructured physical activity, active transport, independent mobility, natural play spaces and community sport, constructed through various community possibilities. In this sense, active communities is a fluid term where education is dispersed from the school and into its extended community and geography and, potentially vice-versa.

In locating the physical education curriculum within social ecological theory, physical educators can extend the role of games, sports, health and fitness discourses while addressing the question of how learning in physical activity occurs in and through our bodies, in various movement experiences, and in relation to different levels of social participation and community engagement..

We outline a case study of how an undergraduate physical education program can more emphatically promote and respond to the experiences of its participants and their engagement in physically active communities while allowing greater opportunities for expanding their own imaginative movement experiences outside of the scheduled class time. By transgressing curriculum areas and viewing the school as a connected community in which movement occurs at a number of levels, a socio-ecological framework can establish physical education as much more than a collection of disaggregated activities.

Paper 4: A social ecology of movement, environment and community.

* Phillip G. Payne, Justen O'Connor & Terri-Anne Philpott

The studies of

- movement experiences and their physical and spatial expression;
- environments and the affordances provided by nature and places for movement and community experiences; and
- active communities and their respective capacities to promote health, wellbeing and sustainability

cannot be separated from each other because each cannot exist without the other. Each flows into the other in a recyclical fashion and, in doing so, underpins the importance of transdisciplinary approaches to pedagogical development, curriculum inquiry, policy reconceptualization, research perspectives and public dissemination and representation of this social ecology. Upon closer inspection, our notion of a social ecology in education invokes a wider range of non-dualistic pedagogical possibilities that, in practice, reconnect mind and body, individual and collective, spatial and temporal, aesthetic and kinaesthetic, indoor and outdoor, school and community, culture and nature.

In this final paper, we draw together the main threads of each paper to offer some key points about,

- the notion of social ecology

- how the theory of social ecology of movement, environment and community lends itself ‘holistically’ to a preferred pedagogical approach and practice in education named, following John Dewey, ‘experiential education.’
- The importance, therefore, of educations and curricula development for ‘movement experiences,’ place/nature experiences, active community experiences if, indeed a revolutionary climate change in educational reform for health, wellbeing and sustainability is more than rhetoric.
- A preliminary ‘model’ or concept map of this social ecology.

Also, we will identify (and respond to) some of the conceptual and empirical research issues, problems and challenges we are encountering in our social ecology of movement, environment and community as this ‘climate change’ occurs in our related efforts of research-led-teaching and education-led-research for the promotion of health, wellbeing and sustainability.