INSPIRED BY PLACE: BC SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS AND PERCEPTIONS OF BENEFITS, BARRIERS, SUPPORTS, AND DECOLONIZATION IN PLACE-BASED EDUCATION

by

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Abstract

Place-based education (PBE) provides dynamic and memorable learning experiences. While some teachers have embraced PBE in their practice, there seems to be a reluctancy among secondary school teachers to do so. As well, in Canada, there is now an imperative to undo the infrastructure which was designed to and continues to promote the spirit of colonialism. Data for this study was gathered through interviews with four participants from the same secondary school with varied teaching subjects and experience with PBE. Data analysis concentrated on descriptive coding of the information provided in the categories of benefits, barriers, decolonization, and supports. The perceived benefits of PBE were that it provides context for learning, improves academic achievement, and allows for connection to the land and community. The perceived barriers to PBE were logistics and safety concerns, student and teacher conditioning to being in a traditional classroom, and the feeling that change is hard. The perceived supports required to implement PBE effectively were a need for more professional development and mentorship, more time, resources, and logistical supports. Based on the findings, five recommendations were suggested to support PBE implementation in secondary schools: (1) provide PBE-specific professional development and mentorship programs; (2) resolve logistical concerns; (3) address perceptions pertaining to student safety; (4) challenge ‘desk culture’; and (5) provide more support to decolonize and indigenize the education system.

Keywords: place-based education, place-based pedagogy, secondary school, benefits, barriers, decolonization, Indigenization, professional development, mentorship

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to all students and teachers who are searching for a sense of place.

“THE LAND IS A FEELING. Sitting beside the fire in this winsome river valley, the mountains seem to enfold you as deeply as the night. Against the sky they become a single purple smudge atop the shadowed apex of pine and popular.

The river gurgle snakes through the sharp crackle of the fire just long enough to remind you where the real power lies. It’s a feeling I’ve come to recognize as home.”

- Richard Wagamese

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Glossary

i. *Best practice:* This is an educational term that refers to the most current, well-researched, and successful methods of instruction.

ii. *Community-based Learning*: Develops interactive partnerships with the local community that can involve students learning in place or bringing community members into the school.

iii. *Critical Pedagogy of Place:* The belief that all educators should consider the relationship between education and the places that we inhabit, while considering what we are leaving behind for future generations. Gruenewald (2003) claims that combining the traditions of critical theory and place-based education supports decolonization.

iv. *Decolonize:* As taken from the Merriam Webster dictionary: "to free (a people or area) from colonial status: to relinquish control of (a subjugated people or area)" and/or "to free from the dominating influence of a colonizing power. Especially: to identify, challenge, and revise or replace assumptions, ideas, values, and practices that reflect a colonizer's dominating influence"

v. *Environmental Education:* Often focused on environmental issues at the local level, as well as those in the global community. This type of education can also be associated with activism and conservation.

vi. *Equity Scan:* An initiative started in 2016 by the Ministry of Education in British Columbia (BC) to have school districts look at evidence pertaining to student achievement (e.g., literacy data, graduation rates, feelings of belonging, etc.). Each school district in BC is invited to complete their own scan to compare Indigenous and non-Indigenous student achievement rates in order to identify areas of inequality and to improve the overall achievement of Indigenous students in their district.

vii. *Halq'eméylem*: An Indigenous language spoken by the Upriver Stó:lō.

viii. *Indigenize the Curriculum:* The practice of including Indigenous content and Indigenous ways of Knowing and Being into all subject areas within the education system.

ix. *Indigenous Knowledge:* Defined by Battiste and Youngblood Henderson (2009) as the collective genius of Indigenous peoples that comes from the land where they have lived, hunted, explored, raised families, built communities, and survived for centuries. The primary source of Indigenous knowledge is Indigenous language and the Land.

x. *Inquiry-based Learning:* The belief that learning should start with the curiosity of the learner. Students are encouraged to investigate their own areas of interest.

xi. *Land-based Learning:* Traditionally associated with Indigenous methods of learning that start with the Land as the primary teacher. This involves living in harmony with the land.

xii. *Learner-centered:* This is an educational approach that shifts the focus from the teacher onto the students. Learning tends to be more active and driven by the needs and interests of the students.

xiii. *Nature-based Learning:* Learning that emerges through student relationships and interest in the natural world. It often involves play and using natural resources for instruction. It is often associated with Nature Kindergarten.

xiv. *Outdoor Education:* A course that falls under the umbrella of Physical and Health Education in the British Columbia curriculum. The aim of this course is to have students participate in outdoor activities and to learn outdoor-related skills, abilities, and knowledge.

xv. *Place-based Education:* For the purposes of this study, place-based education (PBE) is an umbrella term that includes learning in place, nature-based, community-based, land-based, and environmental education, et cetera. PBE starts with place as the starting point for the curriculum.

xvi. Place-based Learning: Aims to integrate traditional subject areas such as English, Social Studies, Science, etc. into the local area through nature-based and community-based experiences.

xvii. *Professional Development:* Education offered to teachers and support staff in a school district. Teachers are required to take part in professional development to further their learning and improve their skills as an educator.

xvii. *Project-based Learning:* Students are given the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge while working on projects that are typically based on real world problems.

xviii. *Settler:* A provocative term to describe non-Indigenous people; immigrants to Canada.

xix. *Stó:lō:* The Indigenous people who inhabit the Fraser Valley and the lower Fraser Canyon of British Columbia. Stó:lō is the Halq'eméylem word for *river* and the Stó:lō are the people of the river/river people. The Stó:lō are a part of the Coast Salish nations.

xx. *Team Teaching:* The practice of two or more teachers working together to teach the same class. They can teach at the same time or take turns; however, they are responsible for teaching the course content to the same group of students.

xxi. *Tómiyeqw:* The Stó꞉lō practice of thinking about the land in terms of honouring their ancestors seven generations past and equivalently, the land providing for seven generations into the future.

xxii. *Traditional Ecological Knowledge*: This is a term used in Canada to describe Indigenous Knowledges.

xxiii. *Xwelítem:* The Upriver Halq'eméylem term for the settlers who have colonized the traditional territories of the Stó꞉lō people. Xwelítem means 'hungry person;' as in this hunger is insatiable.

Acronyms

i. *BC*: British Columbia

ii. *EK*: Eurocentric Knowledge

iii. *FPPL*: First Peoples Principles of Learning

iv. *IK*: Indigenous Knowledge

v. *K*: Kindergarten

vi. *PBE*: Place-based Education

vii. *Pro-D*: Professional Development

viii. *SBO*: School Board Office

ix. *TEK*: Traditional Ecological Knowledge

x. *TTOC*: Teacher Teaching On-Call

Introduction

I am a person of mixed European settler and Métis ancestry living and teaching on Stó꞉lō territory in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia (BC). My educational passion is place-based experiences and the transformational influence that place can have on student learning. My journey as an educator began as a French language teacher, where one of my greatest pleasures was taking students on international culture and language trips to Europe. During my time as a language teacher, it became clear to me that many students needed context in order for learning to be meaningful; and, that place-based experiences provided dynamic and memorable learning. As well, my own educational journey over the past two years has led me to seriously reflect on the importance of decolonizing the education system and to consider the role that PBE could play in supporting a more equitable system for all students.

In the past several years I have transitioned to teaching Outdoor Education, an outdoor activity-based course that is heavily connected to community and place. My experiences teaching Outdoor Education, and the growing popularity of this place-based, activity-based course, have inspired me to consider the lack of place-based learning experiences in the more mainstream courses at the secondary school level. After visiting several outdoor learning elementary schools in the school district where this study took place, as well as speaking with elementary administrators who support place-based pedagogy, it became apparent to me that there may be more willingness at elementary schools to embrace outdoor learning/place-based experiences, and a reluctancy to do so at the middle school and secondary school levels.

As a leader at my school who strives to provide best practices in instruction for students, it has come to my understanding that place-based education (PBE) is an example of good pedagogy and merits further investigation. In addition, in order to fully educate students to be

locally engaged and environmentally conscious, it seems to be an obvious and foundational step to take students outside, to help them to learn about where they live and to show them that there is a rich history to this place. It seems fundamental that knowledge of the land that settlers reside on with Indigenous Peoples be a part of this education. Consequently, in this study I will endeavor to understand the perceptions that secondary school teachers have about PBE, with the intention to better support teachers who would use PBE methods with their students.

Context/School Ethnography

The school where this study took place is the only secondary school in a rural town of approximately 40 000 people. There is a sizable student population within the school and a relatively diverse student clientele. Geographically, the school sits on the foothills of a major mountain range and is close to rivers, parks, and green spaces. The school is also centrally located in the community and is within walking distance of commercial shops, museums, and many other services. The territory of this town falls on the traditional, ancestral, unceded, and shared lands of five First Nations.

There is strong school involvement with the local First Nations, as well as with the large Métis population in the area. Indigenous education in the district is overseen by an advisory committee made up of local Indigenous Elders. There is an Indigenous mentor teacher for the district, and all schools have Indigenous support workers. In addition, this school has its own curriculum mentor teacher who regularly runs workshops for the teachers at this school, which focus on helping teachers indigenize the curriculum. Based on the school's proximity to place-based resources, coupled with support for Indigenous students in the school system, this area seems primed for place-based or land-based experiences that could not only honour Indigenous ways of knowing, but also potentially benefit all students.

Research Question

In light of the considerable influence that place-based education (PBE) could have in the education system, and what I perceive to be a lack of PBE in general at this rural secondary school, I am curious to know what the teachers at this school think about PBE. My research question is: How do secondary teachers perceive the use of PBE in secondary classrooms? I want to reveal assumptions, perceptions of barriers, potential connections to decolonization, and ways to support secondary teachers to participate in PBE. In order to address these questions, this study will start with a review of what the current literature on this topic has to say.

Literature Review

The topic of place-based education (PBE) has many facets. For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to all types of place-based learning – including land-based learning, nature-based learning, community-based learning, and environment-based learning – as PBE. The literature I reviewed on the topic of PBE indicates that the benefits of connecting learning to 'place' are many (Gruenewald, 2003; Miller & Twum, 2017; Sobel, 2014; Vander Ark et al., 2020). This includes improvement in student learning, creating connections to community and the environment, as well as aiding in the decolonization of the school system. The following literature review will provide some background on the topic of PBE, as well as the benefits, challenges, and the future of PBE. The literature has been organized thematically to reflect the major issues in education today. This starts with an overview of the purpose of education. Next, we see the colonial legacy in the education system and the challenges of doing PBE. As Indigenizing the curriculum gains momentum, the literature reflects transitions to 'land-based'

education. Finally, and most importantly, the literature illustrates the many educational benefits of PBE.

Purpose of Education

Gruenewald (2003) states that school reformers over the years have taken little notice of place – so much so that "schooling often distracts our attention from, and distorts our response to, the actual contexts of our own lives (places)" (p. 621). Since 2001, the focus of the American education system reform has been on standards, testing, and accountability; and consequently, where place-conscious practices in education have managed to persist, they are under constant pressure to prove their worth against Eurocentric schooling traditions (Grunewald, 2003). Gruenewald (2003) argues that the role of education has been reduced to preparing workers to compete in the global economy. The hidden agenda, however, is to maintain existing geographical relations of domination. By not discussing relations to place, it obscures the role of average citizens in the democratic process of placemaking (Gruenewald, 2003) thus maintaining the status quo of the dominant colonizing society. Many scholars argue that one of the main purposes of PBE is in fact to work against colonization and to decolonize the education system (Gruenewald, 2003; Seawright, 2014; Webber et al., 2021; Wildcat et al., 2014).

Another purpose of PBE is to seek to address current environmental issues that are impacting the planet. Orr (2011) claims that, in light of environmental concerns, all education should be linked to environmental education, and that using PBE is the best way to develop environmentally aware students. Dewey (1938), who is considered to be one of the most influential educational philosophers of the 20th century, claims that genuine education comes through experience. Flinders and Thorton (2013) explain that Dewey's theory of social learning is based on the premise that school should be representative of a social environment; and, most

importantly, that students learn best in a natural social setting. According to Williams (2017), Dewey would have supported the experiential nature of PBE in developing socially responsible citizens.

Colonial Legacy and PBE

Seawright (2014) claims that the settler tradition of place must be looked at through the lens of white supremacy and settler colonialism. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, white supremacy is "the belief that the white race is inherently superior to other races and that white people should have control over other races" as well, it is "the social, economic, and political systems that enable white people to maintain power." Carlson (2023) claims that settler colonialism is a way of looking at the world that relies on dehumanizing and devaluing the Indigenous People of the area and operates with a logic of eliminating these inhabitants. The Western view of place sees land as a commodity that can be owned and privatized; and this colonial tradition of dominating and controlling nature is also embedded into our schools (Seawright, 2014). It seems logical that teachers would subconsciously feel that the traditional way of instructing is somehow superior to teachings that are place or land based. According to Seawright (2014) there is radical potential in PBE to challenge the dominant Western narrative on place. "An effective place-based education not only reshapes abstract understandings of nature and land but provides a pathway for the tearing down and reconstruction of oppressive ontological relationships with the natural world" (Seawright, 2014, p. 570).

In addition, Wildcat et al. (2014) claim that colonialism has in part functioned by using Western education systems to undermine Indigenous intellectual development. Cultural assimilation, and the violent separation of Indigenous peoples from the land, removes Indigenous individuals from their sources of knowledge and strength. Wildcat et al. (2014) answer some of

the questions regarding what Indigenous land-based education should look like. If colonizing is about dispossessing Indigenous peoples from the land, then decolonization must involve education that reconnects Indigenous peoples to the land. This also includes reconnecting Indigenous peoples to the social relations, knowledges, and languages that arise from the land.

An interview with Simpson (2014, as cited in Wildcat et al. 2014) claims, “Indigenous education is not Indigenous or education from within our intellectual traditions unless it comes through the land, unless it occurs in an indigenous context using Indigenous process” (p. v). Simpson (2014) asserts that a resurgence in Indigenous culture, governance, and nation building requires generations of Indigenous people to grow up connected to their homelands, in addition to their language. Simpson (2014) argues that land must be reclaimed as a source of pedagogy in order to counter the support for settler colonialism perpetuated in the current education system.

Challenges of PBE

Unfortunately, there are significant logistical challenges when it comes to undoing the damaging aspects of over one hundred years of colonial schooling practices. Miller and Twum (2017) conclude that teachers who would like to implement PBE must “strongly believe” in the importance of this type of experiential learning and be “highly motivated” to implement PBE (p. 105). These challenges include winning the support of a potentially hesitant school board and administrators, dealing with inclement weather, overcoming anxieties felt by families, teachers, and students about student achievement, questions regarding fiscal restraints, and, perhaps most damaging and reinforced, the ingrained habit of having students sit at desks to learn (Miller & Twum, 2017; Smith, 2007). To make PBE more mainstream, Miller and Twum suggest that it is important to provide more training and professional development for teachers. In the case of this

study, the authors also suggest that teacher education programs should take a significant role in preparing teachers for PBE.

A study by Ernst and Erickson (2018) suggests that ongoing mentorship is crucial to teachers continuing with place-based instruction after having received PBE training. It is logical that teachers who are *not* highly motivated will need mentorship to feel valued, supported, and excited about the work when making the transition to PBE. According to the study, an important part of the mentorship process was having someone help them to navigate the political and logistical barriers that often exist with PBE. It seems plausible that, when considering a shift to PBE in a school, it is crucial to implement a mentorship program to support sustainable, long-term change, and to make PBE a viable option for every teacher at the school. Smith (2007) suggests that continued collaboration with experts outside of the school is also important when instituting PBE; however, relatively few teachers feel able to reach out for this help given constraints on time.

In addition to a lack of professional development and systematic mentorship, Yemini et al. (2023) assert that time and resources are also a substantial barrier to place-based programing. Powers (2004) found that teachers reported needing considerable time to navigate bureaucracy and to collaborate with community partners. Smith (2002) found that teachers wanting to do PBE often found themselves having to develop their own curricula and curricular materials. Yemini et al. (2023) found that due to a lack of place-based learning standards, curriculum frameworks and the prevalence of co-constructed lessons with other teachers and community involvement can leave teachers outside of their comfort zone. This lack of curricular support and dependance on community connections means that teachers need more time and resources in order to develop place-based programming. These challenges, in addition to the necessity for ongoing

professional development and mentorship, are substantial but not insurmountable. Despite these challenges PBE continues to grow in popularity.

The Land-based Future of PBE

Webber et al. (2021) suggest that place-based approaches are currently being embraced across Canada. Unfortunately, they also assert that although land-based education and PBE may share the same goal of decolonization, fundamental differences in how Indigenous and Settler traditions understand place may perpetuate oppression rather than foster reconciliation of these worldviews. The issue, they assert, is that current PBE still does not adequately provide the framework to disrupt colonial practices. Where traditional PBE supports students to develop positive relationships with place, land-based education primarily addresses issues of sovereignty from Indigenous perspectives. Seawright (2014) argues that Indigenous education must be an integral part of PBE – introducing a different way of thinking about how humans both relate to the land and to each other. PBE carries the potential to offer resistance to Western ideas about nature, private property, and personhood that are the foundations of Western society (Seawright, 2014). In order to dismantle settler traditions of racialized, anthropocentric, and capitalist understandings of place, Seawright suggests that the solution is to respectfully integrate Indigenous knowledge (IK) as a part of the education system. Little Bear (2009) also asserts that IK must be naturalized into the education system in order to neutralize racism, colonialism, and assumptions about inferiority. Addressing the subject of place, Little Bear (2009) sees potential for PBE to provide immediate support to Indigenous students. He claims that just as a person suffers from absences from friends and family, Indigenous peoples suffer from separation from the land, so place must be an integral part of any curriculum.

Coast (2013) claims that ongoing colonial practices of resource extraction from the unceded lands in BC have relied primarily on settler ignorance and indifference to the plight of Indigenous peoples in BC. The mainstream media, the academic press, the courts, as well as the education system, have impoverished non-native understandings of the Indigenous peoples on whose homelands they occupy. Although courses like First Nations 12, First Peoples English and BC First Peoples have made their way into the mainstream BC secondary school curriculum, Coast (2013) feels that these courses did not go far enough to educate the mainstream population about the effects of colonialism. More recently, the province of BC has embedded Indigenous content into all of its courses; and, as of 2024, all secondary school students in the province will require an Indigenous content course to graduate. As more and more Indigenous content enters the BC curriculum the literature suggests that more land-based experiences should follow to truly contextualize this new content and indigenize the curriculum.

Benefits of PBE

Vander Ark et al. (2020) claim that PBE provides authentic learning experiences that encourage student agency and empowerment, student equity, and support community building efforts. Sobel (2014) summarizes the findings of the *State Education and Environmental Roundtable* (an American study aimed at assessing the integration of the environment and nature into the K to 12 curriculum) and outlines numerous benefits of what PBE can do for students. For example, the study found that student achievement increased across all subject areas; problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision-making skills improved; enthusiasm and engagement in learning improved; attendance increased; discipline referrals decreased; citizenship was enhanced; there was an increase in positive attitudes about the environment; college acceptance rates went up; and even the transfer of infectious diseases went down (Sobel,

2014). A more recent literature review by Canadian scholars Miller and Twum (2017) affirms that PBE fosters connection to place, creates vibrant partnerships between schools and communities, promotes an ethic of care and respect for the planet, and supports Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Gruenewald's multidisciplinary analysis of the scarcity of focus on PBE claims that the "lack of attention is disturbing because it impoverishes human experience, conceals from view the correspondence between ideology, politics, and place, and potentially leads to biological and cultural extinctions that we may regret" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 645). Gruenewald (2003) further claims that place is "fundamentally pedagogical" and that "we should listen to what places have to say to us" (p. 645). According to Gruenewald (2003) place teaches us who we are, where we are, as well as how we might choose to live our lives.

The question that is arising for me is this: if the benefits of implementing PBE are so overwhelming, and the consequences of not considering place so potentially catastrophic, why is PBE not embraced on a systematic level in all levels of schooling – and specifically at the secondary level?

Scholarly significance of this Research Study

The research into PBE reflects a lack of studies located within smaller communities in BC, and consequently the perceptions that secondary school teachers have about PBE. In addition, with the more recent initiative to indigenize the curriculum within the BC education system, there is little literature on the perceptions of secondary school teachers about Indigenization/decolonization. This is especially interesting in light of the fact that as of 2024 it will be mandatory for all secondary school students in BC to have an Indigenous-focused course

in order to graduate. This study provides an initial introduction to the perceptions of typical secondary school teachers to the phenomenon of PBE and potential connections to decolonization.

Methodology

In order to adequately set the parameters for this research project, I will first explain my assumptions about reality, how I perceive my role in the research process, the role of bias in the research, and the specific methodology that I used for gaining knowledge. All of this is known as my worldview or paradigm, and this worldview is the foundation of my inquiry (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). For this research I will be following a constructivist paradigm/worldview. I will begin by explaining the philosophical elements that encompass a worldview.

Constructivist Worldview

A worldview starts with a consideration of ontology, or the nature of reality (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In the constructivist paradigm it is believed that there is no one single reality, but rather the possibility for multiple socially constructed versions of it. In other words, there are many ways of looking at the world. Therefore, my inquiry seeks to understand what secondary teachers perceive to be their realities of PBE. According to Creswell & Plano Clark (2007), another element of one's worldview is epistemology - how we gain knowledge of what we know; or, in other words, the theory of knowledge. Epistemology considers the relationship between the researcher and the one being researched. As a constructivist, I believe that the relationship between the researcher and the participant is of value; so, while doing this research it was acceptable for me to gain this knowledge by being on site and working directly with participants while collecting data. A third element of worldview is axiology, which is the role of

values and bias in research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). I will elaborate on this element by explaining my bias. As a constructivist, I would like to acknowledge that I am biased towards the belief that PBE is beneficial for all students. It was important for me to be aware of this bias and suspend it to the best of my ability in order to enable teacher participants to let their own thoughts and realities be at the forefront of the research. Finally, the constructivist paradigm supports inductive methodologies which allowed me to explore the multiple views of participants and then to build a theory and generalize from the patterns that I observed.

Method

Congruent with the constructivist worldview, I chose to use phenomenological methods to research my questions about PBE. A phenomenological study, according to Creswell & Poth (2017), seeks to describe the experiences of several individuals in relation to a lived experience of a specific concept or phenomenon and then to report on the essence of that phenomenon. The phenomenon that I studied was PBE in secondary schools. A phenomenological approach is best for my research question since my goal was to understand the shared experiences of secondary teachers with PBE so that I can potentially develop practices and policies by developing a deeper understanding of their perceptions of PBE. Groenewald (2004) points out that the operative word in phenomenological research is ‘describe’; therefore, I have collected qualitative interview data from secondary teachers who have opinions on PBE in order to develop a rich description of the essence of PBE at the secondary school level. Groenewald (2004) also claims that the phenomenological researcher's aim should be to describe the phenomenon as accurately as possible, refrain from any pre-given theories, and remain as true to the facts as possible. According to Creswell & Poth (2017), this description should consist of “what” these teachers

have experienced with PBE and "how" they have experienced PBE (p. 77). This is the essence of a phenomenological study (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Benefits of the Phenomenological Approach

There are significant benefits to using a phenomenological approach. van Manen (1990) (as cited in Creswell and Poth, 2018) claims that phenomenological research is a form of deep learning that can lead to a profound transformation of consciousness for the researcher. This includes heightened perceptions and increased thoughtfulness about the subject matter. The phenomenological approach can be particularly valuable for groups such as therapists, teachers, health personnel, and policy makers who are seeking to develop practices or policies and generally develop a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This streamlined form of data collection can be as simple as a single interview with participants, so it is not necessarily overly time consuming, and it includes structured steps that make data analysis more accessible for novice researchers.

Limitations of the Phenomenological Approach

Creswell & Poth (2018) claim that some of the approaches for analyzing the data, such as the Moustakas (1994) approach, are too structured for some qualitative researchers. As a novice, however, I appreciated the step-by-step nature of this approach. Creswell & Poth (2018) also assert that to set the stage for this research method it is important for phenomenological researchers to identify their broader philosophical assumptions. Therefore, to accommodate for this limitation it was important for me to clearly state my worldview at the beginning of the methodology section. As personal opinions, assumptions, and biases can creep into qualitative research, *bracketing* personal assumptions and biases is another important part of this research methodology.

Epoche or Bracketing in Phenomenology

LeVasseur (2003) (as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018) defines ‘bracketing’ or the concept of ‘epoche’ (which the Merriam-Webster dictionary states come from the Greek verb *epechein* which means ‘to pause’ or ‘to hold back’) as the practice of suspending our understandings in a reflective practice that cultivates curiosity. Subjective experiences, understandings, and biases of the researcher cannot be completely separated from the interpretation of the data; however, as a phenomenological researcher, I took steps to suspend my own biases to the best of my ability. This included making a conscious effort to refrain from commenting or giving my opinions or perceptions unless asked directly by participants. It was very important for the views and understanding of participants to be the focus of this study and not my own. The first step in this process was to recognize my own bias.

Personal Bias. Regarding this research topic about PBE at secondary schools, I feel very strongly that place should be at the centre of the curriculum of today’s secondary schools. The barriers to implementing PBE are not insurmountable; and connecting to place, specifically to the land, is fundamental in the decolonization process. I am of the opinion that colonization in Canada was detrimental to the Indigenous peoples who live here and that it is my obligation to indigenize the curriculum and decolonize my teaching practices. However, I am approaching this research with an open mind to the perceptions of others and a keen sense of curiosity. Therefore, to further assist me to bracket my own bias, I have kept a journal for notes on my own thoughts and connections to my own experiences in order to keep them separate from the participants’ perceptions. I have also worked with a supervisor whose responsibility is to check for personal bias in my data analysis.

Data Sources/Participants

The phenomenological approach only requires a small sample size. Bartholomew et al. (2021) claim that this small sample of participants is ideal in order for each participant's voice to be fully heard. Accordingly, for this study I decided to collect qualitative interview data from only four secondary school teachers. I chose to interview a purposeful sample of a variety of teachers from different subject disciplines such as Mathematics, Social Studies, English, and Science; however, I was open to including teachers from all disciplines, including Fine and Applied Arts, Physical Education, and Languages. When I sent out the initial request for participants, all of the teachers who responded favorably were female Social Studies teachers. In addition, a school counsellor and an Indigenous support worker also indicated an interest in participating. In an attempt to draw on participants from a greater variety of teaching subject areas, and to stay within the parameters of my study where the intention was to only interview teachers, I sent out the request a second time and was fortunate to attain a broader pool of teacher participants from whom to choose. I selected the participants primarily based upon their teaching areas, but I also looked for variety in terms of potential experience with teaching PBE as well as range in grade level and gender – male (m) and female (f). These criteria were used to determine a purposeful sample of secondary school teachers. Experience was determined during the interview based on participant comments. Minimal experience was determined when the participants had not admitted to using any place-based experiences. Moderate experience was determined when the teacher consistently used the same curriculum specific locations (e.g., the skating rink). Considerable experience was determined if the teacher went out of their way to create place-based experiences and incorporate local knowledge into their classroom. Participants are listed in Table 1 in the order that they were interviewed.

Table 1

Study Participants

Pseudonym	Subject Area	Years Teaching	Experience with PBE
Andi (f)	BC First Peoples	19	Minimal
Kate (f)	Business Education	25	Minimal
Xavier (m)	Physical Education	6	Moderate
Odina (f)	Culinary Arts	10	Considerable

I used open-ended semi-structured interview questions to garner rich responses and get at the essence of each participant's experience with PBE. These questions revolved around my interest in identifying assumptions secondary teachers had about PBE, the barriers to implementing PBE, any potential connections to decolonization and Indigenizing curriculum that teachers perceived, and ultimately their insights with regards to supports for increasing teacher engagement with PBE. I was aware of my responsibility to suspend my own judgement and opinions in each interview so as to amplify the voices and perspectives of the participants.

Ethical Considerations

This research was approved by the UFV Human Ethics and Research Board prior to commencing this study (see Appendix A). This approval also included the consent of the superintendent of the school district in which the study took place, as well as the approval of the principal of the school where the research was done. All teachers at this secondary school were emailed and given the opportunity to participate. Before the interviews, the chosen participants were asked to sign a consent to inform them of the study's details and the procedure for withdrawal from this project if they chose to do so. Participants had the option of meeting with

me off campus in a location of their choice or, if they preferred, at the school. I will protect the identity of the school in the dissemination of the results as well as the identities of the participants.

Interview protocol and data tools

I did my best to make participants feel as comfortable as possible. This included providing the participants with the interview questions before the interview and having a copy of the questions for them to refer to during the interview. My questions included determining how participants defined PBE, perceptions of benefits and barriers, potential connections to decolonization and indigenizing the curriculum, and the supports that teachers require to effectively implement PBE (see Appendix B). The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai. All names and direct identifying features were removed from the raw data. Pseudonyms are used when referring to participants to ensure anonymity. Participants had the right to review the data and to add or change what they had said, thus approving the transcript. This was done before the raw data was shared with my project supervisor. Participants were able to withdraw from this project up until the transcript had been approved. After each interview, I reviewed the raw data and cleaned up the transcript. This means that I took out the ‘ums’, ‘likes,’ and repeated words, as well as any glaring grammatical errors that made the transcript difficult to understand. This allowed for the transcripts to be reviewed more easily by participants. I waited for each participant to review and approve their transcript before reviewing the transcripts for analysis purposes.

Data Analysis

Creswell & Poth (2018) explain that unlike other qualitative research approaches, phenomenology has specific, structured methods of analysis. Creswell & Poth (2018) claim that Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method is the most practical and useful approach for a structured method of analysis for phenomenology. I will follow the steps of analysis proposed by Moustakas especially since I am a novice researcher. The first step is to begin by describing my own experience with the phenomenon to further elaborate on my biases.

Personal experiences with the phenomenon. For me, PBE is an overarching term that includes many variations of the phenomenon including place-based learning, land-based learning, and environmental education. Ideally, place-based learning would involve all school subjects connecting students to place. As an Outdoor Education teacher, I strive to connect students to place daily; however, my focus is on physical activity and place. I take students hiking, camping, river rafting, skiing, and rock climbing, just to name a few of the bigger outdoor activities we do as a class. The popularity of this place-based program has been overwhelming and there are currently around 275 students a year who take the course at the school where I work. This leads me to wonder why this course is so popular and if it is the place-based, experiential nature of the course that has contributed to its success. As well, my thoughts are that other traditional school subjects could benefit from becoming more place-based.

Studying place does not necessarily mean that students need to be in a forest to do their lessons, although I believe that this would be a powerful learning opportunity, particularly as there is a forest within a ten-minute walk of the school. The benefits of spending time in the forest are numerous and the Japanese practice of *shinrin-yoku* is a recognized practice of eco-

therapy that is becoming increasingly popular. Furuyashiki et al. (2019) conclude that spending time in nature can improve mental health and physical health. This would be a direct benefit for many students as I have observed increasing levels of anxiety and depression over the years, manifested in more prolific phone usage, missed classes, inability to complete assignments, increasing inactivity in their personal lives, and a lack of social skills. This finding is corroborated by American author Louv (2005) who has developed the term 'nature-deficit disorder' to describe the growing gap between children and nature, which he claims has led to a disturbing rise in childhood obesity, attention disorders, and depression. A Canadian study by Tramonte and Willems (2010) affirms that the problem of anxiety among middle and secondary school students is significant and deserves to be addressed by parents and school staff.

PBE involves field trips; however, it is also about bringing place into the classroom by making connections to the local environment, economics, and culture. The logistics and planning for taking students out of the school for a day or more can be daunting, but they are not insurmountable if a teacher has the will to include place in the curriculum. My sense is that while many teachers acknowledge the benefits of learning from place; there are an equal number of perceived barriers as to why this cannot be done. As in many professions, teachers are often overworked, and it is easier to avoid place-based experiences as they do require more effort.

In addition, we are at a time in history when 'Reconciliation' with Indigenous peoples in what we commonly refer to as Canada is a stated objective of the provincial education system. It seems logical to me that a focus on place or more specifically the 'land' should play an integral part in decolonizing the school system. Indeed, it seems to be a fundamental place to start (Battiste, 2019; Greenwood, 2019; Littlebear, 2009: Simpson, 2014; Wildcat et al., 2014). It is my belief that focusing on place is a good first step toward potential land-based learning at the

secondary school level. In my experience, however, teachers are overwhelmed and need more support to overcome the barriers that currently exist if they are to implement PBE. Place-based experiences are worth the effort though, as they are not only good for Indigenous students, but for all students.

List of significant statements. Now that my personal views have been stated, it is time to set aside my own views and experiences and strive to amplify my participants' experiences with PBE. I have interviewed the participants in this study about PBE and digitally recorded and then transcribed their responses. Patton (1980, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018) claims that qualitative methods create massive amounts of information, so it is important to be organized. Agar (1980) suggests reading the initial transcripts over several times before beginning to code for information. This helps to get an overall sense of the interview before beginning to break it into parts. After I completed this step, I sought out significant statements within the interview transcripts to highlight how my participants are experiencing PBE. I used Microsoft Excel to create a searchable spreadsheet to make it easier to locate significant statements and eventually create their corresponding codes. I treated these statements with equal worth and value, and I worked to develop a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements. Creswell & Poth (2018) suggest that taking notes about what I am learning plays a complementary role to systematic analysis as it helps to track the development of ideas through the process. With this in mind, I kept a journal dedicated to bracketing my biases and taking notes about what I was learning from the participants.

Grouping the statements. Creswell & Poth (2018) describe the next steps as moving from reading and taking notes to now describing, classifying, and interpreting the data. Once I read the transcripts several times, I pulled out significant statements and grouped these

statements into broader units of information. My questions themselves produced significant categories of information regarding benefits, barriers, decolonization, Indigenizing, and supports for teachers. These clusters of information produced themes as I worked to further reduce repetition in the transcripts.

I used ‘emergent codes’ in my analysis of the statements. This means that I drew my codes out of what the participants said. My emergent codes are ‘descriptive codes’ as they provide a summary of the text and focus on what the participants were talking about. For example, when defining PBE, a common descriptive code was that *place provides context for learning*. In addition to descriptive codes, I have used ‘evaluative codes*’* that categorize each statement as positive or negative. *Place provides context* and *kinesthetic learning* would both be examples of positive codes because they represent perceived benefits of PBE. Salient negative codes presented by the participants included *concerns about supervision* and *lack of PBE understanding by teachers.* This information contributed to the list of perceived challenges that were elicited from participants.

‘What’ and ‘how’. Phenomenological research depends on a thick description of the textural and structural components of the experience that include verbatim examples (Moustaka, 1994, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, I created a description of ‘what’ the participants experienced about PBE to provide the textural description of the experience, or in other words, what happened to the participants as they experienced PBE. As well, I gave a description of ‘how’ the experiences happened, which is known as the structural description of the phenomenon. This is the setting and the context in which the phenomenon was experienced.

Composite description. After the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ were established, I created a composite description that incorporated both the textural and structural descriptions to get to the

‘essence’ of the experience. This part of the study is a synthesis of what I learned from the participants and provides an overview of what each participant experienced, and how they experienced it. The composite description of each participant can be found in the discussion section of this paper.

Strength of Study

Once the study results are analyzed, it is important to determine the legitimacy of the results. MacMath (2009) suggests that using Denzin and Lincoln’s triple crisis is the best fit for determining the validity of phenomenological research. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) propose that quantitative researchers should justify their findings by addressing the triple crises of representation, legitimation, and praxis. Firstly, when determining if the participants in a study have been adequately represented one can ask the question: what have I done to avoid objectifying my participants? In this study, I have taken great lengths to involve my participants in the research process by providing the research questions ahead of time, bracketing my own biases to allow for the strength of participants’ voices, letting the participants give feedback on the final transcript, and seeking their permission before I use quotes. At its heart, the crisis of representation can be averted by taking on a ‘mindset of care’ for the participant (S. MacMath, personal communication, November 18, 2022), which I have done.

Next, I addressed the crisis of legitimacy in my research by asking myself the critical question: do the readers believe me? The believability of the research comes down to the trustworthiness I have developed in this study. I have tried to build trustworthiness with the reader by bracketing my biases, having a supervisor check my work for bias, and being completely open about the methodology of this study. I have used direct quotes from the participants to support any critical findings in the research. I have strived to be honest about what

I learned from the participants and about how I interpreted the information that they gave me. Finally, I will address the crisis of praxis by asking the most important question: is this research useful? I will conclude this paper with a word about its practicality.

Relevance to the Field of Education

This research is useful for many reasons. As the literature suggests, PBE can transform the education system as we know it (Gruenewald, 2003; Orr, 2013; Sobel, 2014; Webber et al., 2021). I would like to play a role in this transformation process at the secondary school level. I believe that the development of programs, policies, and support for teachers starts with an initial attempt to understand teachers' beliefs and feelings about PBE. The secondary school in this project is geographically poised to easily connect to place. I feel that as the political will to connect students to place is increasing, more secondary schools will follow suit. Nature Kindergarten has been popular for years; however, nature-based schools and programs at the middle and secondary school level are starting to increase in the Lower Mainland of BC. One of the most notable programs in the area, in fact in North America, is called the Environment School, and is located in the Maple Ridge School District just outside of Vancouver. This school has a revolutionary place-based, environment-based outdoor learning school. This school is without a traditional school building. It is entirely outside or dependent on community locations and resources. They have a yurt and pop-up shelters; however, they are committed to learning outside rain or shine. The school started in 2011 as kindergarten to grade 7 and as of 2017 has also added high school. A new elementary/middle school in Chilliwack called *Sitó:s Lá:lém totí:lt* opened in 2022 and was specifically designed with place in mind. The school is located beside the Vedder River, close to parks, trails and the Great Blue Heron nature reserve. Teachers were recruited based on their willingness to take students outside and connect to place.

My feeling is that, as the trend to connect students to place becomes even more popular, secondary schools will need to be ready to support their teachers for these possible changes. Considering the 2022 provincial mandate that all students must have an Indigenous-focused course to graduate as of 2024, it feels that the time is right for secondary schools to seriously consider the importance of place and the living and non-living aspects of place. How can we authentically instruct our children about the Indigenous peoples of the area without considering the pedagogical capacity of the land around us? I hope this study will provide insight into the state of PBE at this school, spur further conversations, and contribute to significant change.

Results

The purpose of this research project was to determine the perceptions of a sample of secondary school teachers to the phenomenon of place-based education. Since PBE is broad and can also potentially have many different definitions, the first step was to understand how teachers might be interpreting this phenomenon. The literature suggests that there are many benefits to PBE, so the next question aimed to see what benefits these teachers perceived to engaging students in place-based experiences. Since the goal of this research is to ultimately learn how to empower more teachers to utilize PBE with their students, it seemed crucial to determine what barriers might be preventing them from doing so; and ultimately what supports could be offered to teachers who might want to incorporate PBE into their classes. Asking if PBE can help support decolonization, or at the very least assist teachers to indigenize the curriculum, was posed to see if participants had considered the interrelation between PBE and decolonization or to at least have participants think about potential connections.

Defining PBE

Participants in this study had varying perceptions of what PBE is; however, they all defined PBE as learning outside of a traditional classroom setting. Kate's understanding of PBE is that students would go to a place that allows them to be immersed in what they are learning. The example that she used was that if students want to learn about architecture or a political movement, they could go to a place that could educate them about that subject matter. The place they visited would be used as the classroom, as well as providing the resources for what is being learned. Andi's understanding of PBE was inspired more by Indigenous practices of learning from the land and the Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) that arises from different geographical regions. Andi believed that all students could participate in this type of learning, not just Indigenous students. PBE would connect students to a specific region to learn from the land. Xavier defined PBE as using the places around you to add to curricular understanding. For Xavier this could include the skating rink or the disc golf course near the school, as well as the baseball diamond and playing fields on the school grounds. For Odina, PBE is a spectrum of possible teaching environments that range from utilizing nature-based learning spaces as well as built environments. Odina feels that connecting to place can be as simple as getting students outside the school to talk about the curriculum or as complicated as an all-day field trip to a culinary school in Vancouver.

Many perceived benefits, but even more perceived barriers

When asking participants about the benefits and barriers to PBE, they overwhelmingly had positive perceptions of the benefits that PBE could bring to student learning. Place was repeatedly credited with (1) potentially providing context to the curriculum, (2) improving academic performance, and (3) creating special connections that are not always available in a

traditional classroom. As Andi described a childhood beach learning experience, she recognized that her learning was local, involved all her senses and subconscious, and was extremely memorable. Andi provided a great example of learning in place as she reflected:

> I didn't know at the time that we were learning off of what was available to us, but we would jump along the rocks when the tide came in. Me and all my cousins and my sister. I still remember the different smells and what you saw. The colour of the seaweed and tidal pools and what was in them, and the crabs. So, I think that's another [aspect] of place-based education - not even realizing that [learning] was happening. (Andi)

On the contrary, when considering the location of the school in this study, Kate made an interesting comment that, in comparison to locations in Europe, there are not as many impressive places here (in North America) that warrant making the effort to teach in place. Kate said:

> In Europe, when they want to learn about an architectural style or a political movement, they go to that place, and they let the place inform their education about that subject matter. We obviously don't have a lot of those opportunities here. (Kate)

This sentiment could speak to the Eurocentric attitude that is potentially at the heart of the long list of barriers to PBE that the participants perceived. Specifically for the participants, barriers to PBE included issues of logistics and student safety, coupled with student and teacher conditioning that learning traditionally takes place in a classroom, along with the premise that change is hard. This next section in the paper will break down the perceived benefits and barriers of PBE that the participants experienced.

Place provides context, academic improvement, and connection

The information on Table 2 provides an overview of three main perceived benefits of PBE spoken about by the participants. These benefits are that place provides context for student

Table 2

Perceived Benefits of PBE

Context	Academics	Connection
Allows authenticity	Improves academic performance	Place has feeling
Gives atmosphere	Helps with attendance	Place has flow
Involves senses	Allows variety in learning styles	Physiological benefits
Gives the ‘how’	Supports kinesthetic learning	Happiness in movement
Concrete concepts	Allows experiential learning	Gives outside time
	Provides hands-on learning	Love of outside play
	Experiences embed memories	More than knowledge
	Provides deeper cognition	Survival skills
	Supports struggling students	Indigenous ways
	Better for all students	Learning from the land

learning, that academic success is improved through using PBE as an instructional strategy, and that place imparts a special connection with the human experience. This connection can include personal connections to a place, as well as connection to the land itself, which transcends transmission of intellectual knowledge and engages somatic experience and memory. Although all of the participants shared many perceived benefits to teaching in place, Kate provided an eloquent depiction of what makes ‘place’ special. Kate explained that there was something about place that is difficult to reproduce in a traditional classroom. For example, since Kate teaches Business Administration, she says that it is hard to teach the students what she calls “the shape of

the way business gets done." When Kate taught at college, she set her classroom up like an actual office to get a feeling of the flow; to get a feeling for how you are supposed to present yourself in that setting. Kate claimed that this type of environment allowed for an authentic presence and provided more than intellectual knowledge. She claimed that it ultimately provided an atmosphere. For Kate's students this set up was not about "what" the students were supposed to learn, but more about helping them to understand "how" business is done.

Xavier described the traditional classroom experience as promoting sitting and listening and mainly benefiting auditory and visual learners. As a physical education teacher, Xavier is well aware of the benefits of kinesthetic learning as he strives to develop competent, confident, and motivated people to be active for a lifetime. While reflecting on his own childhood experiences of playing street hockey, as well as the habits of his own children, Xavier captured the feeling of joy that comes with outside play.

Odina also spoke of the physiological benefits of having students move around. She described PBE as "getting students up and moving to get blood flowing in order to get all those happy molecules moving in their bodies." According to Odina, PBE allows for "real connection." She described the learning as "this is what we're talking about - and here it is in front of your eyes. So, it makes things seem less abstract." Also, because senses are often involved with PBE, Odina feels that it creates stronger memories for the students. Finally, Odina referred to studies that have been done on PBE improving overall achievement for students who traditionally struggled with school. She claims that practices that are good for struggling students are also good for average students. Odina feels "not only do you engage your learners better, but then you help to create active and engaged citizens in a community." As well for Odina, PBE "makes [students] feel connected to where they live."

For Andi the benefits of PBE included the hands-on, experiential learning that all the other participants spoke about; however, Andi also felt that there was a special connection to the land that included survival skills and a return to the way Indigenous societies educated their children. For Andi, this looked like experiential education within the family – most likely done by grandparents. Andi does not like how modern life promotes the opposite of Indigenous ways. Andi stated, "We throw our children [in a school] so that we can get off to work." Andi would love to take her own children to experience living off the land. For her, this looks like spending a year in the Yukon to get away from the colonized way of modern life. Andi observed that society today has a fear of living off the land and she feels that the way of life that we are currently living is unsustainable. She believes that the benefits of connection to place could be farther reaching for the environment and society as well as improving the education system.

Conditioned since kindergarten

Despite the many perceived benefits of teaching in place, participants saw an overwhelming number of reasons why place-based experiences are not the norm at the secondary school level. The barriers perceived by the participants fall into three categories: (1) The overall logistics associated with taking students out of the school, along with concerns about student safety and behaviour; (2) Concerns that conditioning in the current school system has created an expectation in students and teachers to be in a classroom and at a desk since kindergarten, which also includes a lack of understanding about the value of PBE by students, teachers, and parents; and (3) The feeling that change is hard: schools do things in rigid ways, making new approaches difficult on many levels for the students, but especially for the teachers. Table 3 shows a complete list of the perceived and potential barriers mentioned by the participants.

Table 3

Perceived Barriers to PBE

Logistics and Safety	Conditioning	Change is Hard
Lack of suitable locations	Struggle to break routine	Fighting student apathy
Lack of community partners	Desk culture	Trying new things is hard
Lack of place knowledge	Classroom culture	Teachers stuck in their ways
Lack of funding	Outside seems foreign	Extra teacher engagement
Safety/danger concerns	Dynamics change outside	Requires presence
Supervision concerns	Teachers are fearful	Requires research
Student behaviour	Lack of teacher knowledge	Outside of comfort zone
Keeping students focused	Lack of teacher comfort	A lot of work initially
Losing students	Lack of legitimacy	
Permission forms	Lack of rigour	
School/district protocols	Lack of productivity	
Legal concerns	Lack of parent appreciation	
High-risk parent meetings	Not all teachers understand	
Parent misunderstanding	Not all teachers value PBE	
Travel logistics	PBE considered a privilege	
Not enough bus drivers		
Timetable is confining		
Day trips are disruptive		
Affects other classes		

Kate really liked the idea of place-based experiences for her students; however, she expressed many logistical and safety concerns. She also referenced the potential cost. Kate felt that there was a lack of suitable places to take students to learn, and that she had struggled in the past to find local businesses that would be willing to partner with her students. In Kate's experience, businesspeople did not have the time nor the inclination to bother with students. When Kate had to place students in practicum settings, she said that it was very difficult to find people who were willing to take in students because "time is money" in the business world. In addition to a lack of suitable locations, Kate felt that the logistics of organizing field trips, along with ensuring student safety, was a lot to handle. This included everything from booking a bus and the logistics of getting students to the location, to the parental consent and student permission forms, potential meetings that her district requires for certain trips and courses that are considered high-risk, the legal ramifications if something happened, and general concerns about student supervision. Kate spoke of wanting to organize a class trip to a remarkable local small business that also provided workshops. Unfortunately, the price for the workshop was prohibitive for her students. Andi also expressed having a fear of taking students outside a traditional classroom. This included controlling student behaviour and concerns that learning would not be accomplished; she worried about how to get the students to focus on the work at hand.

Odina, on the other hand, was much more comfortable taking students on place-based experiences, so her concerns focused mostly on the confines of the timetable and the disruptive nature of taking secondary students out on a full day trip. In order to participate in a field trip, students have to miss other classes, which is an imposition on other teachers and requires students to make up for missing work in other subject areas. Kate also referred to the 75-minute

classes being a barrier and suggested that perhaps raising awareness of the benefits of PBE would help to alleviate the disruption of other classes. Kate felt that if more teachers understood the benefits of PBE there would be more willingness to permit students to miss their other classes.

Introducing the concept of *conditioning*, Andi asserted that we have been trained since kindergarten to be in a classroom. She says that it "feels weird" to go outside of the classroom to do things as it changes the dynamics of everything. Andi admitted that she did not know how to do PBE and was not comfortable taking students outside further than on what would be considered a regular field trip. Xavier also noted that secondary school students have been programmed to sit at a desk since kindergarten. He says that secondary students have been in the system for so long that it is hard for them to break out of the norm, and that they are not comfortable engaging in something that they are not used to anymore.

Andi had strong feelings about the perceptions that other teachers, but especially parents, may have about PBE. Parents may also not be comfortable with students learning outside of a traditional classroom. Andi told a story about a family member, who was also a teacher, belittling her own daughter's outdoor learning experiences in elementary school. The comment made was paraphrased as: how can we expect your daughter to write a paragraph since she spent a full year "running through the forest?" Andi's concern was that PBE could be a challenge if parents, teachers, and even the students do not understand or value it; and, that this type of learning was not considered to be as rigorous as traditional schooling. Kate also observed that students themselves did not see field experiences as part of the regular curriculum, but rather as enrichment and optional. Kate had questions about how to better engage students to "buy in" to the importance of these experiences such that students saw the direct benefit. Odina feels that

PBE experiences are considered a privilege or reward by other teachers, and not necessarily viewed as part of the regular curriculum. This makes it hard to get other teachers on board with students missing their classes.

Odina spoke well to what could be called the *challenges of change*. Odina recognized that change is hard and commented that it starts with secondary school student apathy that is not necessarily present in the lower grades. She commented that standing in front of 24 indifferent secondary students and trying to get them to try new things can be a daunting task for a teacher. Odina also stated that, as a teacher, you cannot be stuck in your ways if you are going to try PBE and that traditional ways of instruction like using worksheets would be inadequate. Teachers need to be engaged, present, and willing to do the initial research that it might take to organize a place-based experience for the class. Odina recognized that, like anything you do for the first time, it is a lot of work, but then you would eventually have your "go-to field trips." This would be done by taking small steps at first or it could be too overwhelming. Odina assumed that this work must be rewarding, though. She also reflected on other teachers at her school who manage to facilitate place-based experiences, and she feels that the benefits to doing PBE are far greater than the barriers.

Supporting Teachers in PBE

The interview question about PBE and decolonization, as well as the question about potential support for teachers who would like to do PBE, both highlighted the possibility that teachers could use more professional development in these areas. Whether incorporating PBE or Indigenizing the curriculum, participants spoke to the importance of collaboration with other colleagues and receiving mentorship. Ironically, Odina commented that a place-based, experiential learning environment would be the best way to gain the knowledge and skills that

would be required to make such significant changes in the classroom. Much like what was learned about the barriers to PBE, it was recognized that supporting change in the classroom can be difficult. This was particularly evident in the discussions about decolonization. The effects of colonization were believed to be deeply embedded in the education system as we currently know it. Participants generally felt that the decolonization and Indigenization process would continue to be slow.

Reflections on the deep-seated nature of colonialism

Although participants made no clear connection as to whether or not PBE could play a role in decolonization, all participants certainly had an appreciation of the value of including Indigenous ways of knowing and learning into the current education system. Kate was not sure how to answer the question about PBE and connections to decolonization; this was something that she had not thought about before, but she ultimately liked the idea that as a society we are valuing Indigenous ways of learning more than ever. The concept of decolonization for Kate brought up images of life pre-contact, which she believed would have been better due to lower stress, and purposeful, individual apprenticeships occurring – not just students sitting at a desk. Kate described this Indigenous method of knowledge transfer as a "gentler" way to educate. She asserts that school as we know it today is Victorian, in the sense that it is tailored to reflect Industrial Revolution assembly lines and is disconnected from real life. Kate feels that the setup of school is not really a microcosm of anything in the real world. For Kate, in addition to being more authentic and gentler, Indigenous ways of education would include more connection to story. The use of story to teach morals and information was particularly appealing to Kate. Finally for Kate, Indigenous education includes the concept that we are never removed from the classroom; that the world is the classroom.

Andi had completed a master's degree in Indigenous Education, focused on administration and leadership with an Indigenous lens. For her, the process of decolonization is a very difficult matter to resolve, and "nothing in our school system is not colonized." Although a seemingly impossible task since the damage is so profound, she believes that it is important to talk about Indigenous ways of doing things, and that every little bit helps to move us forward as a society. Andi felt that it was a positive step to have an Indigenous course required for graduation in British Columbia since many people still have little understanding of our history, especially related to Indian Residential Schools. Unfortunately, Andi felt that many teachers are afraid to indigenize the curriculum. Andi also feels that teachers should not be forced to indigenize if they do not feel comfortable. That being said, Andi had a lot of experience working directly with Indigenous communities, and her feeling was that the Elders were understanding that, in the efforts to decolonize, people would potentially make mistakes along the way. Andi was taught that, "if you have a good heart and it's coming from a good place" then your efforts would be acceptable. Andi also suggested the importance of collaboration with others to learn Indigenous ways, especially by making connections to local Indigenous communities that allowed for experiential learning. For example, Andi had been to a longhouse ceremony and has seen masked dancers firsthand. Andi says that she has been learning about Indigenous ways for nineteen years now and that she still feels that she has a lot to learn.

Xavier was quick to admit that indigenizing the curriculum was not one of his stronger abilities; however, he was able to quote from the First Peoples Principles of Learning that states that learning takes place through story and place (First Nation Education Steering Committee, 2006). Xavier saw the value of connecting to place and claimed that places have stories as well. He recalled teaching Outdoor Education one semester, and the stories he taught to the students

about mountain names and the local Indigenous stories attached to these mountains. Much like Andi, Xavier also saw the process of decolonization as taking a long time, but he claimed that every effort gives a "little bit of added light."

Of all the participants, only Odina felt that she was advancing in her attempts to add Indigenous content to her classes. For Odina, decolonizing school would be more hands-on and have less of an emphasis on the written language. She admits that this could be controversial; but she questioned the current practice of memorizing facts to be recalled on a later date for a test. Odina felt that Indigenous ways of evaluating knowledge would be more immediate and practical to real life, perhaps focusing on oral traditions. Odina goes to great efforts to add Indigenous content to her classes and was particularly proud of her Foods 10 class which she felt was sufficiently indigenized as well as highlighting many other cultures. Odina was still not satisfied with her senior Foods course and was striving to add even more Indigenous content. Odina recognized that it takes time to work with the curriculum, to find age-appropriate resources, and to incorporate social justice experiences in her classes. Having never seriously considered the importance of place in her courses, she also wondered what role that place could play in her course content in her efforts to indigenize.

Resources, professional development, collaboration, and mentorship

The supports needed for decolonization and PBE garner similar needs of professional development and mentorship. Specifically pertaining to PBE, participants claimed that in order to implement PBE they would be faced with logistical challenges, time constraints, and a lack of resources. Table 4 is a breakdown of the complete list of supports that participants felt would help them to incorporate PBE into their classrooms.

Table 4

Perceived Supports Needed to Do PBE

Time/resources/logistics	Professional Development	Collaboration and Mentorship
Setting up experiences	Educate teachers on benefits	Time for collaboration
Finding places	Pro-D on how to do PBE	Cross-curricular collaboration
Locating resources	Hands-on Pro-D	Collaboration to find places
Having support teachers	Place-based Pro-D	Team-teaching opportunities
Developing a ‘place’ database	Educate administration	More mentorship
Cross referencing curriculum	Educate SBO	Systematic mentorship
Changing classroom set-up		Hands-on mentorship
Obtaining guest speakers		Build PBE confidence
Funding for TTOCs		
Funding/grants for trips		
Funding for bussing		
Transportation options		
Timetable flexibility		
Alleviate missing classes		

As there are many perceived barriers to doing PBE with students, it seems logical that the perceived supports needed to make PBE happen would also be many. Participants had a number of helpful suggestions for supporting teachers. Since the time constraints of the traditional secondary school timetable was felt to be a substantial barrier, both Kate and Odina suggested that there should be more flexibility in the schedule to avoid inconveniencing other teachers.

Also, they both suggested increased funding for trips and logistical support in the way of bus drivers and Teachers Teaching on Call (TTOCs) to cover classes for teachers who would like to do day trips with their students. Funding TTOCs could also allow time for mentorship and collaborative opportunities among teachers.

An interesting suggestion made by Kate was to develop an extensive database of potential educational locations for all subject areas. Kate thinks that this would be especially useful for teachers who are not yet comfortable with PBE and who are just starting to experiment with it. Teachers sharing resources and past experiences with PBE would go a long way to helping overcome the initial investment of time needed to find suitable places. Xavier also felt that expanding place knowledge takes time and suggested that a dedicated curricular support teacher could help in this area. Xavier went as far as to suggest that the traditional four walls, desks, and a whiteboard set-up at school were part of the problem. He reflected, "what do you think a teacher is going to use? What do you think a teacher is going to get comfortable with if that is what is available?" The school where Xavier teaches was built in the 1950s. He said that he has seen new buildings that support a more open classroom concept that have changed the typical classroom environment.

It was suggested that educating secondary school teachers about the benefits of PBE could help to alleviate some of the barriers and help to support the implementation of PBE; however, Odina also suggested that support needs to come from the administrative level of the school, as well as from the School Board Office. Professional development about PBE would need to happen at all levels in the district. She felt that support at the upper levels would help to alleviate some of the barriers that teachers face. Odina spoke specifically to an increase in the popularity of PBE but that there was a lack of official Professional Development opportunities

offered by the school district around the topic of PBE during dedicated professional development days. Odina called for specific hands-on, experiential, professional development about what is PBE and how do you do PBE. Odina does not want "boring Pro-D where you just talk about PBE and read some articles." According to Odina, professional development for PBE, by its nature, should be done in place.

Finally, collaboration and mentorship could have an important role in supporting teachers who want to do PBE – especially when it comes to decolonization. Andi felt very strongly that teachers cannot be forced into changing their ways, specifically when it comes to Indigenizing the curriculum. She claims that we have to be sensitive to meeting people where they are on their journey. Andi recognized the emotional process that learning can be, and the powerful role that an Indigenous mentor had in helping her along her educational journey. Xavier and Odina both suggested that if teachers are interested in PBE, collaboration with other teachers and mentorship are an important part in overcoming the perceived barriers that teachers have around doing PBE. Xavier spoke of his experience bringing in a guest speaker to class; he felt that not only did the students benefit from hearing another perspective, but also as a teacher, it helped to confirm and add to his own knowledge as well. Xavier spoke highly of his experience collaborating with other teachers and concluded that collaboration could also help him to gain a greater understanding of what is available around him for place-based opportunities. He thinks that he could learn about potential places from other teachers who have been in the area longer than himself.

Odina had the strongest comments about the importance of mentorship. She had spent time volunteering as a chaperone on school Outdoor Education field trips. Odina claimed that this experience of shadowing another teacher had primed her to take students out. She had "no

concerns about losing students on her first field trip." Interestingly, Odina commented that she is not sure if she ever would have attempted a place-based experience if she had not had the previous experience with her mentor; she thinks that it was the mentorship that gave her the confidence to lead a trip on her own. Odina also explained how she had since mentored another teacher to take students out on field trips and was passing on the skills that she had acquired with her mentor. Odina felt that there was a need for more mentorship in her school district, specifically around PBE, and that there should be a system in place to mentor teachers. Odina also had positive experiences when collaborating – sharing ideas and tips with other teachers who organize place-based experiences. One tip that she particularly liked was to dress all the students in the same colour so that they could be easily spotted when out in the field. Odina was quite animated and excited as she recalled the camaraderie of collaborating and planning trips. Odina also suggested that team teaching would be a great addition to the collaboration process.

Discussion

The primary purpose of this research was to learn what secondary school teachers thought about the field of PBE. The study aimed to understand how teachers define PBE, their perceived benefits and barriers to implementing PBE with students, as well as the perceived connections of PBE to decolonizing and indigenizing the curriculum, and the supports that teachers perceived to need to in order to implement PBE into their teaching. This question emerged out of my own positive experiences with PBE, what I perceived to be a lack of PBE at the secondary school level, and my desire to support teachers interested in utilizing PBE. Overwhelmingly, participants in this study perceived PBE as beneficial for their students; however, there were many perceived barriers to implementing PBE in secondary schools. Overall, there were strong recommendations for more mentorship and PBE support for teachers.

Interestingly, there seemed to be no clear connection between learning in place and indigenizing the curriculum. This discussion focuses on the implication of these themes in relation to the literature on these topics and my own experiences with PBE.

Essence of PBE Experience

First of all, I will provide a brief summary of what I understood to be each participant's experience with the phenomenon of PBE. This is in line with the phenomenological method that would have me create a composite description of 'what' and 'how' the participants experienced the phenomenon of PBE.

Andi

Although Andi had minimal direct experience with PBE she seemed excited while considering the potential connections between PBE supporting Indigenous ways of knowing and being, especially in regard to learning off the land. Andi had vivid memories of learning by the seashore as a child visiting her grandparents. She was inspired by the concept of hands-on, experiential learning that would allow a reconnection to traditional ways of learning, but specifically traditional ways of living that are more sustainable than colonial ways of living. However, for Andi, her comfort level with PBE only went as far as potentially doing a field trip to a traditional museum. She admits that the logistics of taking students outside to learn can be stressful as there is a perceived lack of control when outside of the classroom. Andi seemed particularly concerned with a lack of parental understanding around PBE, specifically that PBE could be perceived as less rigorous than traditional, more typical, ways of learning.

Kate

Despite having minimal direct experience with PBE, Kate had some of the most profound insights into the potential benefits of PBE. All participants espoused the benefits of place providing

context, as well as offering kinesthetic learning experiences; however, Kate describes place as providing an atmosphere and a feeling – a "flow" she called it. Place, for Kate, provides an authenticity that cannot easily be replicated in a school setting. Kate, from what she shared, seems keen to include more place-based experiences for her students; however, she feels that there is a lack of suitable places and a lack of support in the community to partner with the school. This being said, Kate does suggest that teachers could easily be supported if a database of potential educational locations was provided to them. Although Kate had not considered the potential for PBE and decolonization, she was supportive of the idea and had positive feelings about Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Kate's view of education pre-contact was of a gentler more authentic time that would have included collaborative apprenticeships in harmony with the surroundings.

Xavier

As the only male in the study, Xavier provided a perspective from someone who regularly includes place in his teaching. For Xavier, this place is specifically the skating rink. He had fond memories of place and appreciated the significance of place as he reflected on his own experiences. Xavier had interesting insights into how the physical parameters of school itself have programmed students to sit at desks or to stare at screens. Xavier feels that it is hard for some students to get out of their comfort zones and do something that is considered outside of the norm. He also feels that place-based experiences benefit the teachers as well as the students. Xavier believes that teachers need more place-based curricular support as well as collaborative experiences. He recalls an experience with Odina, the final participant in the study, where they got their classes together for a place-based lesson on nutrition that involved Xavier's students making pancakes in Odina's school kitchen. Although Xavier claims that Indigenizing the curriculum is not one of his strong suits, he was familiar with the First Peoples Principles of Learning and was able to identify that

learning occurs through story and place. Xavier feels that many secondary school subjects could find appropriate locations close enough to the school to walk to. Although Xavier was not sure if this would lead to decolonization, he felt that it was a step in the right direction to connect to place.

Odina

Of all the participants, Odina seemed to have the most familiarity with actively creating place-based experiences for her students both in and outside of the school. As an applied skills teacher, her course naturally offers an authentic hands-on style of learning that Odina claims allows more time for authentic relationship building. Odina recognized that place does not need to be outside but can also be a built environment. Odina feels that place can be nature, or the community, and she describes place as a spectrum. Odina had several influential mentoring experiences which she claims gave her the confidence to take students on field trips. She shared that she feels that it is field-based experiences that students will remember the most. According to Odina, being in place not only engages learners better, but also helps to create active, engaged citizens in a community. Odina also goes to great lengths to indigenize her curriculum as well as to include activities with a focus on social justice.

Benefits

All of the participants had a positive perception of the potential benefits of PBE; even though they had different levels of experience with the phenomenon. The participants perceived three main benefits of PBE which are that it (1) provides context to learning, (2) improves academic performance, and (3) creates connection. Overall participant perceptions of the benefits of PBE were confirmed by the literature. Gruenewald (2013) claimed that school reformers over the years have been ignorant to the fact that traditional school does not provide the context that students need to make connections to their own lives; however, participants were able to quickly

recognize the potential for context that PBE could provide. Kate expressed this when she stated, "I think that [with PBE] you are providing context in a way that just does not happen in a classroom or is incredibly hard to reproduce accurately or even reproduce."

Participants also perceived an improvement in academic performance with place-based experiences which Sobel (2014) claims is a by-product of the contextual nature of PBE. Improvement in academic performance does not just mean that students get better grades. Participants saw academic performance as being reflected in attendance and authentic learning experiences that leads to deeper cognition. Vander Ark et al. (2020) confirm that the academic benefits of place are that in addition to providing instructional and cultural context, place also provides motivation for learning. The current school structure tends to remove place-based experiences, which are more common at the primary school level, and more likely to deliver quality learning experiences, with a focus on simple content transfer at the secondary school level (Vander Ark et al. (2020). Andi observed that contrary to what commonly happens at the secondary school level, "students always seem to succeed or enjoy themselves when they are actually using their hands and are doing experiential learning."

For the participants the idea of connection had a range of meanings. Connection included everything from a special feeling that a place elicited to traditional survival knowledge associated with the land. Naxaxalhts'i has dedicated his life's work to chronicling the place names and stories of the Stó:lō peoples. One thing that he says that he has learned over the years is that it is really important to have personal connections to places (Naxaxalhts'i/McHalsie, 2007). Having a personal connection helps you to want to take care of the land and it helps you to remember your ancestors and the history of the land. Louv (2014) claims that in this current technological age, we need to *reconnect* to nature to counter the effects of 'nature-deficit

disorder' which he describes as the growing gap between children and nature. In response to this growing disconnect with nature, Louv has developed what he calls the 'nature-principle' which states that a reconnection to the natural world is fundamental to human health, wellbeing, spirit and survival (2014). Louv cites a growing body of evidence that nature impacts our senses, intelligence, physical, psychological, and spiritual health. Connecting to nature also impacts the bonds of family, friendship, and community (Louv, 2014). Participants observed happiness, the love of being outside and the connection to community that place-based experiences provided. Kate summed this up when she said, "(Place) is not so much the knowledge as it is the atmosphere...the idea is that you get the flow...you get the feeling."

In order to help to counter the effects of settler colonialism, and the insatiable desire that the *xwelítem* (upriver Halq'eméylem term for settlers/white people) have for the resources of this land, Carlson (2023) suggests that we adopt the practice of *tómiyeqw*. *Tómiyeqw* is the Stó꞉lō practice of thinking about the land in terms of honouring their ancestors seven generations past and, equivalently, the land providing for seven generations into the future. Carlson (2023) advocates that "we all need a strong connection to the land." It is by developing a deep relationship with the land that settlers to the area will feel more of a need to protect the land and the culture of the local Indigenous inhabitants. In the transient nature of today's society, Carlson feels that even if we are only physically here in Stó꞉lō territory for a little while, we need to act like we are here long term. Essentially, we need to develop a similar connection that the local Indigenous peoples of the area have to this place. According to Odina, "the real benefit (of PBE) comes when you are in a place, whether that is nature or our community...place-based makes (students) feel connected to where they live."

Even though participants in the study generally perceived PBE as being positive for learning, none of the participants were consistently putting place at the centre of their curriculum. In order to gain insight into this, let us consider the potential obstacles discussed by the participants.

Barriers

The perceived barriers to implementing PBE experienced by the participants were: (1) logistics and safety, (2) student and teacher conditioning, and (3) the feeling that change is hard. Obviously, these barriers are not insurmountable, as I take students on place-based experiences on a regular basis as do many other educators. I find the concerns about student safety and behaviour interesting as studies show that often student behaviour improves when learning has context (Louv, 2012; Sobel 2014). In my experience, students do not want to be lost and do very well at staying with the group. As well, students often behave better for me when out in public or on a field trip or with a guest-speaker than they do while in the classroom; however, perceptions of students getting lost or behaving inappropriately are a significant barrier for the teacher participants.

The issue of safety perhaps speaks to the perception that outside is somehow dangerous. Louv (2012) comments that nature is often vilified - perceived as dirty and unsafe, which helps to support the narrative that we need to keep our children inside to keep them safe. This could be true in parts of the world where levels of pollution outside are in fact dangerous (Landrigan et al., 2019); however, for the most part being outside is much healthier for children (Sobel, 2014) and during the recent COVID 19 pandemic, health care professionals encouraged us all to go outside more to help avoid this highly contagious respiratory disease. It would be interesting to

look further into why the participants were particularly concerned about safety when the literature shows it generally to be a non-issue.

Teaching in place does require extra time and effort to begin; however, I generally find students more engaged outside or in place than in the classroom, and that it is worth the effort. My more recent classroom experiences find me battling with students who would rather be on their phones. Studies are showing that cell phone addiction among young people needs urgent attention (Nikita, et al., 2015; Sahu, et al., 2019) This distraction of technology rarely happens when I am teaching in place or when I have students on a field trip. The high level of engagement that students experience is worth the effort.

The most significant barrier that the participants perceived was that students and teachers have been highly conditioned to participate in school in a certain way. When I ponder the radical departure from traditional schooling that the Environment School in Maple Ridge has embraced, it makes me very excited for the future of education in the Lower Mainland since a precedent has been set. However, when I consider the conditioning of over 100 years of Eurocentric schooling tradition, I also sense that place-based change will still be very difficult. Participants perceived this as well and mentioned the dominant culture of traditional schooling being a significant factor, along with perceptions of a lack of legitimacy, rigour, and productivity in a non-traditional setting. Miller and Twum (2017) confirm that the issue of conditioning is also significant where it concerns the anxieties over student achievement.

Participants recognized that the logistics of PBE can be frustrating. Specifically, the timetable of traditional high school is not supportive of innovative place-based programming. There are alternative models of timetables that allow for flexibility that are not as radical as Environmental School, but still allow for a more authentic learning experience. For example,

Imagine High Integrated Arts and Technology in Chilliwack, which opened in 2021, has no bells. This flexible schedule allows for longer project-based, inquiry-based, experiential learning opportunities. Students are podded to allow for interdisciplinary learning in their *Integrated Core Learning Communities* in the morning and then students pick electives for the afternoon. Twice a year the regular classes stop and allow for a two-week long 'deep dive' into project-based, place-based areas of student interest. This timetable attempts to honour the need for the additional time that authentic learning experiences sometimes require. This is a great example of an alternate secondary school timetable that could allow for more freedom and less disruption to other classes. If the will is there, it is possible to provide timetable alternatives to traditional secondary school schedules and to change the traditional way of educating students.

Decolonization

The main sentiment to come out of the question about PBE and decolonization was the feeling that colonialism is deep-seated in the education system and that the system is difficult to change. This is troubling. The literature speaks volumes to the power of place in the decolonization process (Gruenewald, 2003; Seawright, 2014; Webber et al., 2021; Wildcat et al., 2014); however, none of the participants had considered this connection. Most were still grappling with Indigenizing the curriculum and spoke in terms of small steps. Odina was the only teacher who felt that she was giving sufficient attention to Indigenous content in at least one of her courses. Andi aspires to teach BC First Peoples so by default she will be teaching an Indigenized class. This is one of the courses that as of 2024 will fulfill the new Indigenous graduation requirement in BC.

Andi pointed out that teachers are perhaps afraid to indigenize, and she also insisted that teachers cannot be forced to teach something for which they are not comfortable. This brings us

to cross-roads. Teachers are required to teach the curriculum. The curriculum requires us to indigenize, but we have teachers who are afraid or who are not comfortable doing this. It is my feeling that teachers need even more support in Indigenizing the curriculum than what is currently being provided. The current system is Eurocentric and reflects colonial ways of educating (Coast, 2013; Little Bear, 2009; Seawright, 2014; Simpson, 2014; Wildcat et al., 2014). If colonization is so deep-seated in the education system, then there may need to be even more radical changes yet to come since, unfortunately, the current education system is not yet equitable for Indigenous students. Regardless of how teachers feel about Indigenization, Vander Ark et al. (2020) contend that one of the main tenants of PBE is that it provides an equitable learning environment, not just for Indigenous students, but for all students. According to Coast (personal correspondence, April 26, 2023), Indigenous students will often excel in place-based activities that are culturally familiar to them, which also gives unique opportunities for leadership by Indigenous students.

Support

The supports that participants felt that teachers needed to implement PBE were resources, professional development, and mentorship. These perceived supports fall in line with what the literature suggests about change being difficult. My feeling is that unless support comes from the administrative or school district level, the perceived barriers would prevent the typical teacher from actively seeking to use place-based strategies in their pedagogy. Professional development in BC happens at the provincial level, district level, and at the school level. Professional development support can come from teacher suggestions as well as administrative insights into best-practice and overall district vision for the schools in the district. According to the

participants in this study, there has been a lack of professional development in the area of PBE in this district specifically at the secondary level.

Accepting that change is difficult, Sharpe and Nishimura (2017) claim that mentorship plays a foundational role in supporting people who are dealing with a new initiative. It is interesting that Odina had received the most amount of mentoring in PBE and was consequently the most actively incorporating PBE activities with her classes. This speaks to the importance of having an intentional and systematic mentorship program to overcome the perceived barrier that change is difficult, and to truly support teachers who are interested in PBE initiatives. There is a growing acceptance of the importance of collaboration time for teachers to work together and work on areas of interest and inquiry together. Hargreaves & O'Connor (2018) attest that teachers working and learning together can have an impact on the culture of an entire school. As of the beginning of the 2022 school year at the secondary school in this study, time was allotted once a month for teachers to collaborate on areas that interest them. It will be intriguing to see if there is an increase in place-based discussions.

I find the perceptions about resources such as transportation and funding interesting. Although I agree that it would be great to receive more funding for field trips and bussing, one of the tenets of PBE is to stay local. Xavier pointed out, "As you go across the curricular subject matter you could probably find something to teach that would be a simple walk for many of the subject areas." This is my feeling for this school, as well as many schools – that 'place' could be right outside the doors of the school. Kate did mention how beneficial a place database could be to supporting teachers. It takes time to find locations and make community connections. If a school was determined to connect to place, I can see the benefit of providing teachers with a list of possible relevant locations close to the school.

This school was just recently slated for a new building to be completed in the next five years. It will be interesting to see what happens regarding the discussions of design and making connections to place. Xavier had suggested that the design of the school itself has an impact on the way that teachers present curriculum. This would be an opportune time for this school to consider what other schools in the lower mainland are doing to support best practice and reflecting on how their school can ultimately better support decolonization in the education system. Hopefully the teachers in this study will be consulted in the design of the new school.

Limitations

The findings in this study have to be seen in light of several limitations. The most glaring limitation is the size of the research study. With only four participants, the findings do not represent a large enough sample to be able to make any sweeping generalizations about PBE at the secondary level. It could be argued that the participants themselves are biased toward a positive view about PBE since they all knew that I use PBE in my own practice. It would be interesting to speak to teachers who are more supportive of traditional schooling practices. The question about decolonization only lightly got into the subject. Feelings of white supremacy would be hard to determine and definitely difficult to admit to in a study such as this. Colonialism is a challenging topic to discuss, and it was not my intention to dig deeply into this with participants.

This study is also limited by a timeframe that is in line with completing a master's degree. Future research could allow for a larger sample of teachers, but more importantly from other secondary schools in the district and different school districts. Further research would be to include the perspectives of administrators or school board officials since they are more able to influence the policy for a school or district. Although there was a question about perceptions

around PBE in relation to decolonization, I feel this topic needs further exploration as there was not a strongly perceived connection between the two concepts for the participants. Future research should also question what specific supports secondary school teachers perceive they need to help decolonize their practice.

Implications and Recommendations

Based on what I learned from these four schoolteachers, I see five main ways for leadership teams to support place-based programs at the secondary school level. All of the teachers in this study were supportive of PBE providing significant benefits to students, which could potentially be reflective of the general population at this school, especially as the popularity of PBE is growing. However, if a place-based program is to take root at the secondary school level, there are several factors to potentially consider. These recommendations could be especially useful for district level leadership, school leadership, instructional team leaders, department heads or individual teachers who would like to support PBE in an authentic and meaningful way.

Professional Development and Mentorship Programs

First of all, professional development and intentional mentorship would be a central tenet to supporting teachers and instilling long term change. This stems from the experience of the participants that change is hard, and support is needed for change to be lasting. It would be beneficial to offer Professional Development to teachers; however, perhaps more enduring to provide a mentorship program aimed at alleviating the challenges that are associated with PBE.

Logistical Supports

A simple support could be to provide a locally developed ‘place database’ for teachers to reference as participants expressed mostly just being ignorant of what places were available

close to the school. A more substantial support would be to address the limitations of the traditional bell schedule and the constraints of the timetable. Participants mentioned that infringing on other classes was a significant obstacle. The solution to allowing for serious place-based experiences could mean a revamp of the traditional bell schedule to allow for more authentic learning experiences as seen in school such as the K-12 Environmental School in Maple Ridge and Imagine High Integrated Arts and Technology Secondary School in Chilliwack.

Student Safety

Perceptions around student safety seemed to be a significant perceived barrier for some of the participants. It would be worth addressing this concern around student behaviour and field trip safety. It stands to reason that teachers as well as students could use basic safety protocols for taking students outside; however, it should be reinforced that the literature does not consider student safety an issue, in fact, student attention and engagement increase when teaching in 'place.'

Changing Desk-culture

It feels that the biggest challenge to overcome would be to change the colonized culture of sitting at a desk in a classroom to learn. Although sitting at a desk to learn works for some students, the participants overwhelmingly felt that this was detrimental to many students. The problem of course is that this practice starts in kindergarten for most students. Changing the culture does take time and can be especially difficult to do after years of learning in a traditional way. Patience and perseverance are necessary when changing a culture, keeping in mind that change is hard.

Decolonizing the Education System

Finally, although participants were all supportive of Indigenizing the curriculum, not all participants felt that they understood what this meant and/or did not feel that they were doing service to this part of the curriculum, plus there was a feeling that teachers could not be forced to indigenize the curriculum. In regard to PBE and decolonization, overall participants in this study did not see a clear connection between the two. This potentially shows a need for even more professional development and mentorship in addition to the support that is already being provided in this school district.

Even though change is hard, it is not impossible for those who believe in the benefits of PBE. Since the challenges of breaking routine are so significant, it would also make sense that students would potentially need to be taught from an earlier age how to engage in place-based, project-based, inquiry-based learning so that by secondary school this is seen as the norm.

Conclusion

I remember visiting with some friends in England when I lived there twenty years ago. During our dinner conversation, my friend's elderly grandfather, in all sincerity, asked me what it was like to be from a country with no history. These words have haunted me over the years, and they make me sad on many levels. To begin with I was shocked by the Eurocentric attitude of superiority that still existed, but mostly I was hurt at how flippantly the 100s of years of history of my own Métis ancestors were so quickly dismissed as irrelevant, as well as the history of the First Nations and Inuit peoples who have been on this land since time immemorial. I have a strong connection to this land we call Canada. I have been deeply shaped by the place where I was born and the place where I now live in the Lower Mainland of BC. As a secondary school teacher, I have a fierce resolve to address the importance of place in the educational community.

This research study stems from my respect for this land and my appreciation for the insights of other educators. Although I personally have a passion for PBE, this study has given me special insight into the perceptions of typical teachers in the secondary school system. I have learned a lot from the participants in this study and professionally I feel better equipped to support secondary school teachers who may be interested in implementing PBE.

According to the participants, there is something special about PBE that connects students to the curriculum in a way that traditional practices of learning in a classroom is unable to provide. They attributed some of this uniqueness to the authentic context for learning that PBE can provide, in addition to the variety of learning styles that are supported by PBE. Barriers to implementing PBE stem from Eurocentric traditions of schooling that include routine and sitting at a desk to learn. This culture is hard to break away from, and there is a fear of teaching methods that disrupt this tradition. This fear is reflected in the teachers as well as the parents, and unfortunately students have been intrinsically trained by the time that they get to secondary school to sit at a desk to learn. There is hope though, as different models of secondary education are starting to make their way into the mainstream. A call for more professional development and mentorship in the area of PBE can make a difference in embedding long-term change. Finally, the topic of decolonization in the current public school system is no longer taboo, and significant efforts are being made to challenge the system as we currently know it. PBE can play a role in supporting the dismantling of the colonized education system by connecting all students to place; but, more personally, to supporting students' development of a deep-seated relationship with the land that we all live on together: a relationship that not only has the potential to protect the planet, strengthen communities, and decolonize our education system but also to provide powerful learning experiences for students.

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Appendix A

Human Research Ethics Board - Certificate of Ethical Approval

HREB Protocol No: 101184

Principal Investigator: Mrs. Jacquie Blaschek

Team Members: Mrs. Jacquie Blaschek (Principal Investigator)

Dr. Vandy Britton (Supervisor)

Title: Perceptions of Secondary School Teachers about Place Based Education

Department: Faculty of Education, Community & Human Development\Teacher Education

Effective: December 05, 2022

Expiry: December 04, 2023

The Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) has reviewed and approved the ethics of the above research. The HREB is constituted and operated in accordance with the requirements of the UFV Policy on Human Research Ethics and the current Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2).

The approval is subject to the following conditions:

1. Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.

2. Approval is for one year. A Request for Renewal must be submitted 2-3 weeks before the above expiry date.

3. Modifications to the approved research or research team must be submitted as an Amendment to be reviewed and approved by the HREB before the changes can be implemented. If the

changes are substantial, a new request for approval must be sought. *****An exception can be made where the change is necessary to eliminate an immediate risk to participant(s) (TPCS2 Article 6.15). Such changes may be implemented but must be reported to the HREB within 5 business days.

4. If an adverse incident occurs, an Adverse Incident Event form must be completed and submitted.

5. During the project period, the HREB must be notified of any issues that may have ethical implications.

6. A Final Report Event Form must be submitted to the HREB when the research is complete or terminated.

*Please note a Research Continuity Plan is no longer required.

Thank you, and all the best with your research.

UFV Human Research Ethics Board

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Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Tell me a bit about yourself as a teacher.
2. There can be many facets of place-based education (PBE). How would you define PBE?
3. What do you believe could be some potential benefits of using PBE with your students?
4. What do you see as some potential challenges or barriers for using PBE with your students?
5. What potential connections can you see between PBE and decolonization and/or Indigenizing the curriculum?
6. How could we better support secondary school teachers who would like to use PBE with their students?
7. What questions do you personally have about PBE? Is this something you could imagine yourself doing with your students? Why or why not?