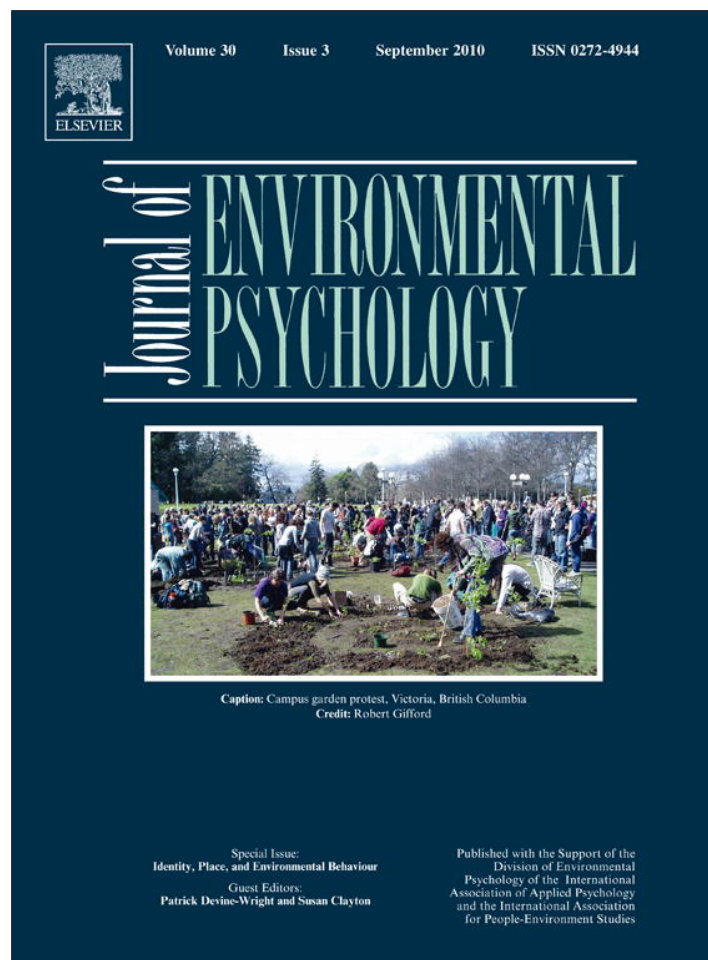


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Exploring insideness in urban children's sense of place

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ABSTRACT

This study, informed by phenomenology and ethnography, explores urban children's relationship with their urban environment: In what ways do urban children exhibit "insideness" in their sense of place? This study proposes "insideness" as a conceptual construct to understand urban children's sense of place in its ecological and dynamic nature. Employing qualitative research methods, the study explores place stories of urban children who live in low-income, immigrant neighborhoods in New York City. The study finds that as children cultivate their sense of place, they construct "insideness" in their sense of place including 1) environmental understanding (i.e., contextualized, comprehensive, and critical understanding of a place), 2) environmental competence (i.e., knowing how to navigate and engage in a place), and 3) diverse, strong affective relationships with a place. Using "insideness" as a conceptual tool, this study discusses children's emplaced understanding and active and dialogical positionality in the development of their sense of place.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, research on place has proliferated in various academic areas such as environmental psychology, philosophy, geography, and urban planning and architecture. However, relatively limited attention has been paid to place inquiry from the education community (Hutchinson, 2004). Recently educational researchers and designers have begun to include "place" under various names and programs. Whereas there has been increasing interests in and attempts for sense of place approaches and practices, less attention has been paid to developing a coherent pedagogical framework through documenting and explaining what children's sense of place is and how place matters in an educational context (Gruenewald, 2003; Nespor, 2008). This led us to realize that a fuller understanding of children's sense of place is necessary in designing of educational approaches. This inquiry has grown out of our desire as urban educators to be informed about designing and implementing place-conscious education. This inquiry is pedagogically oriented in that we hoped an understanding of how children develop insideness in their sense of place would inform us and other educators about how to support their students' construction and cultivation of sense of place.

Our primary research interest is to explore urban children's sense of place in its ecological nature, using the concept of

"insideness" as a way to examine children's sense of place. Considering the dynamic and complex nature of one's sense of place, making any effort to categorize children's sense of place could be problematic. For example, children may be insiders in some aspects or dimensions in their place experience, while they may not be in other aspects, dimensions, or contexts. Thus, by imposing categories and labels on children, we risk essentializing their sense of place and missing what might be important as aspects of one's sense of place – that is contradictory, complex, and dynamic. In this study, we take the conceptualization of insideness and outsideness as interpretive lenses rather than as analytic categories to apply in an empirical study as Relph (1976) noted. Thus, instead of characterizing each child's sense of place into categories, we explore "insideness" aspects or events in a sense of place when it is expressed or exhibited in children's stories through their narratives and visual representations. In the study we are not trying to answer *what* (e.g., Who is an insider or an outsider? Who exhibits stronger insideness in their sense of place?). Rather we try to explore *how*: In what ways do urban children develop and exhibit insideness in their sense of place?

Drawing upon the conceptualizations proposed by three components model of place (Relph, 1976; Stedman, 2002), we framed our exploration of children's place experience with three guiding questions: 1) How do children perceive and represent their place, 2) what activities frame how children engaged in their place, and 3) what meanings do children construct regarding their place? We pay attention to how these aspects overlap to illustrate insideness in their sense of place.

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2. Conceptual background

2.1. Sense of place

In this study, “sense of place” is employed as a conceptual construct to guide the exploration of children’s relationship with their place(s). In the literature, various aspects of human relationships with a place have been theorized, explored, and discussed using various constructs such as “place affiliation” (Moore, 1986), “place attachment” (Altman & Low, 1992), “place identity” (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996), “place satisfaction” (Stedman, 2002), “place bonding” (Pearce, 1977), and “sense of place” (Olwig, 1982). Among the diverse constructs, we employ “sense of place” for the conceptual features that the construct offers: Sense of place offers a broad, encompassing conceptual basis for the exploration of human relationships with a place (Smaldone, Harris, & Sanyal, 2005). We define sense of place as a person’s cognitive, affective, and embodied understandings of a place that are cultivated through a living ecological relationship with the place (Cobb, 1977; Lim, 2006). Sense of place, therefore, includes a person’s overall relationship with a place as a collection of cognition, attitude, and identity based on meanings created by the person (Stedman, 2002). Thus this broad definition allows us to explore the diverse ways and meanings that children develop from their place experiences.

2.2. Constructivism

Children have great chance to strike out alone or with peers to explore the environment, looking for new experiences and adventure (Moore, 1986; Sobel, 1993). Constructivism supports us in looking into children’s active engagement in the development of their sense of place (Matthews, 1992). Children do not passively react or adapt to environmental elements but rather leverage various cognitive activities to mediate the influence of the place. The place is not an objective phenomenon rather it has to be interpreted and reconstructed by children. Thus children’s development of sense of place needs to be viewed as a dynamic process of children’s experiencing, interacting, and sense-making (Chawla & Salvadori, 1999). Furthermore, place experience is facilitated within physical, social, and cultural contexts where all the objects and events have specific meanings that are socially constructed as well. Therefore, research is not to discover and define the “eternal child”; rather, it is for the “historical child” who exists in real places in real time under particular social and historical conditions (Grause & Walsh, 1998). This emphasis on context is a main argument of transactional constructivism (Matthews, 1992). To develop a fuller understanding of children’s place experiences, we need to understand the place as it is experienced, interacted with, understood, and constructed by children.

Over time, children’s interactions with the environment and the assimilation of environmental experiences would produce a feeling of competence and confidence. As the children develop, new place experiences and opportunities need to become available to support the growth of competence. If children encounter too many barriers (e.g., parental restrictions and interventions, streets with heavy traffic, social deprivation, etc.), motivation toward competence will waver and desirable development might be disturbed. Children need to cultivate and be satisfied with their place experiences to support their healthy development and to maximize their developmental potential (Moore, 1986).

2.3. Conceptualizing child–place interaction

A transactional view on child–place interaction offers a way to approach complicated processes of place experience (Golledge,

1987; Hart & Moore, 1973). This view suggests that one can understand children’s sense of place by how they dynamically interact with place through the various activities they engage in and the environmental behavior they take up (Matthews, 1992). A transactional view also emphasizes the dialectical relationship between children and place. How children make sense of place-based information informs how they solve the problems or challenges they confront in that place. At the same time, how children seek to solve problems within places informs the new place-based knowledge they acquire.

The transactional view focuses on children’s relationship with their place “in action” (Graumann, 2002). A child–place interaction cannot be assumed as a simple and static stimulus–response relationship nor can it be explained by examining the child and the place alone (Greeno, 1994). Rather, the transactional model indicates the importance of both the context and process of transaction. By keeping children’s relationship with place “in action,” how and why transactions shape children’s sense of place are foregrounded (Golledge, 1987). Further, such an “in action” stance places children’s identification of affordances and other qualities of place as of equal importance as the place itself. Thus, to develop a holistic understanding of children’s sense of place, we need to look into the interactional and relational relationship between a place and a child, that is, *a child in a place* (Graumann, 2002).

The transactional view also emphasizes children’s relationship with their place as on-going. Human beings are ever-changing, and thus the meanings and relationships we ascribe to place are dynamic. Sense of place is never a final product/artifact. The development of a sense of place is always in progress. This view stands in contrast to much of the earlier work on place which viewed place as a static concept (Smaldone et al., 2005). Within this view, place takes on a static role with essential identities based on tradition and history (Gustafson, 2001). While static models have offered depth of understanding, the actual meaning of place is often abstracted from its context. With a dynamic view of place, the focus of inquiry should be on the process of how actively children cultivate their relationship with a place. In this child–place relationship, children purposefully participate in a place with intentions, therefore, the place is being used and evaluated in terms of its affordances in the relationship (Min & Lee, 2006). To examine the interactional nature between a child and a place, we employ two concepts: place identity and affordances of place, which work together in a dialectical relationship to facilitate one’s place experience.

2.3.1. Place identity

Place identity is formed through an accumulation of cognitions and affects about the physical environment encompassing the past and present (Lalli, 1992; Sandberg, 2003). Some have argued that place identity is akin to a “potpourri of memories, ideas, feelings, attitudes, values, preferences, meanings, and conceptions of behavior and experience” (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 59). This stance points out that one’s environmental past (i.e., the collection of earlier place cognitions of the person) have a significant influence on one’s subsequent place identity (Proshansky, 1978). In other words, not only has place identity taken shape through the experiences one has had in the world, it also significantly shapes how one comes to understand their current and future place in their world.

Place experiences are filled with diverse objects, spaces, and places that may or may not satisfy one’s biological, physical, social and cultural needs. Therefore, place identity has an evaluative quality; it can lead a person to make positive or negative assessments of their world. When children are positioned in a place, they draw upon their place identity to assess and make sense of whether

the place is a good fit or not. When the place is compatible with the child's place identity, the place tends to offer satisfying and meaningful experiences for the child that in return reinforces the child's place identity. However when the place is in conflict with the child's place identity, the place can act to limit the child's meaningful and satisfying place experiences (Proshansky et al., 1983).

2.3.2. Affordances of place

We draw upon Gibson's (1979) theory of affordances to call attention to the functionally significant properties of a place that contribute to or frame a child's transactions there. Affordances mean, "whatever it is about the environment that contributes to the kind of interaction that occurs" (Greeno, 1994, p. 338). While affordances theory rejects environmental determinism, it argues that people are attuned to the properties of the place (Kytta, 2002). Affordances theory acknowledges the role and contribution of a place in this people–place transaction. Environments are not mere antecedents or stimuli to environment response behavior. Affordances theory acknowledges the fact that many behaviors are place-specific or context-specific (Greeno).

Our place experience includes not only awareness of physical or social features of elements or events but also, more importantly, an awareness of their functional significance and meaning (Heft, 1988). Affordances are not properties that either do or do not exist. Rather they can be understood as a graded property that exists in various degrees and levels (Greeno, 1994). Furthermore, affordances exist in multiple dimensions including physical and social dimensions provided by people present in the place (Clark & Uzzell, 2002). Affordances are "simultaneously determined by attributes of the environmental feature in question and attributes of a particular individual" and functional possibilities of a place can only be defined by the individual who would engage in the functionalities (Heft, 1988, p. 30). Thus affordances should be understood as relationally specified functionalities.

2.4. Insideness

In order to make sense of a transactional view and the role of place identity and affordances in shaping that view, we draw upon Relph's (1976) conceptualization of the insideness–outsideness. Relph explains sense of place existing as "a full range of possible awareness, from simple recognition for orientation, through the capacity to respond empathetically to the identities of different places, to a profound association with places as cornerstones of human existence and individual identity" (p. 63). Similarly, Tuan (1980) views sense of place as a critical awareness that is different from "rootedness." He described that sense of place is a self-conscious, reflective awareness that allows one to appreciate and "create" a place, whereas rootedness is an unself-conscious, unreflective "state of being made possible by an incuriosity toward the world at large and an insensitivity toward the flow of time," resulting from a long habitation at one locality (p. 4). Thus, the essence of place experience lies in how one positions self in a place. The more the person is inside, the stronger one belongs to the place and identifies with the place. Insideness also illustrates the affordances that a person may engage in. For example, the same place may foster different modes of insideness and outsideness for individuals. At the same time, an individual may engage in various modes of insideness and outsideness in places.

Also Relph (1976) conceptualizes insideness and outsideness in dialectical and dialogical relations which are ready to be reversed or shifted depending on how one positions self in a place. Similarly, he uses authentic–inauthentic division as a foundation for a conceptual discussion, but he does not offer it as a complete, absolute framework to describe and categorize all place experiences.

As Seamon (1984) points out this perspective "sensitizes" researchers to different modes of place experience and provides conceptual clarity and guidance to observe multiple modes of insideness and outsideness for place experience. Further, this perspective highlights the importance of intentionality of a person in place experience. What sets apart experiencing a place from simply "looking into" is primary intentions that a person has behind a place. Thus insideness–outsideness dialectic would be shaped and defined by a person's intentionality and positionality in a place at a time. As we adopt a view of place as a dynamic context, affordances of places and its "significances" are continuously defined by the intentionality of the person, thus, produce meanings over time, leading to an ongoing relationship between the place and the person (Gustafson, 2001; Smaldone et al., 2005). Phenomenological perspectives thus allow us to explore lived experiences of place in its multiple, dynamic, and contradictory nature. In this study, we use insideness as a conceptual tool to look into children's sense of place, paying attention to children's intentions and meanings.

3. Research design

3.1. Research settings

To explore insideness in urban children's sense of place, the study was conducted with 19 children (ages 11–13) who attended two public middle schools located in low-income neighborhoods in New York City. This study emerged from a larger project designed to explore how urban children develop their sense of place in their neighborhood and how they leverage their sense of place in science class. Thus, the design of the study centers around two schools as research settings from which study participants were selected. In consultation with teachers, we purposefully selected the participating children based on various factors including children's and parents' willingness to participate in the study, children's gender, academic interests and performance, and place histories and experiences (Table 1).

We opted to work with middle school aged children because at this time in their development, children are becoming more independent, separate from their families, and actively seeking out and expanding place-based experiences (Cobb, 1977; Moore, 1986). Yet, because this freedom is relatively new, they are still deeply influenced by their families, and social and physical constraints.

3.1.1. Union school & neighborhood

Union is a neighborhood public middle school which is located in the Freedom Heights area in New York City. (All the names of schools, streets, neighborhoods, and children used in the paper are pseudonyms.) Union school is located in a place where two very

Table 1
Summary of participating children.

	Union school (# of children)	Tremone school (# of children)	Total (# of children)
<i>Gender</i>			
Female	5	4	9
Male	4	6	10
<i>Ethnicity</i>			
Asian	1	1	2
Black	1	0	1
Latino/Latina	7	9	16
<i>Place history^a</i>			
3+ years	6	4	10
1–3 years	3	6	9

^a Place history is grouped by the number of years (3 years) children lived in current neighborhood.

different neighborhoods meet. The school sits in between two main streets of the city: West Avenue and Broad Avenue. The school's eastside neighborhood serves a predominantly Latino working class and lower-income population. Store signs and graffiti are in Spanish, as is the dominant language heard on the street. The school's west side neighborhoods have undergone extensive gentrification over the past two decades. Broad Avenue is a very busy street with heavy pedestrian traffic as well as commercial activities with diverse stores and restaurants. The neighborhood feels like a seamless extension to the relatively wealthy neighborhood to its south. Thus, the two sides of the Union neighborhood that surround the school are divided not only by ethnic environment but also by socioeconomic status (SES). Most students at Union belonged to racial and/or ethnic minority groups: Latina/Latino (50%), African Americans (44%), White students (4%), and Asian and others (2%). About 70% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch.

3.1.2. Tremone school & neighborhood

Tremone is a public middle school located in a high poverty neighborhood in New York City. The children from Tremone are sixth graders in a self-contained ESL class. Across the United States and especially in urban areas, classrooms are becoming more and more diverse ethnically, linguistically, and racially and Tremone is one of the urban schools facing this change. Students at Tremone are a mixed group of racial minorities, predominantly Latina/Latino (65%) and African Americans (31%). A majority of the Latino students speak Spanish as their first language and 55% of the students are considered to be English Language Learners (ELLs). Over 90% of students were eligible for free lunch.

Tremone neighborhood is located in a high poverty Latino community with a lot of recent immigrants continuously moving in and out. Compared to the Union neighborhood, the Tremone neighborhood is more homogeneous in a sense that the neighborhood is predominantly Latino in both a cultural and demographic sense. The children who live in the Tremone neighborhood talked about a violent social environment (e.g., shootouts, fights, gang activities in the neighborhood) more frequently than the children who live in the Union neighborhood.

3.2. Research methods

In this study we used ethnographic research methods for data generation including conversational interviews, walking-along (neighborhood walk), mapping, and autophotography. The methods, which are described below, were administered following a consistent procedure, to minimize the influence that one research method might have on others, and also to maintain consistency among participants.

3.2.1. Interviews & neighborhood mapping

We conducted conversational interviews with children around place to develop "experiential narrative materials" to provide deeper and richer understanding of children's place experience (van Manen, 1990). At the beginning of an interview, children were asked to define a neighborhood on their own terms and then to draw a map of their neighborhood. We encouraged them to define a boundary of their neighborhood freely and allowed them to choose the level of detail on their own. Except for a suggestion to include their own house, the scale or scope of the map and the decisions on what to include in the map were up to the children. The maps were to illustrate what elements children recognize in the neighborhood and/or what elements they consider worth mentioning in the map. Interviews were audio-taped with the

permission of children and parents. Interviews were semi-structured and conversational.

3.2.2. Autophotography

Upon completion of the interview, the children were given a disposable camera and asked to take photographs of their neighborhood. With the developed pictures, we conducted follow-up conversations. The photographs served as a viable source of data as well as an engaging tool for children. The photographs allowed us to see children's neighborhood through their eyes. While children's neighborhood map would reveal their spatial cognitive representation based on their memory and conscious selections, photography would give children opportunities to represent their neighborhood in a more spontaneously perceived way.

3.2.3. Walking-along

Go-along methods are proposed as a way to enrich traditional ethnographic methods (Kusenbach, 2003). A researcher accompanies informants in their natural settings and explores informants' experiences and practices as they participate in them. In this study, walking-along was conducted as part of interviewing, when conditions were permitted. Being in their neighborhood, walking through their routes between places, and visiting their favorite places, we sought to learn more about various degrees and qualities of the children's place activities and engagements.

3.3. Data analysis

Data analysis process was informed by qualitative and phenomenological data analysis methods (Hycner, 1985; LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993; Moustakas, 1994). The first step of the process was to review the data, by listening to the interviews as they were being transcribed. For an initial analytical framework, we looked at how children talked about the physical setting, their activities with/in those settings, and the meanings they ascribe to them. The units and/or themes on insideness were reflected to determine whether what the participants said responded to and illuminated the three aspects of place experiences. All the data were reviewed and analyzed to develop emergent categories and themes.

Based on this analytic framework, there were two analytic processes that went on concurrently and interactively during the data analysis. The first process was to work on creating a sense of place story for each child. This continuous process helped the inquiry to keep a sense of the whole child and also to keep uniqueness and particularity in a sense of place story. The second process was to develop analytic categories and themes on insideness that crosscut in children's sense of place stories. The data analysis process was cyclic between these two processes, which informed, guided, and complemented each other. As transcripts were prepared, the entire tapes, transcripts, field notes, and artifacts (maps and photographs) were listened to, read, and reviewed several times. We reviewed and analyzed all the data, looking for crosscutting categories or themes on insideness as well as the individual and unique stories using the analytic strategy of constant comparison of cases (LeCompte et al., 1993).

4. Characteristics of insideness

4.1. Environmental understanding

Children develop an understanding of place that is critical and comprehensive in its diversity, complexity, and interconnectedness. In this section, we discuss children's environmental

understanding in three emergent aspects: contextualized, comprehensive, and critical.

4.1.1. Contextualized understanding

Children's stories of place reveal meanings that go beyond simple physical descriptions. For an outsider, a functionality and meaning of a place is simple and denotative, such as referring to a bodega as a place to get a soda. But through contextualized involvement in the place, children are able to read their place deeply and richly into layered functionalities and meanings, which offer added social and psychological affordances for them.

For example, take this picture taken by Ulecis, titled as "the way we get into school" (Picture 1). When children, who live on the west side of the Tremone neighborhood like Ulecis, come to school, they approach the back of the school building first. They pass the backyard of their school, and then near the end of the road there is a main entrance to the school. To get into the school, they have to walk around a long curved road that surrounds the school. Many children, instead of walking all the way around, especially when they are late for school, opt for the short cut shown in Ulecis' picture. To an outsider's eyes, this entryway may look like a patchwork on a chicken wire fence, if they notice it at all. However, for insiders it becomes useful knowledge, offering an added functionality as an alternative and convenient entryway to the school.

Another student, Jameer told how commercial places offered added social and psychological affordance for her. As Jameer described her neighborhood, she talked about her favorite stores, "On the opposite side, I have a corner store. That's my favorite corner store." When asked for a reason, she responded "the people because they know me Then I have my little hair salon. My all time favorite hair salon." While she could list her preferred shopping places in the city (e.g., department stores and busy commercial areas in the city), her all time favorite stores are the ones on her block. While the distant commercial places seem to carry a denotative function and meaning (i.e., a place for shopping), neighborhood stores offer added functions and meanings for her. Her relationship with these places may have started as a commercial exchange but by her going there "on a daily basis, get some soda, get some chips," it seems to have extended into social relationships and network as well.

In addition, sometimes to be alone, Jameer goes out and walks down the street to a store just to window shop, "I walk to the Cross street because there's a sneaker store there and when I look at the sneakers I think about other things, and it's a short walk so might as well go." This visit is not so much a commercial activity, rather it is a way to be alone and to think. She is out in a public space yet in her own private space at the same time. This is a psychological



Picture 1. "The way we get into school" (From Ulecis' autophotography).

affordance that she creates since the city is such a walk-able place for her. As the examples show, contextualized understanding comes from deeper than the simple physical descriptions or denotative functions. It comes from layered functionalities and meanings of the place that are added and developed by children through their lived experiences.

4.1.2. Comprehensive understanding

Children make sense of and characterize their place in their own terms or through their own slants of experience. They grasp their neighborhood. For example, Anais noted that having "ghetto people" i.e., people who are not afraid to speak their minds is one of the positive, attractive characteristics of her neighborhood.

How children comprehend their environment provides an important insight into how they position themselves in the place as insiders. For example, Andreas who has lived in his predominantly Latino neighborhood all throughout his life, pointed out that his neighborhood has become "more White ever since the Starbucks came in." His neighborhood is going through gentrification, attracting new businesses and changing the demographic make-up of the place. Based on what he has experienced over the years, he predicts that his neighborhood is going to become more like busy "downtown" in near future. This example reveals Andreas' keen awareness and grasp of the changes in his neighborhood which seem to have brought in "outsideness" and created a tension in his insiderness.

In another example, two girls exhibit different depths of comprehension of their neighborhood. When asked to describe their neighborhood, both Kathleen and Stephanie pointed out quietness as a positive quality. However, the meaning of quietness differs for them. Kathleen, who has a high mobility place history and recently moved to the neighborhood, simply describes it as "quiet that I could go to sleep." On the other hand, Stephanie who has lived in the area for a longer period of time, describes the quietness as follows:

I live in Grand Avenue. It's very quiet. You don't hear no gun shots anything like that. And only thing you hear is the side of Davidson which is the loudest place It's very quiet. Only on weekends they put a little loud music. It's only time it's like loud. But [if] it's like weekdays. It's quiet. I understand daytime they might put the music a little loud. You know it's day time. But by 6 o'clock, like everything is like already off. Like the radio is off and they have TV down and everything is off. It's actually quiet and it's actually good.

While Kathleen's understanding seems limited to a simple recognition of quietness as a positive property of the neighborhood that serves her comfortable living, Stephanie's understanding of quietness in her neighborhood is more comprehensive and detailed. Based on her comprehension of several neighborhoods in that area, she evaluates her neighborhood as a comparatively quiet place: She understands where noise usually comes from and she can identify a few potential sources of noise in the neighborhood including gunshots, loud music, and loud televisions. She understands and appreciates how her neighbors operate to nurture quietness in her neighborhood by turning off loud music and the television at a decent time. In this example Stephanie's detailed, connective, and expansive understanding of quietness indicates insiderness in her sense of place. The children observe, pay attention to, and make a sense out of what goes on in their neighborhood. Children are very observant and cognizant of what goes on in their neighborhood. Further, they make connected and expansive meanings out of what they observe in their neighborhood.

4.1.3. Critical understanding

We observed the children's critical understandings of place through their ability to read their place critically, observing positive

and negative sides, and through their attitude that seeks constructive changes for the community. When asked to describe their neighborhood, children neither romanticized their neighborhood as a place where “everything is great” nor deprecated the place as full of negative characteristics. For example, Ulecis described his neighborhood as “half and half,” having both good and bad aspects. He noted, “They are good and one day, they could be really bad. Like good ... all the people get along and play basketball and sometimes there are just fights and gunshots.”

In the following quotation, Jameer's description of her neighborhood reveals her critical awareness of the socioeconomic divide that exists in her neighborhood.

Neighborhood is where you live at, like your community, who's there, what stores are there, what surrounds you. My neighborhood if it's on Broad Avenue it seems like some rich neighborhood, and on West Avenue it just like some poor people who don't have a lot of money, teenagers who don't go to school. So either way I walk like ... if I walk West when I go to school or Broad you get two totally different feelings. You feel more comfortable on Broad because there are a lot of people, a lot of light, and then over there it's like some dark side. A lot of mixtures like a lot of different people with different nationalities.

Her contextualized grasp of what goes on in the two different sides of her neighborhood comes from her lived experiences and critical reflections on them. Her critical perspective is further revealed through her comment on the gentrification process in the neighborhood. Jameer continued,

They're going to keep West the way it is because that's how society is. They don't care. They only care about Broad because Broad is a big street, and they're going to fix it up And it's going to look real nice On West I have not seen any stores change. Like if you go to Broad, the streets are clean. West, trash on the floor They don't care because they know that the richer people live on Broad, the not so high-class people live on West.

The differential renovation process has stirred up her sense of justice. She feels that the two sides of her neighborhood are being treated differently because of their economic status. She continues, “Yeah, because everyone deserves the same it doesn't matter if you have money. You still don't want to walk around some dirty neighborhood whether you have money or not.” She reads her place critically using this lens of social justice.

Children's critical understanding was also observed when they talked about what changes they would want to bring into their neighborhood to make it better. While some children expressed more egocentric wishes (e.g., “I want to bring all my friends from my old neighborhood”; “I want to have more shopping places for me”), many children framed their wishes in light of the broader place. The children pointed out the negative aspects of their social environment as critical issues to be addressed and changed in their neighborhood including gang activities, violence, drug dealers, fights, shootouts, crimes, socioeconomic divide, and conflicts among ethnic groups in their neighborhood. These place-centric or place-conscious ideas are to serve more than personal concerns and to benefit the broader community they live in. As insiders, children identify critical issues and challenges that their place faces and they wish to bring positive changes into the place.

4.2. Environmental competence

Having environmental competence reflects an ability to be a skillful and capable explorer based on an embodied understanding

of a place. In this section we describe the children's environmental competence in two aspects: knowing how to navigate and knowing how to engage in a place.

4.2.1. Knowing how to navigate

Children develop capabilities to read their neighborhood and map out what to do, what not to do, and how to navigate their place strategically. It can be something simple yet vital such as knowing how to travel between destinations safely and efficiently or being able to navigate and explore the city to satisfy their needs. For example, “knowing how” to take a subway or a bus without adult supervision is a competence which could contribute to an expansion of the child's activity range in the city.

While children exhibited varying degrees of activity range, the children who have a relatively expansive free activity range revealed a contextualized understanding of and confidence in how to navigate the city strategically and purposefully. For example, Lily gets to freely travel in her neighborhood within about 6 blocks around her house, without consulting or getting permission from her parents. When it is beyond the range, she must have a friend or chaperone to travel with her. Lily talked about how she strategized her trips to various shopping places, depending on the destination and distance: If it is a far enough away, then she would choose a subway to save time, but if it were close enough, she would enjoy a bus ride. Yet within her activity range, she only travels to selected places. She decisively commented “Not any place. There's some places that I don't want to go because there's nothing that interest me there.” Thus, her place exploration is being nurtured and shaped by her place identity.

In the next example, Richie shows how learning to navigate is constitutive of more than knowing the physical infrastructure, such as subways or bus routes. An insideness understanding of place juxtaposes social activity and meaning upon the physical layout. In the quotation below, Richie describes his favorite place spaces:

What the good things what I like about my block ... We have our own little backyard where we could play baseball stuff like that. So nobody knows about that so nobody goes back there so only me and my friends. So that's what I like about my block. And the basketball court just like a walk away. There's a there's a mountain in umm on King Street Park? That park that they closed down. You could walk all the way to the park and instead of going through the front to get beat up umm we walk all the way up to the park. Sometimes ... somebody almost got shot around there somebody got killed around there.

This little backyard that Richie describes is an empty lot behind an apartment building that appears abandoned. Thus, it has become a “playground” for Richie and his friends where the children marked the place as theirs with graffiti. This is where he goes and plays baseball with his friends without being interrupted by other people. The second place he mentioned is a basketball court in a park. To get to their desired basketball court, Richie and his friends have to walk all the way around to avoid bullies. We do not necessarily agree with his choice of going to the park, as he risks potential trouble with bullies or violent encounters. However, that point aside, in this story Richie shows how he strategically navigates his neighborhood to satisfy his needs and desire for play spaces. The examples show how these children developed embodied understandings of how to navigate their urban environment strategically and purposefully to satisfy their needs and desires.

4.2.2. Knowing how to engage

The children exhibit capabilities to engage in various places. Children engage in formalized activities in structured settings (e.g.,

schools, after school programs, and sports teams). In addition, children also venture out to engage in other places through informal activities where their competence gets revealed more clearly. When the children want to be engaged in a social setting, they know where to go and how to participate in those settings. Many children would go play, hang out, and make friends at various settings such as playgrounds, street fairs, on the street, or on a staircase of a building where their socialization occurs organically and unofficially. For example, when Jameer wants to be with people, she just walks out to a spot on a nearby street. She explained, “a lot of teenagers hang out there, and a lot of my cousins live around there. So we just hang out on the block, especially in the summer, we just chill and have fun.” She does not need any plan or arrangement. She does not necessarily know everyone there. But she knows some of them as “neighborhood cousins” and feels competent and confident to engage in the place.

In another example, Carlos actively shapes his own activities to participate in his place, which reveals dynamic interactions between *who Carlos is* and *how he participates in the place*. When asked to talk about himself, Carlos listed his likes: “I like to read. I really like exploring. I like to get along with other people and help out. I like animals. I actually work at a bird store.” Carlos works for a pet store called the Bird House in his neighborhood. His love for birds (thus, visiting the store all the time to look at the birds) got him this job in the first place.

When I went inside I started looking around and I said, Oh my God I love these animals. And then days passed and days passed and I always went to the store when it was closed or open and just looked at the birds, and then the manager said would you like to work here and I said fine. Then he said I only need I.D., report card, and your parents' signature. So then I got the job over there and now I feed the birds.

He works there everyday after school. Also he owns four pet birds at home, which he adores and takes a good care of all the time. Additionally he walks dogs for other people in his neighborhood. These activities seem to serve more than the purpose of satisfying his love for animals. Through the activities, he gets to support his mother and his family financially as well, which gives him great pride and satisfaction. The jobs also may serve as a reminder or motivation to work and study hard so as to fulfill his dream of becoming a veterinarian, which looks promising given he is a hard working, successful student at school.

Carlos's story reveals how *who he is* and *what he values* (e.g., his family, education, his future goal, and his passion and love for animals) is actively expressed through *how he participates in his place* (e.g., working at a bird house, walking dogs, taking good care of his pet birds, and working hard at school). Carlos's place identity is in sync with *how he participates and engages in his place*. His sense of place can be defined by the continuous, lively interactions between “*who I am*” and “*how I live*.” Interactions between these two aspects are multidimensional and fluid. These interactions are not simply given or provided by the setting. He appears confident in terms of realizing his aspirations and enacting his agency. He has the understanding, strength, and competence to actively participate in his place and to create the kinds of changes and opportunities for him in the place.

Through lived experiences in the neighborhood, children develop a contextualized knowledge and understanding of the place. Based on the understanding, children serially assess the affordances of a place and negotiate with various conditions and factors (e.g., their parents, social environment, physical setting, and co-explorer availability) in which they are positioned. As insiders, children develop environmental competence: knowing how to navigate and participate in their place strategically and purposefully.

4.3. Affective relationship

Children develop affective relationships in various contexts. These relationships provide not only emotional and psychological affordances, but also cognitive and social affordances that satisfy children's sense of place development (Chatterjee, 2005). Here we present three contexts of affective relationships that exhibit insideness.

4.3.1. Developing symbolic association

We noted insideness in children's sense of place through symbolic relationships that children develop with urban streetscape and/or elements within it. As Lewicka (2008) noted, “place exerts its influence on place attachment through physical features and symbolic meanings with the former often being a cue to the latter” (p. 211). While children appreciate aesthetically pleasing places in their neighborhood, their association with their neighborhood develops further into symbolic meanings as well. Thus, meanings of streetscape could become more than aesthetic values for the children.

While a famous cathedral, park, or university campus would attract an outsider's attention (e.g., tourists) for their objective values (e.g., aesthetic values or social reputations), many of the items and places that children identify with, find meaningful, and feel attached to would not necessarily be interesting to outsiders nor would receive tourists' attention. Yet they carry subjective, personal values and meanings for the children. For example, regardless of its objective, aesthetic value, the graffiti in an abandoned lot symbolizes that the space belongs to Richie and his friends. Also for Uleci the mural on his apartment building is what symbolizes his neighborhood. Because of his personal involvement with the development of the mural, he feels pride, ownership, and attachment when it comes to the mural.

For example Allegra, an animal lover who pays close attention to biological elements in her neighborhood, points to a tree in front of her apartment building and says proudly, “This is the oldest tree in this block!” (Picture 2). Whether that tree is really the oldest on the block or not, she seems to believe so. Allegra who has lived in the neighborhood since she was a baby, claims “this is the tallest in this block and this was here when I came. I can watch it from my window all the time.” To her the tree has become a significant, meaningful representation of her neighborhood. Children in the study identified symbolic and psychological affordances in their urban streetscape which reveals children's insideness, their ability to read into and create layered significance and meaning with and in a place.

4.3.2. Shared history

Another affective relationship was noted through children's attitude toward gentrification. For example, on several occasions, Lily expressed her emotional uneasiness with or even disapproval of gentrification going on in her neighborhood. As we were walking around her neighborhood, Lily stopped to take a picture of closed-down stores due to recent renovation of a building (Picture 3). During a later interview, the gentrification in her neighborhood came out again with one of her pictures (Picture 4).

Researcher: What building is this?

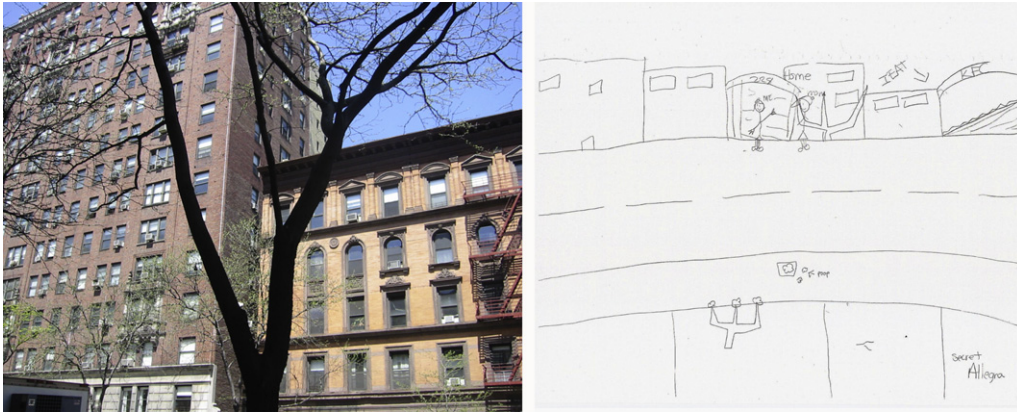
Lily: It's one that the university built.

Researcher: Why did you take [a picture of] it?

Lily: To show how much they're trying to tear down this place because they own almost everything.

Researcher: So you don't like it?

Lily: No, and when I was in my old building they had this thing that said they were going to tear it down.



Picture 2. Oldest tree on the block (from Allegra's autophotography and map).

Researcher: You mean the supermarket?

Lily: The supermarket, the post office thing I think, the deli, the Chinese restaurant, and where Burger King was and make a building right there on the block where my building was and may be have a parking lot too.

Here, we sense Lily's negative attitude toward gentrification and toward the university in particular as a major player in the gentrification process in the area. Similarly, Jameer revealed her uneasy, contradictory feelings toward the changes.

On Broad. I like neighborhoods when they're not so good, but not bad. I like when stores don't look so beautiful Then they made my corner store ... into some nice thing, some nice beautiful store and I'm like what are you doing? And then they cut down my pizza shop to put up some smoothie thing ... It looks kind of stupid because you have this clothing store, this busted old photo store, then this nice store, then some busted store, then some nice store, then some busted store. I'm like what's happening? ... and they're redoing another building.

While Lily and Jameer could not (or did not) clearly or logically explain why they did not like the neighborhood being gentrified, their stories reveal their resistant attitude toward the changes that renovation brings into their neighborhood. Place identity theory offers a way to look at children's affective response to gentrification: The connection between changes in the neighborhood and disruption of continuity in children's place identity (Twigger-Ross

& Uzzell, 1996). Although these children did not move to a new place, gentrification seems to create a similar impact on the children's sense of place because they were losing their shared history with the places. Gentrification might have created a disconnect in familiarity and continuity, further disrupting social and symbolic associations with the places and social, psychological, and/or symbolic affordances of the place. As we noted in Andreas' example before, gentrification process seems to create a tension in children's insideness–outsideness dialectic. The children's strong emotional response toward gentrification reveals their affective relationship with the place as an indication of insideness in their sense of place. However, further research is needed to understand better how children feel, respond, and/or deal with urban gentrification phenomena in their neighborhood and how gentrification may shape children's sense of place.

4.3.3. Reciprocated relationship

Children expressed their attachment to a place when they were socially known in that place through interactional relationships. For example, children's favorite stores in their neighborhood often were the ones where they have developed social acquaintances, thus, have become a part of children's social networks over the years. According to the children, those stores become their favorite places not simply because they sell certain products, but because the children *know* the people at the store and also the people *know* them. What facilitates insideness in children's sense of place



Picture 3. Closed-down store (from Lily's autophotography).



Picture 4. New building that the university built (from Lily's autophotography).

further is not only the familiarity of “knowing people” but also “being known,” a reciprocated relationship between the children and their neighborhood. For example, when we asked Jenny about her likes of the neighborhood, she pointed out, “I am proud to be known” in the neighborhood. Children’s attachment to a place and identification with the place (e.g., a sense of belonging and a sense of pride) are often nurtured through reciprocated relationships with their places, to know and to be known (Schneider, 1986).

5. Discussion

This study explored how urban children construct “insiderness” in their sense of place in its ecological, dynamic, and dialectical nature. The findings showed that children’s sense of place develops through multiple ways, routes, and dimensions (Lewicka, 2005). We learned that for the urban middle school children, insiderness is constitutive of the interactions among environmental understanding (i.e., contextualized, comprehensive, and critical understanding of a place), environmental competence (i.e., knowing how to navigate and engage in a place), and diverse affective relationships with a place. Here we discuss enduring aspects of children’s sense of place: children’s active and dialogic positionality and emplaced nature of children’s place understanding.

5.1. Active positionality

The findings showed children are active explorers of their urban environment, which aligns with findings from previous studies that have noted the active nature of children’s engagement and their agency in sense of place development (Christensen & O’Brien, 2003). Being an active place explorer is not simply about how much children know or how long they have lived in a place. It is about their attitude and intentions to engage in a place that drives them to become active participants in their place. Children’s sense of place is neither a passive response to the environment they are positioned in nor a mere product of long-term residency. Rather, they are actively and purposefully exploring their urban environment and nurturing their sense of place. Children critically read into their place and create layered significance and meanings of a place with critical awareness and assessment. Insiderness in their sense of place illustrates that children are cultivating a critical awareness and conscious appreciation of their place i.e., critical sense of place (Olwig, 1982).

With its focus on insiderness, the results showed children develop sense of place through dialogical engagement with place identity and affordances of place. The children “cannot” and also “do not” go and explore every space. They cannot go everywhere due to the various challenges and restrictions imposed on them (such as parental restrictions and a tough social environment). Yet, children do not go everywhere. They have preferences, purposes, and intentions. Their place experiences are shaped by their intentionality, driven by their place identity. Thus positionality is shaped by dialogical interactions between “who I am in a place” and “how I live where I am”. For example, Carlos’s story showed how strongly and efficiently he exerts “who Carlos is” and shapes this activities in the place. He actively positions himself in the place to develop affordances in the place and strongly exerts his place identity through his multidimensional exploration and experience of the place. Children’s positionality is an expression and exertion of their place identity: who they are, who they want to be, what they value, and what they seek in a place. At the same time, positionality is a reflection of the affordances (perceived, used, and/or created) of the place: what they think they could do and what they actually get to do in the place. Children’s agency is clearly exhibited in how

actively they are shaping their life: identifying, negotiating, modifying, and creating opportunities to participate in their place.

5.2. Emplaced understanding

As the children perceive, engage in, and make meaning of their place, they make detailed observations, construct contextualized knowledge, and develop embodied and layered understanding of their place. Across the insiderness characteristics, we noted that children, grounded in their lived experiences, construct particularized and layered understandings of their place i.e., “emplaced” understanding (Christensen & O’Brien, 2003).

Our findings show that, as insiders, children read into their place, constructing layered functionalities and meanings of their place, thus create multidimensional affordances for themselves. Further, children engage in their place with a particularized competence such as knowing how to navigate and participate in their place. Having environmental competence seems to be critical for children to become a skillful, capable explorer and participant in their place. As children become more knowledgeable of their neighborhood geographically, socially, and culturally in details, the concreteness and particularity in their understanding help them to become more strategic, competent, confident, and participatory place explorers in their neighborhood. Through deeply reading into and active, dialogical engagement in a place, children construct layered, personal, and symbolic meanings of a place.

Beyond knowing what it is and how to behave, meanings of a place also include symbolic and affective relationships between the place and the person (Proshansky et al., 1983). Meanings of a place are not always universally or objectively shared. This emplaced understanding that children develop as insiders is subjective and “lived” in nature. Children construct insiderness with complex and layered affordances and meanings, which goes deeper than denotative and generalized perception of a place an outsider may identify. The kinds of knowledge, skills, and affective meanings that the children develop with and in their place are emplaced i.e., uniquely constructed by insiders, detailed and particularized from lived experiences, and layered with significance and meanings.

In short, children’s abilities and knowledge to read into particular opportunities and constraints in their place would offer critical foundation for their agency in a place (Christensen & O’Brien, 2003). Thus, what also becomes critical in fostering insiderness and agency in sense of place is children’s positionality, how children position themselves in a place. Insiderness can be described by, as Relph’s (1976) suggests, children’s ability to attend a place knowledgeable and their attempt to experience a place fully, empathetically, and sympathetically.

6. Implications of the study

Building upon existing research on multidimensionality of children’s sense of place (Derr, 2002; Hart, 1979), we propose insiderness as a viable conceptual construct in exploring children’s sense of place development. It allowed us to explore how urban children engage in their relationship with their urban neighborhood through children’s dialogical positionality. Further it allowed us to develop a set of characteristics to examine urban children’s sense of place and to describe emplaced nature of children’s place understanding. Yet, given this was an exploratory study, we encourage further examinations of the findings within various, particularized research settings (e.g., children’s gender, age level, place history, and/or geographical settings) to develop a comprehensive yet contextualized understanding on children’s sense of place.

This study was shaped by our pedagogical orientation: To better understand children's sense of place and find ways to integrate the understanding in education. An effort to engage children in the process of their place would need to begin with an understanding of how children experience their place and how they construct a sense of place (Christensen & O'Brien, 2003). In a fundamental sense, to integrate children's sense of place into education, developing educators' understanding of and sensitivity to children's experiences would be an important first step. In the study, we offered detailed stories of sense of place to illustrate children's unique perspectives, and thus to help educators to develop sensitivity and understanding toward urban children's place experiences.

Also, the study provided a set of characteristics of insiderness which can serve as a pedagogical direction and framework for conceptualizing sense of place in educational contexts. In particular, richness, depth, and quality of children's sense of place we learned from the stories demonstrate children's sense of place as a pedagogical resource, especially in educational communities where children's lived experiences are valued as "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992). Further, children's emplaced understanding and active positionality propose children as critical, resourceful commentators and skillful participants of their place which leads us to envision engaging children in place-based participatory action research in education (Hart, 1997).

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