Original Research

Does Place Actually Matter? Searching For Place-based Pedagogy amongst Impact and Intentionality

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Introduction

The emergence of this special issue of *Metropolitan Universities* journal, "*The Pedagogy of Place-Based Initiatives and Anchor Institutions*," stems from developing, teaching, and evaluating courses and pedagogical programs at urban/metropolitan institutions. This issue is rooted in scholarly practice and focuses on the intersection of place-based initiatives and pedagogy. It interrogates how place-based initiatives such as hyper-local community-based learning and anchor frameworks impact teaching and learning in the classroom. This framing article for this special issue captures the themes and broader questions that emerged from the articles while proposing a line of inquiry to engage the readers with the special issue focus. Within the last two decades, many urban and metropolitan universities have committed to creating and utilizing place-based initiatives (Hodges & Dubb, 2012). These initiatives can lead to community development and social and economic mobility, as well as transform how we approach teaching and learning (Yamakura & Koth, 2018). Building from Gruenewald's (2003) work on developing and defining a critical pedagogy of place, we identify with the challenge to all educators to recognize the relationship between teaching and learning and the spaces and places we inhabit. Our line of inquiry throughout this special issue is whether a distinct pedagogy emerges from place-based initiatives such as anchor institution approaches and hyper-local community-based learning.

Drawing from practitioner-scholar frameworks (Lytle, 2008; Salipante & Aram, 2003; Ravitch, 2014) and community engagement experiences with anchor institution frameworks (Hodges & Dubb, 2012; Yamakura & Koth, 2018), this special issue seeks to address a core question: *Is*

there a pedagogy emerging from place-based initiatives? Yamakura and Koth (2018) position place-based anchor initiatives within the context of community engagement, identifying the critiques and opportunities to evolve and deepen community engagement priorities of higher education institutions. What is missing from the conversation is how place-based approaches impact the teaching and learning enterprise of the academy, and especially how it impacts what occurs in the classroom.

As a result, the authors have utilized a practitioner-scholar approach to place-based work, which applies an inquiry stance that fosters critical reflection on professional practice, theorizes and re-visions practice, and generates local knowledge (Lytle, 2008; Ravitch, 2014). Rooted in our professional practice and positionality, our observations and critical reflection led us to theorize more intentionally about how we approached place-based work and where we might find opportunities for it to impact the classroom more directly. We begin by interrogating how place-based initiatives such as anchor institution approaches and highly intentional partnership work do *not* guarantee a change in classroom instruction and may fail to impact pedagogy long-term. We provide examples of service-learning within our local professional context and draw from themes that emerged from the scholarly articles in this issue. We also noted the intersection of place, institution, and systemic context. We offer a framework for a pedagogy of place with committed approaches to these place-based intersections as we have experienced them in our practice and emerging from the issue's scholarly articles.

Impact-Based Program from an Anchor Institution Framework

One common approach to place-based work utilizes the frame of the university as an anchor institution. Anchor institutions are long-lasting and ensure organizations and institutions are rooted in their localities (Hodges & Dubb, 2012). In recent years, many universities have sought to push their anchor identity from a place of simple stability to a force for economic growth and community development (Yamakura & Koth, 2018). Urban colleges and universities can become a massive economic engine for their surrounding neighborhoods and, when approached intentionally, also provide important employment and business opportunities to local neighborhood residents (Garton, 2021). Their choice of vendors for university events and services, what business they recruit within close proximity to campus, and how they may encourage residency in the local neighborhood through both housing policies and assistance programs are all examples of how these institutions can yield tremendous impact to the places they are located (Ehlenz, 2019).

As we explore this anchor approach locally, we recognize our positionality at Loyola University Chicago, an anchor institution in Chicago, Illinois. As a member of the Anchor Learning Network supported by the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU) and drawing from the anchor institution framework (Hodges & Dubb, 2012), Loyola University

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Chicago adapted the framework to include faith as a key element (see Figure 1, www.luc.edu/anchormission). An anchor mission task force was formed with representatives from university departments that represented each area of this framework. Regular meetings created a dialogue across departments to foster an anchor mission approach to spending, hiring, partnering, and other forms of economic development for our local communities.
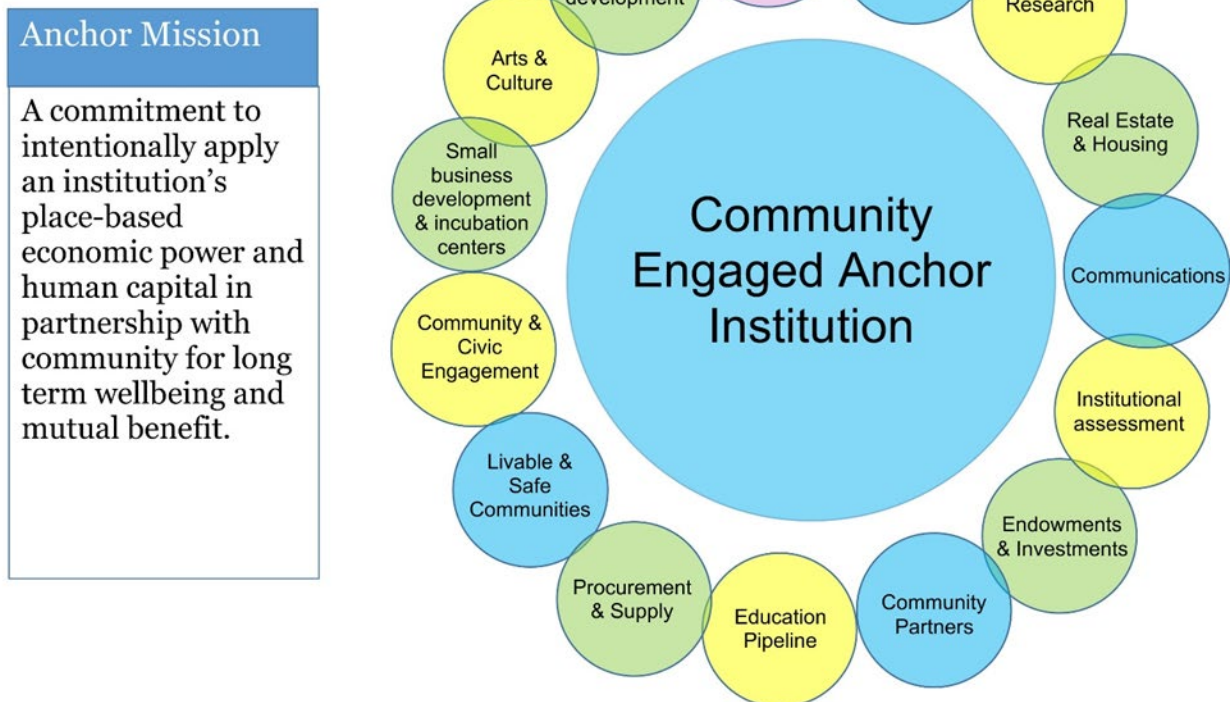

FIGURE 1. Loyola university Chicago's anchor institution framework.

In addition, Loyola's commitment to community-engaged teaching and learning is evident through such units as the Center for Engaged Learning, Teaching, and Scholarship (CELTS), the Center for Urban Research and Learning (CURL), the Office of Community Service and Action, and the Office of Neighborhood Initiatives provided a natural lens to inquire into place-based pedagogy. The anchor mission task force, including leaders from each of these units, along with the University strategic plan, established a renewed emphasis on the local communities where our campuses were situated, and our students lived. The prioritization of our surrounding geographic communities (neighborhoods) emerged for each of our campuses in the urban setting of Chicago.

Service-Learning and Place-Based Impact

The high level of intentionality and emphasis on community engagement through place-based work does not necessarily trickle down to students in their learning and classroom instruction. Service-learning initiatives at anchor institutions are sometimes directed specifically in the surrounding neighborhood to amplify the institution's impact (Combrinck & Nortjé, 2021). However, unless the sites students engage with are intentionally limited to a particular neighborhood, a service-learning program at an institution may be scattered across the city (or farther), with the focus more on individual partnership or work that best matches course learning outcomes rather than place (Germain, 2019; Faulconer, 2021).

Even when the service might be rooted in the hyperlocal community, it does not guarantee that it was well incorporated into the classroom or that community member voice or community history influenced instruction. For example, as co-instructors of a community-based research (service-learning) course, we critiqued our courses reflecting on applying best practices for community-based learning but were challenged by how we incorporated the community and place (Haarman & Green, 2021). In other words, the community's specific context is often missing in teaching and instruction, even as community influences the learning outcomes and approach to the course. Our critique here cautions that place-based approaches may unintentionally only prioritize community impact, without including pedagogy that facilitates student learning and faculty teaching as part of the community impact.

Intentionality Around Developing Community Partnerships

Intentionality around hyperlocal community partnerships elevates mutually beneficial relationships, reciprocity, and the co-educator role of community partners. Focused more on the relationship between the specific community partner and the professional, intentionality models of place-based community engagement emphasize mutual and ethical relationships with community partners. These programs center efforts on listening to community needs and asset-based community development while at the same time recognizing the structural issues that partners negotiate (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). The intentionality of partnership development takes seriously the conception of community partners as co-educator in the classroom (Walker et al., 2021).

Drawing from our experiences at Loyola University Chicago, we sought to capture a community partnership approach firmly rooted in our strategic, intentional approach to partner development. After multiple meetings, focus groups with faculty and partners, and structured dialogue sessions, Loyola's Center for Engaged Learning, Teaching, and Scholarship members developed a community partnership conceptual framework (see https://www.luc.edu/celts/resources/forcommunitypartners/conceptualframeworkofpartnership/). The framework challenged our team to articulate the critical components of a mutually beneficial relationship with community partners and how that was enacted.

While this model pushes the field toward better and more equitable relationships with community partners and communities, it can also insulate faculty from those same partners and communities. The less connected a faculty member is to the community context with which their class is engaging, the less likely it is that the approaches to instruction in the classroom will be impacted by the particularity of the place in which it is occurring (George-Paschal et al., 2019). When one-to-one relationships between the partner and university professionals are the focus, the partner at the center of this relationship may not represent a prevailing interest or concern of the neighborhood (Haarman & Green, 2021). By following the relationships where mutuality and deepened relationships can be guaranteed, universities may unintentionally focus their community-based learning work outside of the very community that is meant to be the focus of their place-based work.

A Framework for a Pedagogy of Place: Responding to the Challenge of Place-Based Pedagogy with Contextualized Commitments and Practices

Our critique here focuses on place-based community engagement models and how they are rooted in impact, and intentional partnership development approaches toward our communities and our universities, recognizing that work may not extend to pedagogical approaches. Although we recognize the complexity of the work, we can raise these critiques partly because they are pitfalls we have experienced. Practices like anchor institution frameworks and intentional hyperlocal partnership approaches are moving the needle for community-engagement. Still, they may have little discernible impact on the classroom experience and instruction – effectively disconnecting place-based approaches from pedagogy. Can we really say we are doing place-based work if the teaching in our classrooms looks nothing like the places in which they are rooted? We elevate this inquiry in hopes that deeper critical reflection on place-based work will encourage us to highlight the powerful ways that community voice and community-based learning can deepen student learning through *how that instruction occurs*.

As we considered the challenges of rooting place-based work into our pedagogy, we documented our observations founded upon our experiences with community engagement and service-learning pedagogy. We noted how place intersects with the community context as we worked with community partners around Chicago and beyond and how place intersects with the institutional context as we connected to the anchor mission framework. Finally we recognized how place is founded within a systemic context, drawing from the work of Gruenewald's (2003) critical pedagogy of place, which "combines the spatial and ecological awareness of place-based education with the willingness to challenge social assumptions, norms, and practices of education and society as found within critical pedagogies" (Bright, 2020, p. 3). Upon critical inquiry and reflection rooted in our practices around how place-based work intersected with institutional, community, and structural contexts, we present pedagogical practices rooted in

place-based work and pointed toward community wisdom and community priorities as catalysts for a different approach to teaching (see Figure 2). We contend these are important contextualized pedagogical practices and encourage further inquiry into how place-based pedagogy reflects the unique contexts from which they emerge (Haarman & Green, 2021). The scholarly articles featured in this special issue will be highlighted, along with their emergent themes, as we discuss the emerging framework that surfaces from this inquiry (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. A framework for a pedagogy of place: The intersection of local community, institution, and systemic context.

History as Place-Based Pedagogy at the Intersection of Local Community and Systems

At the intersection of the contexts of local community and systems, place-based pedagogy can manifest through a commitment to include the history of community. The ways in which communities have been impacted by and show resilience to systems and structures of oppression are embedded in memories and lived experiences of the locations of our place-based work. For instance, it shows up in the demographics of communities impacted by decades of redlining or environmental racism. It is highlighted in how local communities understand their economic and social realities and what caused them. In Musicant's piece, *Detroit as a Marker for Divorcing Place-Based Education and Orthodox History from Oppressive Pedagogy Practices,* he

describes how most Detroit residents recognize their city's thriving and struggles are deeply intertwined with the car industry. The absence of an awareness of a community's history and how it impacts the community members' lives can lead to the same "placelessness" that Musicant warns against. Incorporating historical narratives of a community into courses can be applied to any discipline's place-based work and deepens the learning that occurs.

In Longo's *Putting Deliberative Pedagogy in Place: How Colleges and Universities Can Help Build a More Democratic Society*, the example of a course at the University of Cape Town with students from South Africa and Providence College offers a guide for deliberative pedagogy and the importance of place. Longo explores deliberative pedagogy related to place-based education, suggesting the need for public spaces to practice democracy in local communities and recognizing the importance of place. In *Elevating Community Voices through Place-Based Education Initiatives in Chicago*, Hough shares perspectives from an educational non-profit organization that facilitates place-based education in Chicago neighborhoods. His emphasis on First Voice Pedagogy and place-based immersions situates the community and its history as central to place-based education. Hough calls for a paradigm shift in place-based education to prioritize community voices, centering First Voices or community-based voices and resources as experts in the community.

Authentic Community as Place-Based Pedagogy at the Intersection of Local Community and Institutions

As highlighted earlier and supported by many other articles in this issue, the relationship between the surrounding local community and a higher education institution is complex (Hodges & Dubb, 2012; Yamakura & Koth, 2018). Although a university may be deeply involved in local community issues with its considerable resources, an issue remains with how they exert power in and over the local community and do not allow local residents to express concerns in a way that is truly heard (Stoeker et al., 2009). Some partnerships exist at the transactional level, but the call for over a decade has been to create authentic community relationships (Mitchell, 2008). Place-based pedagogy can manifest through a commitment to developing authentic community in this tension of institutions and local communities intersecting needs and priorities.

This authentic community comes from creating a space for honest exchange between members of the local community and members of the institution to address mutual priorities and imagine ways to collaborate. This may emerge from community-based undergraduate research projects, where the research questions and agendas originate from the partner, not the faculty instructor or student. In *Community Autonomy and Place-Based Environmental Research: Recognizing and Reducing Risks,* Britton et al. argue that the local community and its needs should drive research rather than being subjected to a research agenda generated by an outside party. Authentic community relationships can also help impact pedagogy when community members are

considered co-educators and invited to co-instruct, bringing their unique wisdom, experience, and community-based education approaches from their context. Quan's article, *A Framework for Justice-Centering Relationships: Implications for Place-Based Pedagogical Practice,* suggests a framework that guides the "how" of taking a place-based community engagement approach, which may lead to more authentic community relationships.

A commitment to an authentic community also invites institutions to consider who they are partnering with and whether it truly reflects the place and demographics of the diverse local community. Changes in the institution could shift its needs and desires, especially in how it interacts with the local community. In *Seeking Justice, Seeking Hope: Refugee Resettlement Campuses and Transformative Pedagogy in Higher Education* by Sapra, Matheis, and Abdo, the implementation of Every Campus A Refuge shows the commitments of the university to support newcomers impacted both the campus and the local community as well. It invites us to consider how individuals create and impact what we know as place and profoundly impact how we do place-based work.

Epistemic Justice as Place-Based Pedagogy at the Intersection of Systems and Institutions

When we consider how institutional context and systemic context overlap in this framework (Figure 2), a focus on epistemic justice surfaces as a commitment and practice that may emerge from place-based pedagogy. While anchor frameworks often focus heavily on the economic capacity for development, it may de-emphasize the important contribution the university can make around epistemic justice (Boni & Velasco, 2020). Epistemic justice refers to how people experience oppression or injustice related to 1) access to knowledge and/or 2) their identity as someone who possesses knowledge that is considered valuable (Fricker, 2007). Kidd et al. (2017) state that experiences epistemic injustice includes silencing or systematically misrepresenting one's contributions, leading to an undervaluing of one's status as a knower. A common inquiry from scholars and practitioners concerned with epistemic justice is who gets to know things and whose knowledge has value (Haarman, 2021).

At the intersection of institutional context and the systemic context in place-based work, the capacity of the university to work for epistemic justice as a generator and disseminator of knowledge is central. The majors and industries for which an institution offers a degree, the research and scholarship they support, and the students they recruit and enroll are ways universities can disrupt traditional knowledge frames rooted in white supremacy and oppressive systems. Place-based work can inform the focus of a university's efforts at epistemic justice, such as when the primary concerns of the community inform the scholarship through community-based research, in which community members help design the research question(s) and implement methodological approaches (Wallerstein et al., 2019; Suarez-Balcazar, 2020).

Paying attention to prevailing issues that the local community faces can also influence the educational initiatives undertaken by universities. Crossland's *On Becoming A People's College: Placemaking as Hidden Curriculum* provides an example highlighting how local communities should drive the offerings and approaches of an institution in its effort to become a "peoples' college." In *Exploring Place-Based Pedagogy as Entrepreneurship Accelerator* by Palazzo and Devasagayam, the authors propose a small business and entrepreneurship accelerator framework, combining university resources, local community elements, and small business owners, social entrepreneurs, and high school students and activating a critical pedagogy of place. The framework integrates a series of public-private partnerships between the university and stakeholders in a local community's economic success and sustainability, providing a proposed case of epistemic justice in practice. Place-based pedagogy orients knowledge toward an individual's experiences and perspectives (Lowe et al., 2023), and the presence of community members as a recognized co-educator with valued knowledge presents a shift toward epistemic justice.

The Pedagogy of Place: The Intersection of Local Community, Institution, and Systemic Contexts Emphasizing History, Authentic Community, and Epistemic Justice

The scholarly themes that emerge in this special issue demonstrate a framework for a pedagogy of place, situating the intersection of local community, institution, and system contexts, and prioritizing history, authentic community, and epistemic justice emerging from those intersections (Figure 2). As this emerging framework suggests, the authors intend to foster a dialogue around how place-based work impacts teaching and learning and dynamizes pedagogy. As two community engagement scholar-practitioners, we critically reflected on whether our place-based work substantially impacted the pedagogy as it occurred in the classroom in the service-learning context. We contend that the framework for a pedagogy of place (Figure 2) invites us to consider how place-based teaching and learning can surface intersections in the contexts of local communities, institutions, and the systems. This special issue, and the scholarly articles within, have the opportunity to further dialogue and explore how place-based work can spark innovation in our teaching, push pedagogy forward and encourage pedagogy reflective of the knowledge and assets of the community. As community-based scholars continue to examine and reflect on place-based pedagogy working alongside and in their communities, they will also surface more and differing educational practices and commitments. The framework for a pedagogy of place invites future dialogue, building on the research, theory-building, and scholarly work published in this issue.

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