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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore curricular and young people's orientations to, and representations of, the areas in which they live contrasted against curricular representations of place in Wales. This is accomplished through a mixed methods approach incorporating statistical and content analysis. Responses were coded with a positive, neutral or negative value and organised into categories emerging from the data. While the majority (64.6%) of our participants are positively oriented to these areas, schools providing Free School Meals above the national average for Wales had more pupils with negative orientations. Additionally, the rhetoric in teachers' guidance for the Curriculum Cymreig promotes cultural icons and symbols representing place, while pupils' responses do not. The findings suggest a potential relationship between social disadvantage and negative orientations to place, as well as a dissonance between "official" representations of Wales and pupils' lived experiences. Recommendations are made to include place-based, dialectical critiques of curricular and pupils' understanding of place within pedagogical practices of teachers in Wales.

**Keywords:** Wales; Education; Curriculum Cymreig; Critical Pedagogy; Place

## Introduction

Place-based education and other approaches to schooling focusing on place continue to be contested and debated (Barrat and Barrat Hacking, 2011). In Wales, curricular considerations of place in school are addressed through teachers' implementation of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig (Curriculum Cymreig), a distinctive aspect of the national curriculum intended to develop a Welsh ethos in schools. The aims of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig also include helping pupils to appreciate

the distinctiveness of living and learning in Wales in the twenty-first century, to identify their own sense of Welshness and to feel a heightened sense of belonging to their local community and country. It also helps to foster in pupils an understanding of an outward-looking and international Wales, promoting global citizenship and concern for sustainable development. (Welsh Government, 2003, 2)

The prominent emphasis on the appreciation of place and its associations with self-identity, community cohesion and global citizenship illustrates its curricular significance, but little research in Wales has been conducted on pupils' perceptions of where they live and how notions of place can contribute to meeting the aims and goals of the Curriculum Cymreig or pupils' educational experiences.

The purpose of this research was to capture the language young people in Wales use in describing place. The analysis of their responses provides a fascinating glimpse into both the common and distinctive elements of their lived experiences and calls into question assumptions of how they conceptualize the areas where they live. From the analysis and discussion of these findings, recommendations are made for a more-nuanced and sophisticated pedagogy of place situated within the auspices of the Curriculum Cymreig wherein pupils and teachers may more consciously interact with considerations of place and its relationship to their teaching and learning experiences both in and out of the classroom.

Approaches to Understanding Place

This study is primarily concerned with pupils' subjective perceptions of place. In discussing place, Kissling (2012) compellingly describes the variability of perceptions and conceptions of place.

Place is landed in a physical sense, imagined in a psychological sense, felt in an emotional sense, storied in a historical sense, enacted in a cultural sense, constructed in a social sense, and sure it 'is' in many other senses as well. (Kissling 2012, 111)

Place is also a ubiquitous concept "wrapped in common sense" and a word that "seems to speak for itself" (Creswell, 2004, p1). Geertz (1996) echoes this sentiment in describing place as "something that is a dimension of everyone's existence, the intensity of where we are, passed by anonymously and unremarked. It goes without saying" (p259). How we talk about place suggests notions such as privacy, belonging, diversity and the existential, experiential and relational qualities at play between individuals and their environment (Creswell 2004; Relph 1976; Entrikin 1989; Foucault 1972). Some approaches to place focus heavily on the material and spatial realities. For example, Agnew (1987) theorised three fundamental aspects of place: location, locale and the sense of place. From this perspective, Wales serves as both the location and locale for this study, and while these characteristics are crucial in regard to the relevancy of this study and its findings to the participants and other stakeholders, I focus primarily on conceptions of place emerging from a "sense of place," a subjective rather than objective designation. Creswell (2004) makes a crucial point in understanding the subjectivity of place, particularly as it relates to a Welsh context, in referring to Raymond Williams' novel *Border Country*. Creswell discusses a duality within considerations of place where, in most definitions of landscape, the "viewer is outside of it" (Creswell 2004, p10). However, in discussing Williams, Creswell illustrates how upon his return to his childhood home in the Welsh borderlands, Williams is reminded of "the qualities

of life that made it a 'place'," emphasising a shift inward — from an objective consideration of place to a more subjective interpretation (Ibid.).

The subjectivity of place is dependent upon personal interpretations constructed through exposure to discursive formations and socio-cultural interactions with individuals and the physical realities of a place. Raymond Williams provides another insight into a Welsh-oriented subjectivity of place in his essay *Welsh Culture* (Williams, 2003). In this essay, Williams and an American visitor travel through the Welsh countryside. Looking out over the landscape, the American described rural mid-Wales as a "wilderness area." This statement reflects the American's objective appraisal of a landscape and a subjective interpretation of that place informed through particular experiences and discourses of place. Williams, on the other hand, saw farmland, not "wilderness." Raymond's interpretation of place as both the object and product of the farmers' labour (p6) wasn't produced solely through the physical reality of him being in Wales. It was also constructed through his being *from* Wales, his association with Wales and in identifying as Welsh. The outside/inside parity of place represented in this essay demonstrate different approaches to interpretations and representations of place emerging from individuals' interactions with the social, cultural, political and economic discourses in their everyday lives.

The story of Williams and the American also link to Relph's (1976) work with a phenomenology of place in *Place and Placelessness*. Relph's approach to conceptualising "space" and "place" along with Tuan (1974) and Buttimer (1976) represented a "humanistic" turn in geography. This perspective emerged from a belief that previous approaches to place did not address the importance of place to the human experience (Seamon & Sowers 2008). In simplistic terms, phenomenology is a study of human experience and meaning-making of a concept or phenomenon or concept, with the intention of the inquiry serving to reduce the experience to a description of "essential" qualities, or qualities that describe the nature of the

phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). In his work, Relph argues for experientially-based understandings of space and place, and from this perspective he asserts that “place” possesses a power that orders and focuses human intentions, experiences and actions. As a result, Relph conceptualises space and place as “dialectically structured in human environmental experience, since our understanding of space is related to the places we inhabit, which in turn derive meaning from their spatial context” (Seamon & Sowers 2008). While Relph did address place and placelessness, critics of Relph’s work argue that a focus on place overshadows considerations of the interstices of place. For example, Massey argues for a “more progressive sense of place” that accommodates a sense of both dislocation and connectivity through which places are made, referring to a “global sense of the local, a global sense of place” (Massey 1997, p323). Other perspectives taking into consideration what exists between places include Entrikin (1991) who wrote of the “betweenness” of place, emphasising the use of narrative and emplotment from a position between objectivity and subjectivity as an ideal approach to conceptualising place, asserting narratives suggest relationships and trajectories in the meaning-making production of place.

For the purposes of this study, and in recognition of the various interpretations and conceptualisations of place, I find it useful to draw upon elements of Relph’s phenomenology of place and Entrikin’s concept of narrative in investigating how pupils’ construct and express their place images, identities and, their association with, and orientation to, the places in which they live. In other words, I am interested in understanding how young people in Wales experience a particular kind of place — the areas in which they live. As outlined below, pupils were asked to provide up to three words that best described these areas. Through these few words, I hoped basic narratives might emerge reflecting an individual’s experience of place, as well as regional narratives constructed by participants’ responses from different areas across Wales. Although limited to a maximum of three words,

these brief narratives can communicate important insight into how young people make-meaning of and from the areas they live.

As mentioned above, place is a paradoxical concept involving competing perspectives of inside and outside-ness, “situatedness” and “inbetweenness,” and conscious and unconscious interpretations and reactions to place. As we begin to enlarge our understanding of place, we can come to share a sense of belonging with the “environmental materiality, sociological perception and construction and individual affect or bond” (Buell 2005, 63) of a place, which contributes to the innumerable cultural expressions that emerge and erupt from our meaning-making processes. Our connection through our individual affect or bond is something that Hummon (1992) describes as an “everyday rootedness” (263). We, as the inhabitants of a place, may feel an association with it because, for us, place possesses a centre of “felt value” (Eyles 1989, 109) and our affinity with the “objects and things, and the very spaces and places in which they are found shape a person’s place identity” (Proshansky 2006, 259).

Through the interactions with place, our “place identity” coalesces within a “social field” that contains shared meanings (Stokols and Shumaker, 1981, 457) arising from common and uncommon experiences and interpretations. In this social milieu, place can exist as “an expression of groups that inhabit it; and it often represents people, even as people come to embody places” (Rodman, 1992, 652). Indeed, as alluded to above, place has “multiple meanings that are constructed through relationships and by people and their interactions with each other, environment, memories and events” (Berger and Luckmann (1966; Schuz, 1967). As the setting where our meaning-making is enacted, place is both contested and political (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992) because, ultimately, one’s “sense of place has to do not only with what we personally feel and think about the environment but also with how we suppose others may think and feel about it” (Anderson and Milbrandt 2005, 17).

Understanding how young people experience, interpret and represent the areas in which they live is at the heart of this research. In analysing the language they use in describing these places we can understand similarities and disconnections between curricular treatments of place and the pupils' experience. The potential of this exercise lies in the opportunity for educators' to engage pupils' orientations to the places where they live and learn into pedagogy and practice, creating opportunities for contextualized learning experiences that assist young people in examining the particularities arising within their current circumstances and inform the potential of their future trajectories and destinations.

### **Place and the Curriculum Cymreig**

In 1989, the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC) introduced the Curriculum Cymreig as a "distinctly Welsh" curricular initiative meant to ensure schools in Wales demonstrate a "Welsh ethos" in the educational experiences they provide for their pupils. According to the Welsh Government, a learning experience where teachers and learners are proactively self-aware of their Welsh context will help young pupils "develop a sense of identity and an understanding of the place where they live" (Welsh Government, 2003, 14). Moreover, the Welsh Government purports progression in learning in regard to the Curriculum Cymreig might be demonstrated through "moving from the concrete, such as knowledge of their own locality... to more abstract concepts about the place and influence of Wales in Europe and the wider world" (Welsh Government, 2003, 15).

In addition to the aims and goals of the Curriculum Cymreig, the Welsh Government also suggests how the Curriculum Cymreig can be most effectively employed. The Curriculum Cymreig should "provide pupils with a knowledge of their Welsh heritage and culture, with a knowledge of a contemporary Wales as a country of pluralities, and with an awareness of change and development" (Welsh Government, 2003, 56). Through the Cwricwlwm Cymreig, discourses of 'place' emphasise certain historical, political and cultural



representations of Wales (Smith, 2010), what is not known, however, is the degree to which these discourses represent (or engage) the interpretations and constructions of place expressed by the pupils and teachers living in those areas. With this concern in mind, I wanted to capture the language young people in Wales use to describe the areas in which they live and to better understand how they come to understand and represent these places. As described below, this was accomplished through a mixed-methods approach incorporating statistical and content analysis.

## **Research**

The research was conducted using data collected from a multi-cohort longitudinal study following children in primary and secondary schools throughout Wales funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). Although part of a longitudinal study, these data were collected during the first sweep of the study and are not presented here as having a longitudinal dimension or being subject to longitudinal analysis. Self-completion surveys were distributed by the researchers, including the author, to the pupils using tablet computers. Pupils had the option to complete the surveys in English or Welsh. The responses were uploaded to an online database and then imported into electronic spreadsheets and statistical analysis software for qualitative and quantitative analyses. Mixed-method approaches to data analysis were used in examining the evidence provided by the young people in our study. Nvivo, Microsoft Excel and SPSS were used to analyse the data. Excel and Nvivo were used in organising, coding and annotating the interpretation of responses. Once coded, SPSS was used to conduct frequency and cross-tabulation analyses.

## *Sample*

The participants were Year 8 and Year 10 pupils aged 13-15 years of age. In regard to gender, 408 (49.1%) were male and 423 (50.9%) were female. Although the ethnic composition of the sample was diverse, the number of participants within the five ethnic

categories (white, black, Asian, mixed and other) were too small for reliable analysis. As a result, two categories were created with 382 (88.7%) white and 49 (11.3%) ethnic minority. Purposeful sampling was used to attempt to capture the diversity of Wales' social, cultural and geographical landscape. Schools across Wales were selected in consideration of their geographic location, language of instruction, community language use, socio-economic data, rural and urban profiles and ethnic and racial diversity. **The head teachers from each school determined how many pupils would be invited to participate in the study. Informed consent was provided by each participating pupil. The number of participants from each school ranged from a single class to the entire year group, depending on the decision of the head teacher.**

Young people in Wales experience a distinctive schooling experience in that bilingualism, even in officially designated 'English medium' schools, is a considerable aspect of their daily routine. Cymraeg (the Welsh language), is ever-present in schools in Wales, although to varying degrees of intensity. The linguistic medium of instruction in Wales is organized into five categories, English medium, English with significant Welsh, bilingual with 50-79% Welsh, bilingual with 80% or greater Welsh, and Welsh medium. Our sample includes schools in each of the aforementioned categories. Overall, 458 (55.1%) of the sample attended English medium schools, 50 (6%) attended English medium with significant Welsh use, 151 (18.2%) attended bilingual with 50-79% Welsh, 141 (17%) attended bilingual with 80% or more Welsh and 31 (3.7%) attended Welsh medium schools. In regard to the language pupils used to complete the survey, 87 (10.2%) responded in Welsh. These responses were translated into English by a first-language Welsh speaker and the use of a Welsh-English dictionary.

#### *The Topic of Research*

**All of the Year 8 and Year 10 pupils participating in this research were asked to list up to three words that best describe their neighbourhood.** A pilot survey revealed pupils living in rural areas found it difficult to characterize the areas where they live as neighbourhoods. Furthermore, for Welsh speaking pupils, the word ‘Cymgodaeth’ (neighbourhood) was difficult to understand since most of them used the term ‘fy ardal’ (my area). As a result, the wording of the prompt was changed to ‘please list three words that best describe the area in which you live.’

### *Coding and Analysis*

**The methodology for this study primarily utilises content and discourse analysis. Additionally, while it is not a phenomenological study, the research is informed through phenomenological methods, or at the very least, a constructivist concern with understanding clarified accounts of pupils’ orientations to the areas in which they live. Phenomenological analysis investigates what “all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2006, p.59), or in this case, living in Wales or specific areas in Wales. The goal of phenomenology can be described as reducing individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of its universal essence or the “very nature of the thing” (van Manen, 1990, p.163). This “essence,” is revealed through specific methods of analysis associated with phenomenological research. One such method is bracketing, which Creswell describes as a process in which “investigators set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (Creswell, 2006, p.60). Because the topic of this research is understanding pupils’ representations of, and orientations to, the places where they live, I felt elements of phenomenological inquiry would be helpful designing the research and in analysing the data. For example, the decision for pupils to provide up to three descriptive words describing their 'area' was**

meant as an organisational exercise similar to bracketing, wherein pupils had to reduce their experience of the areas in which they lived to three or less terms that communicated, as best as possible, their most-refined, constructive meaning, understanding of, or orientation to, that place. As mentioned below in the limitations of this study, open-ended responses, focus groups and interviews with pupils could have provided richer, thicker descriptions of the areas in which these pupils live, but these methods could not be arranged at the time this research was undertaken. Through the collection method, I hoped the process of narrowing down responses to three or less terms would encourage pupils to economically choose words that most effectively represented and communicated how they experience, know and derive-meaning from the places in which they live.

Individual responses were given a negative or positive score by me and a coding assistant. For statistical analysis, a method for evaluating the positive, neutral or negative orientation of responses was derived based on principles associated with discourse analysis. This method involved the analysis of experiential, expressive and relational values (Fairclough, 1995; 2001) of the responses provided by the pupils. These values helped in ascertaining the positive, neutral or negative value of the word, particularly when a set of two or three words were provided by a pupil. For example, words with relational values express characteristics of social relations. The thematic categories largely coincide with previous research regarding mechanisms that indicate neighbourhood impact on young people (Ellen and Turner 1997) such as services, social networks, exposure to crime and physical distance. **Using SPSS, a coding assistant and I performed multiple coding attempts as we interpreted the positive, neutral or negative value of a word. A negative response was given a score of -1, neutral responses 0 and positive responses +1. This was a careful and detail-oriented process involving discussions of the potential interpretations of each**

**word. Through numerous discussions, referencing word definitions and comparing words to other terms provided by the pupil, we were able to code all of the responses provided by the participants. We then used Scott's Pi Alpha to determine coder reliability. The results of this analysis are provided in the limitations section below.**

Since most pupils provided multiple responses to the question, each of the pupil's responses were scored and the values for each word were added together to create a new variable. **This variable was the composite score of each pupil's responses that represented their overall orientation to the area they lived. A sum of the individual responses provided by each pupil was made, with the score ranging from -3 to +3. This process created the following seven point scale: -3 (Negative), -2 (mostly negative), -1 (somewhat negative), 0 neutral, +1 (somewhat positive), +2 (mostly positive) and +3 (positive).** As I was primarily concerned with general orientations to place, the categories marked as 'mostly' and 'somewhat' were aggregated into a single category creating a five point scale of negative, somewhat negative, neutral, somewhat positive and positive.

Once values of the responses were coded, the actual terms provided by the pupils were imported into an electronic spreadsheet, examined for spelling errors and sorted alphabetically. Initial thematic codes were also derived from the responses and the responses and themes were imported into Nvivo for thematic analysis. **The results of the thematic analysis are not reported in this study, but the process was beneficial in corroborating the positive and negative orientation of pupils' responses. For example, broad, descriptive themes emerged from the pupils' responses. I initially classified these categories as social, physical and ambient themes. The "social" category included responses describing the social aspects of place such as relationships (e.g. neighbours, family) and peoples' characteristics (e.g. friendly, mean). The "physical" theme was comprised of the physical, material aspects of place (e.g. mountains, the coast). The**

**“ambient” theme included responses describing representations of place that communicated mood or “atmosphere” (e.g. boring, peaceful). Subcategories such as social, economic, geographic and historical were also created. Through organising the data into themes and subcategories, I became more familiar with the terms provided by the pupils and developed a greater insight into what I believed was the meaning and intent of the pupils’ responses.**

#### *Limitations*

Although strict measures were taken to maintain the purity of the data and ensure the validity of this research, there were certain limitations to conducting this study. The subjective nature of generating descriptive and evaluative codes for pupils’ responses introduced a level of interpretive variation. In response to these concerns, I used Scott’s Pi analysis to measure coder reliability. The Scott’s Pi values and Percent Agreements for coder reliability regarding the positive, neutral or negative value of pupils’ responses are provided in the table below.

**Table I: Scott’s Pi Analysis of Coder Reliability of Positive/Neutral/Negative Orientation**

	# of Units of Analysis	Scott’s Pi Value	Percent Agreement
Response #1	831	.786	86.7%
Response #2	746	.778	89.8%
Response #3	593	.829	90.3%

While identical responses were coded with the same descriptive and evaluative codes, similar items may not have the same qualitative dimensions. For example, responses such as ‘beautiful’ and ‘disgusting’ were relatively easy to code with a descriptive theme (appearance) and an evaluative code (+1 and -1 respectively). However, some responses such as ‘lots of shops’ were slightly ambiguous. When possible, items in question were compared to other responses provided by that pupil. By doing this, the evaluative codes of the other responses by the pupil could inform the interpretation of the response. Therefore, if ‘lots of

shops' was accompanied by the responses 'lively' and 'friendly,' then 'lots of shops' was given a positive evaluative code. Additionally, the question addressed by this study was part of a larger survey designed by a team of researchers covering a number of issues regarding pupils' lives and learning experiences.

Unfortunately, time spent with the pupils was limited and I did not have opportunities to conduct ethnographic interviews or focus groups to gather richer, more detailed and nuanced responses. In consideration of these limitations, pupils were asked for three descriptive words in the hopes that this bounded-set of responses might encourage them to choose answers they felt were appropriate and descriptive while still allowing for genuine, creative and varied responses. As mentioned previously, this decision was informed through phenomenological methods, with the intent being the purposeful limitation of responses might serve as a type of bracketing that would reduce the almost innumerable potential of their responses to a nearly "essential" expression of the area they were describing. **When using the word "essential," I refer to a reduced and clarified interpretation of the pupils' meaning of place and not that these places have a real or authentic truth in and of themselves.** While this research does produce provide new perspectives young people's orientations to place in Wales, it is only a starting point for further investigations into understanding the interplay between curricular representations and pupils' perceptions of place.

### *Findings*

Of the 2198 responses analysed, the three most frequent were 'quiet' (315, 14.33%), 'friendly' (236, 10.73%) and 'boring' (126, 5.73%). Overall, pupils were predominately positive in the language they used describing their neighbourhoods with words like 'friendly, fun and happy.' Neutrally categorised responses include words such as 'countryside, rural and green.' Typical negatively oriented responses include words like 'boring, noisy and

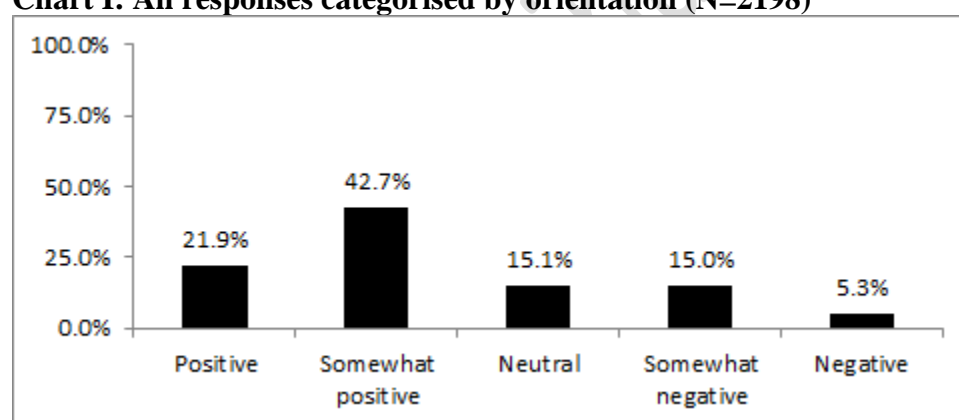
dirty.’ While “quiet” was the most frequent response, the majority of responses by pupils were of a social nature, describing friends, family and members of the communities. Due to the large number of responses, only the ten most frequent responses are provided in the table below.

**Table II: Ten most frequent responses (N=2198)**

Response	Pos/Neu/Neg Code	%	Response	Pos/Neu/Neg Code	%
Quiet	Neutral	14.3%	Nice	Positive	3.7%
Friendly	Positive	10.7%	Safe	Positive	3.6%
Boring	Negative	5.7%	Peaceful	Positive	3.2%
Small	Neutral	4.9%	Happy	Positive	2.6%
Funny	Positive	3.9%	Loud	Neutral	2.2%

In addition to the frequency of responses, the data were coded into a scale of positive to negative categories. These categories suggest the overall value of responses provided by the pupils as they described the areas where they live.

**Chart I: All responses categorised by orientation (N=2198)**



The following table presents the three most frequent responses organised into 14 regions model of Wales developed by Coupland, Bishop and Garrett (2006). “Friendly” and “quiet” remain the most frequent words in every region. However, variation in the third most frequent word from each school suggests interesting differences in the qualities of place interpreted by the pupils.

**Table III: Frequent words and orientation by region and school (n=2198)**

Region	School	Three most frequent responses	Positive	Negative
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					Orientation of responses by school	Orientation of responses by school
Swansea/Neath/Port Talbot	School A	Friendly	Quiet	Boring	65%	27.9%
The Valleys	School B	Friendly	Quiet	Boring	53.1%	32.3%
	School C	Friendly	Quiet	Small	63.4%	24.4%
Pembrokeshire	School D	Friendly	Quiet	Boring	56.3%	20.6%
	School E	Friendly	Quiet	Boring	53.7%	29.6%
Carmarthenshire	School F	Friendly	Quiet	Happy	75.5%	10.2%
Cardiff	School G	Friendly	Quiet	Safe	80.6%	16.1%
	School H	Friendly	Quiet	Clean	61.2%	18.4%
Ceredigion	School I	Friendly	Quiet	Boring	69.4%	18.4%
Gwynedd & Anglesey	School J	Friendly	Quiet	Safe	63.5%	21.2%
Powys	School K	Friendly	Quiet	Peaceful	68%	10%
	School L	Friendly	Quiet	Boring	57.6%	18.6%
	School M	Friendly	Quiet	Small	71.9%	16.9%

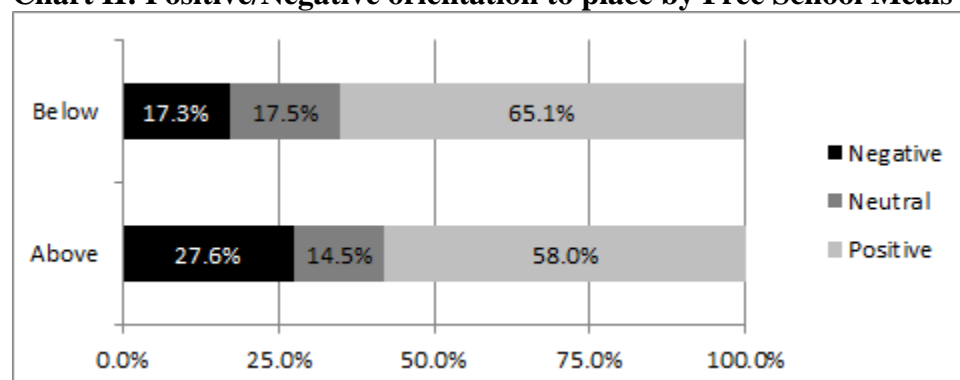
Although socio-economic data for the participants could not be collected, data regarding the percentage of pupils at each school who received free school meals was available. For this analysis, the five-point scale of positive to negative orientation (shown above in Table II) was reduced to a three point scale, wherein the ‘somewhat negative’ and ‘somewhat positive’ responses were combined with the negative and positive responses respectively. **In Chart I, the ‘above’ and ‘below’ labels refer to schools with pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) that are ‘above’ or ‘below’ the national average for Wales. In other words, for this analysis, the proportion of children eligible for FSM at each school were compared to the national average and the schools were organised into categories above or below that average.**

Of the 13 secondary schools included in the sample, eight are below the national average for FSM in Wales and five are above. Pupils attending schools above the national average for FSM possess a more negative and less positive orientation to their neighbourhoods than pupils attending schools below the national average ( $p=.003$ ).

Admittedly, the validity of FSM as a measure or standard is limited. However, the variability inherent in the uptake of FSM does not necessarily render it useless as proxy for more

articulate socio-economic data (Hobbs & Vignoles, 2007) or as a heuristic device to guide future research.

**Chart II: Positive/Negative orientation to place by Free School Meals (FSM) (n=2198)**



Discrepancies between curricular and pupils representations of place

Guidance produced by the Welsh Government to support the implementation of the Curriculum Cymreig contains case-studies demonstrating “best practices” for developing a sense of place with pupils. **A common theme in many of these case studies is the promotion of cultural and historic icons and symbols, such as castles, the Millennium Centre, YSenedd, bards, the Mabinogion, and distinctive Welsh concepts like “hiraeth,”** (which roughly translates into English as a longing for home). **Nearly none of the pupils relied on terms describing these icons and symbols in describing their areas. Only two responses included the words “history and “culture,” and the words “Wales” and “Cymru” (the name of the country in Cymraeg, the Welsh language) only appear four times.** Additionally, references to Wales, Welsh culture and concepts were extremely sparse (e.g. the word “Welsh” was only mentioned five times). Although pupils mention features such as mountains and rivers, no specific references to locations like Devil’s Bridge or Snowdonia are made.

Similar discrepancies are found in how the Curriculum Cymreig represents work and place, providing examples of developments in green technology, the leisure industry and engineering and situating these discussions within particular locales in Wales. These

representations were overwhelmingly positive, focusing on the potential of work and its positive, future impact. Responses such as “farming” and “farms,” which were the most frequent type of labour provided by pupils, does give insight into the type of work that comes to “define” the areas where the pupils live, but pupils the most common responses regarding work and employment were “no opportunities,” “unemployment” and “benefits.”

Finally, the Curriculum Cymreig attempts to situate Wales as a nation with a distinctive political character and a global presence. This is established through case studies highlighting devolution, multiculturalism, sustainable development and global citizenship (Smith, 2010). However, these elements of Wales as a politically nation with devolved powers are absent from pupils descriptions. No mention is made of any political parties or civic participation in their local communities, as are references to devolution in its actual or potential impact. **In regard to devolution, admittedly, it would be unlikely for a pupil to list ‘devolution’ as a word to describe place. After all, pupils were asked to describe the area in which they live, which suggests using adjectives in order to convey their representations. However, many pupils included nouns and verbs in their responses. For example, “trees, houses and sheep” were common words provided by pupils. If they used nouns and verbs to represent certain aspects of place, then they could have also done so in referencing concepts of devolution or politics. In general terms, Wales is often described as a Labour-oriented nation, and Plaid Cymru is a political party unique to Wales, yet pupils did not provide any responses demonstrating a political identity of affiliation of their neighbourhoods. Similarly, pupils in Cardiff could have mentioned Y Senedd (the National Assembly for Wales), the word “capital” (as in Cardiff being the political capital of Wales) or adjectives such as democratic or even simply political or government, but none of these word were included in any of the**

**responses, which suggests the pupils in the study did not make explicit connections between the politics of Wales and the areas in which they live.**

## **Discussion**

Positive, neutral and negative orientations to place

These words “friendly,” “quiet” and “boring” summarise the participants’ overall orientation to the sounds, ambience, social profile and potential for activity in their neighbourhoods, emphasising Kissling’s claim that place is at once physical, psychological, emotional, historical, cultural and social (2012). Responses like ‘community,’ ‘connected,’ ‘friendly,’ ‘helpful,’ ‘trustworthy’ and ‘kind’ highlight the positive experiences and social relationships pupils have in their neighbourhoods and suggest the ‘felt value’ (Eyles 1989) these young people possess in relation to these places. Friendliness and communitarian attitudes were prominently discussed, suggesting they are aware of their own interpretation of place and that of their neighbours as well (Anderson and Milbrandt 2005). Equally important, the pupils seem cognizant of both their and other’s performance of place as a community — however, that may be interpreted. More than an aggregation of people living in a shared place, the experiential, expressive and relational values of the terms provided by the majority of the respondents suggest that positive social interaction, possibly accented by an ethic of care and social responsibility, is valued, executed and even expected in their daily social interactions. Buell, as cited in Jayanandhan (2009, 1), suggests this appreciation of the “environmental materiality, sociological perception and construction and individual affect or bond” of place can contribute to one’s sense of belonging and association with place, which in turn may lead to general, positive associations with the areas in which we live and the diversity of our interactions there.

Free School Meals and Place

Schools in this study providing free school meals above the national average for Wales had more pupils with negative composite scores and fewer pupils with positive scores than schools below the national average. The data show schools located in the Valleys, Swansea/Neath/Port Talbot and southern Pembrokeshire — areas often associated with social deprivation — possess the highest concentration of pupils with negative orientations. While pupils in these schools express a greater negative orientation to these areas, the data also show they share common, positive understanding and representations of these places. Words such as “loyal,” “family,” “trustworthy” and “generous” were commonly found in responses from these schools. These typically social references highlight the positive characteristics of communal support and cohesiveness in the face of what can be challenging circumstances.

School G in Cardiff and School F in Carmarthenshire both have the highest percentage of positive oriented responses. The school in Cardiff is a Welsh-medium school and can be classed as a school serving a middle-class, but not particularly privileged, community. The community in Carmarthenshire could also be described as lower, middle-class. School G is located in a bustling urban area and School F is situated in a large, but relatively quiet village. Both schools have a strong Welsh-language curriculum, with School G being a Welsh medium school and school F a bi-lingual school. Additionally, both of the schools have a number of pupils eligible for FSM that is below the national average. As free school meals are often used as an indicator of higher social deprivation, these results suggest poverty and social deprivation may contribute to negative dispositions and lesser amounts of these social circumstances may ameliorate pupils’ perceptions of the places they live. In regard to School G in Cardiff and School F in Carmarthenshire, the third most frequent response from these schools were different from any other school in the study. For example, the third most frequent word from School G in Cardiff is “safe,” and for School F in Carmarthenshire, was “happy.”

Although these findings are intriguing, more research is needed to better understand the possible of social deprivation, as well as the overall day-to-day experiences of young people in these areas that help contribute to their overall positive orientation to the places where they live. This future research should include more accurate and appropriate measures for socio-economic status and in-depth interaction with participants and data utilising ethnographic research methods.

### **Recommendations: A Pedagogy of Place in Wales**

In consideration of the descriptions of place promoted by the Curriculum Cymreig and pupils' responses, questions arose regarding the relationship between curriculum and pupils' place identity (Proshansky 2006). As I analysed the data, I thought about the "everyday rootedness" (Hummon 1992) of these young people and what that meant in terms of how they build and engage in social relationships and their engagement with cultural, political and economic discourses of their communities both now and in the future. Equally important, I wondered how these realities were acknowledged, analysed and interpreted at school (McKenzie 2008).

Themes of crime, substance abuse and unemployment are under-represented or absent from the case studies supporting the Curriculum Cymreig. Pupils' acknowledgement of "bad men, druggies" and other negative "embodiments" (Rodman 1992) of place illustrate their awareness of negative social and cultural circumstances, but not necessarily their aplomb in understanding the factors contributing to their existence or strategies for avoiding or even eliminating these factors from pupils' lives and communities. **While these descriptions provide an insight into relationships and experiences that spill over into pupils' schooling experiences, *Developing the Curriculum Cymreig* does not give guidance for teachers on how to create opportunities for pupils and teachers to discuss these social actions and the circumstances that create them, or more important, critical perspectives**

**and practices that may reveal how to counter their effects and transform the ‘embodiments’ of place into a more socially just environment.**

At the heart of the Curriculum Cymreig is a discourse of Welshness and Wales that emphasises a ‘cultural citizenship’ framework linking belonging and identity to characteristics of culture and place. These discourses promote commonsensical assumptions of what it means to be Welsh in Wales (Andrews and Lewis 2000) and represent technical approaches to citizenship (Giroux 1980) and culture in schools. These discourses reinforce ideological thinking (Fairclough 1995) and resist multiple interpretations of place, self and belonging, undermining the plurality of Welshness suggested by rhetoric periodically surfacing throughout the guidance for the Curriculum Cymreig (Allard 2007; Smith 2010). While many of the case studies mentioned in this paper take into account various locations within Wales, *Developing the Curriculum Cymreig* provides guidance for teachers to enact a Curriculum Cymreig that is based on carefully crafted representations of place and Welshness. The guidance supporting these case studies do not encourage teachers and pupils to reflect on how these representations are put forward or what they may convey through their curricular narrative of Wales and Welshness (Smith 2010).

**For example, representations of work and employment in *Developing the Curriculum Cymreig* (Welsh Government, 2003) and pupils’ responses of “unemployment,” “benefits” and “no opportunities” highlight important disparities between representations of work promoted by policy makers through the *Developing the Curriculum Cymreig* document and pupils’ actual experiences. Similarly, inelegant, traditional and over-simplified representations of the Welshness of people and place result in a gap between policy makers’ notions of place in Wales and pupils orientations to, and perceptions of place in Wales. Due to this inadequacy, teachers are left to their**

own devices in developing robust, reflective, philosophical considerations of the relationship between curriculum, culture and place.

The Curriculum Cymreig is a statutory element (Welsh Government 2003, 4) of the national curriculum for Wales, and if teachers rely solely on this guidance in ensuring their lessons are aligned to the Curriculum Cymreig, it is possible they may promote overly-simplistic representations of work and opportunity, of cultural identity and place, that is inconsistent to the meanings they and their pupils derive from the areas in which they live and learn. I am not suggesting the case studies in *Developing the Curriculum Cymreig* are entirely representative of pupils' learning experiences in schools in Wales, I do assert the case studies are presented as models of best practice that teachers should emulate in planning their curricula. It would be beneficial if the best practices promoted by the Welsh Government explicitly demonstrated strategies for engaging pupils' perceptions of place so as to better align curricular aims and goals with the actual circumstances and experiences of pupils. One possible approach to revealing the competing discourses at play between these perspectives is engaging teachers and pupils in dialectical discussions of place framed within a critical pedagogy.

The potential of such an exploration into the lives of these young people can be the development of what Freire described as conscientization, or the process of engaging in a critical consciousness that identifies and critiques the political, social, cultural and economic contradictions at play in our daily lives (Freire 1985). The benefit of such an engagement is pupils and teachers can collaborate in a pedagogy of place that emerges from their local context, set against curricular discourses and refined through the examination of claims and experiences of the social and physical realities of the areas in which they live.

## **Conclusion**



In conceptualizing place within an educational discourse, (Jayanandhan 2009, 1) asserts that a definition of place “ought to capture its multiplicitous nature and multidisciplinary connotations while still being responsive to the specific contexts of its use in education.” It is through the thoughtful, perhaps even philosophical contextualisation of the multidisciplinary nature of place within a child’s education that place-based pedagogies exist and, hopefully, flourish (Edelgass 2009). For decades, proponents for place-based pedagogies have asserted contemporary schooling fails to provide pupils with meaningful ways to connect what they learn in the classroom to the realities of their life outside of school (Dewey 1959; Kitchens 2009). Similarly, while Wales is promoted as the physical, social, cultural and conceptual cornerstone of place in the Curriculum Cymreig, this curricular initiative and the national curriculum fail to provide teachers and pupils with meaningful ways to address the disconnectedness of curriculum and Cymru; of the disparity between displaced knowledge that is deemed important for pupils to know and the emplaced knowledge they currently possess or will discover through their daily routines and beyond (Smith 2010). **Much of the rhetoric regarding critical thinking in the national curriculum for Wales promotes ‘thinking skills through the context of scientific literacy and numerical reasoning’ (learning.wales.gov.uk 2015), but this language is centred on logic-based critical thinking skills, which are important, but do not explicitly engage in critical thinking that can lead to what Freire (2006) describes as political literacy and the ability to discern ideological discourses that shape social structures and attenuate our orientation to them.** In March 2014, an independent review of the national curriculum for Wales was conducted. The review stated the curriculum should exist as a national framework with greater levels of interpretation at the school level. Furthermore, the curriculum should be organised around four purposes: Ambitious, capable learners; enterprising, creative contributors; healthy, confident individuals and ethical, informed

citizens (gov.wales 2015). A pedagogy of place in Wales, wherein teachers and pupils deconstruct and examine the social, political and cultural elements that organise their orientation to their 'places,' falls in line with the recent review calling for a holistically-oriented and culturally relevant curriculum erupting from local interpretations and practices.

In concluding this paper, I again refer to Freire's concept of conscientization (1985), and assert that a place-based pedagogy in Wales must be willing to challenge established discourses of identity, culture and place (Cutts 2012) through critical investigations arising from reflective practices situated within a dialectical learning. While the guidance for the Curriculum Cymreig seems flexible in interpretation, the discourses of Wales and Welshness are not sufficiently challenged or displaced. Such restrictions do not reasonably allow for teachers' curricula to be informed by risk or open-mindedness (Somerville and Green 2011). Educators should be curricularly empowered to "address the specificities of the experiences, problems, languages, and histories that communities rely upon to construct a narrative of collective identity and possible transformation" (McLaren and Giroux 1990, 263) . In other words, they must be given opportunities to enact a pedagogy of place within their classrooms, with the intention of perceiving discourses that can obfuscate obstacles to a more socially just community (Apple 2008; Bates 2006). For such a lofty call to be successful, it must be founded upon sustainable intergenerational transmissions and practices (Mckenzie 2008; Mannion and Adey 2011) and engage people in examining the contradictions between their meaning-making practices and the discourse, structures and institutions constantly at play in their lives (Freire 1985; Freire 2006; Giroux 2010b; Giroux 2011; Giroux 2012).

Critical and even unconventional considerations of place can serve as organisational elements providing alternative understandings of the world, ourselves and our relationship with others (Somerville 2010; Stevenson 2008). Through privileging pupils' voices, understanding the language they use in describing the areas in which they live, and

incorporating these knowledges, perspectives and opinions into their pedagogies, teachers in Wales can enact empowered pedagogies concerned with envisioning place as areas of human life that are socially just and critically aware (Hodson 2011; Eubanks Owens, et al. 2011; Greenwood 2008). In Wales, critical approaches to pedagogies of place may create environments wherein ‘citizens might have some direct bearing on the well-being of the social and ecological places people actually inhabit’ (Gruenewald 2003, 3), concerns that, as evidenced by the findings of this study, are central to pupils’ meaning-making processes for how they come to know and associate with the places in which they live and the people who share that experience with them.

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