

## BEYOND COLONISATION: DEVELOPING A SENSE OF PLACE THROUGH OUTDOOR EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

Mark Leather<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of St Mark and St John, Plymouth, UK

\*Corresponding author email: [profmarkleather@gmail.com](mailto:profmarkleather@gmail.com)

### Abstract

In this paper, I explore the recontextualization of place-responsive pedagogy within Vietnamese cultural and geographical setting. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks and empirical findings from Leather and Thorsteinsson [6] and Thorsteinsson et al. [10], I critically examine how outdoor education can develop a sense of place that is experientially, culturally, and politically sensitive. As a white European from the UK, a nation known for its colonising history and legacy, I adopt a reflexive stance, questioning the colonial influences and legacies of traditional British outdoor education while exploring its potential for social, ecological and environmental justice. I situate place-based education in dialogue with my current understanding of Vietnamese values [9] and landscapes [8], and outline pedagogical adaptations that respect local narratives, challenge colonial legacies, and embrace the aesthetic, embodied, and more-than-human dimensions of learning.

**Keywords:** Sense of place, outdoor education, place-responsive pedagogy, Vietnam.

### 1. Introduction

Outdoor and environmental education has long been shaped by western epistemologies and colonial histories [12]. As educators working internationally, particularly from nations with colonial pasts, there is a responsibility to deconstruct inherited paradigms and reimagine our pedagogies in ways that are place-responsive and justice-oriented [6]. This paper responds to that call by exploring how the principles of place-based outdoor education, developed by Watchow and Brown [12] in the Australian and New Zealand contexts, and adopted and implemented in the British [6] and Icelandic contexts [12], might be reinterpreted within Vietnam's cultural and ecological context.

Vietnam presents a rich terrain for this inquiry. With its layered histories of colonisation, resistance, and renewal, and its diverse topographies from mountainous highlands to deltaic lowlands, Vietnam is a country where place is deeply storied [8]. My paper and the arguments presented here, are grounded in my stance that rejects colonisation in all its forms and seeks instead a pedagogy that acknowledges and collaborates with the land and its people. In doing so, I position myself as a learner and collaborator, not a carrier of superior knowledge and pedagogic practices.

### 2. Theoretical Foundations: Sense of Place and Outdoor Pedagogy

#### 2.1. Defining a Sense of Place

In this section, I draw extensively on the teaching and research I have done with my colleagues in Iceland and the UK. Our adoption of *A Pedagogy of Place* in the southwest of England was influenced by Watchow and Brown [12]. We taught a similar course, *place based outdoor education*, in Iceland from 2018, which is a completely different cultural, political, historical context and geographical landscape and the implications and outcomes of "importing" a university course were researched [10]. The processes of engaging in place-based and place-responsive education were utilised and required a cultural sensitivity and critical reflexive awareness to acknowledge that Iceland has a different language, culture, and socioeconomic and political history to the UK.

The section that follows below, the conceptualisation and articulation of space and place and the associated pedagogical implications, was developed and published by Leather and Thorsteinsson [6].

#### 2.2. What is a Sense of Place?

A sense of place has many contested potential explanations, and what is discussed here is written through the lens of university professors, practicing outdoor educators, in higher education. This is one perspective that has multiple key influences including the eminent geographer Tuan [11] and university outdoor educators and academics Watchow and

Brown [12]. What is presented here reflects our (Mark Leather and Jakob Thorsteinsson) journey of understanding that has influenced our teaching [6]. Firstly, I consider the difference between outdoor *spaces* and outdoor *places* – as discussed below – before exploring the three pedagogical challenges facing the outdoor teaching profession: culture, nature, and time.

### 2.3. When Space becomes Place

The eminent geographer Tuan [11] discussed how human experience is affected by dwelling in places and spaces. He made the distinction between *spaces*, which are unspecific and applicable to a range of locations (for example, a city, a forest, a desert, a river delta, a mountain range etc.), and *places*, which are more local, personal and storied. For example, on the high moorland landscape of Dartmoor National Park in Devon, England, as the place where Arthur Conan Doyle set *The Hound of the Baskervilles* featuring the detective Sherlock Holmes or Mount Snæfellsjökull in Iceland as the place where Jules Verne set *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. These places are spaces where attachment and belonging are cultivated through stories and embodied experience. By engaging with the space **aesthetically** – seeing, smelling, touching, tasting, and hearing, and being outside in nature ‘under the open sky’, these sensuous experiences help us to develop our relationship with the ‘more-than-human’ world – a concept defined by Abram [1] and are fundamental in developing our sense of place. These aesthetic experiences generate **emotions** that we can make sense of through our feelings.

Emotions can be understood as embodied forms of sense-making rather than automatic responses. Emotions are constructed when bodily sensations are interpreted through conceptual knowledge, enabling us to make sense of our affective states via feeling. The *Theory of Constructed Emotion* [2], advances our understanding, explaining emotions as active inferences rooted in interoception and prediction. Interoception refers to the sensory and cognitive process through which the nervous system detects, integrates, and interprets internal bodily signals – such as heart rate, breathing, hunger, temperature, and pain – forming the bodily basis for emotional awareness and self-regulation. In parallel, emotions are culturally and politically mediated, circulating between bodies and communities to generate shared attachments and meanings that link individual experience with broader cultural narratives.

When emotions are combined with narratives, we experience space **cognitively**, by connecting with the culture – both fictional stories, folklore, historical and contemporary accounts of this place. Narratives provide a crucial cognitive frame through which humans interpret and inhabit space and storytelling

structures experience and identity, allowing individuals and communities to situate themselves meaningfully in place. Narratives actively construct social and spatial realities, embedding meaning into cultural contexts. Storytelling practices shape geographical imagination, and it is apparent that narrative and geography are deeply intertwined, making stories central to how we as humans emotionally and cognitively connect with, and make sense of, spatial experiences.

A *sense of place* is a multidimensional and complex construct used by anthropologists, cultural geographers, sociologists and urban planners to characterise relationships between people and spaces [6]. As discussed above, what is written here is through the lens of university professors, practicing outdoor educators, in higher education. My sense of place, used in my teaching, is an experiential process where people interpret the meaning of place and this is influenced by Tuan’s [11] phenomenological place theories and the human geography and place theories of Creswell [3] who argues for place as a space invested with (subjective) meanings via personal, social, and cultural practices. As such the concept of a *sense of place* may be felt, experienced, understood and then used in different ways by different people. These two aspects of understanding a *sense of place* can be, a) an objective, naturalistic conception, and b) a subjective existential sense of place. The naturalistic view is a descriptive approach to place. The existential notion has a humanistic approach where personal experience and meaning are more emphasised. This has given life to a range of related concepts that are helpful such as: *place identity*, *personality of place*, and *place attachment*.

### 2.4. Place Attachment

Attachment is a characteristic that some geographic places have, and some do not. A *sense of place* is often used to describe those characteristics that make a place special or unique, as well as those that foster a sense of authentic human attachment and belonging. **Place attachment** describes the emotional bonds between people and a particular place or environment. In *Landscapes of Fear*, Tuan highlights how not all *senses of place* are necessarily associated with positive emotions; not everyone lives in an aesthetically pleasing or safe place. Places said to have a strong *sense of place* have a strong identity that is deeply felt by inhabitants and visitors and as such a *sense of place* is a social phenomenon. As I write this in 2025, I must acknowledge these *Landscapes of Fear* and the current world situation where fear and safety are not assured for all humans and more-than-humans. Whether that is the numerous human wars and genocides, the mass factory farming of animals for food consumption, or the devastation of rainforests driven largely by agricultural expansion, these are contemporary Landscapes of Fear.

### 2.5. Place Identity

Whilst my key influences are from human geography, I am aware that the literature and thinking on space/place comes from a far broader spectrum of disciplines. The concept of **place identity** encompasses both the formalised designations imposed by external agencies and the deeply personal, subjective connections individuals form with their surroundings. While institutions such as UNESCO play an essential role in organising and preserving sites deemed of global significance – such as Stonehenge, in Wiltshire, England, the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks, Vietnam's Hạ Long Bay and Phong Nha – Ke Bang National Park – place identity is not solely the domain of iconic or aesthetically extraordinary landscapes. Rather, it can emerge from every day, intimate interactions with space, whether in familiar locales or during initial encounters with new environments. Here, I briefly explore the tension between externally constructed place identity and the more nuanced, personal sense of place, drawing on theoretical frameworks from human geography, environmental psychology, and heritage studies.

Place identity is frequently shaped by formalised designations that seek to protect and enhance sites perceived as valuable by authoritative bodies. UNESCO's World Heritage List, for instance, operates as a global mechanism for assigning places with cultural or natural significance, effectively constructing a hegemonic narrative of value. Such designations not only preserve sites but also influence public perception, reinforcing certain place identities while marginalising others. Heritage is a selective process, where institutional recognition elevates specific narratives, often at the expense of local, indigenous, or alternative interpretations.

In contrast to institutionalised place identity, humanistic geographers emphasise the subjective, affective dimensions of place attachment, what I think of as the personal and the intimate in place-making. Tuan's concept of *topophilia* - the emotional bond between people and place - highlights how even mundane environments can foster deep connections [11]. Similarly, Relph - as explored by Leather and Thorsteinsson [6] distinguishes between *insideness* (a profound, authentic sense of belonging) and *outsideness* (a detached or tourist-like engagement), suggesting that place identity is as much about personal experience as it is about formal recognition. Recent studies in environmental psychology further support this view, demonstrating that place identity often emerges through repeated, embodied interactions rather than through external validation. For example, a neighbourhood park or a childhood playground may hold profound meaning for individuals despite lacking institutional recognition.

The duality of place identity – oscillating between external imposition and internal attachment – raises critical questions about whose narratives dominate and whose are silenced. While UNESCO and similar agencies play a vital role in conserving globally significant sites, we must also acknowledge the quieter, more personal geographies that shape human experience. It is beyond the scope of my discussion here, but I remain mindful of how institutional designations interact with – or potentially disrupt – local place identities, particularly in communities where heritage is contested and how to reconcile the institutional and the personal.

### 2.6. Place Personality

The **personality of place** concept refers to the distinctive character, atmosphere, and identity of a location, shaped by socio-cultural, historical, and environmental factors [11]. In human geography, it highlights how places evoke emotional and symbolic meanings, while sociology examines how collective identities and social practices embed uniqueness. Anthropologists highlight the role of rituals, narratives, and material culture in constructing place personality, whereas tourism and heritage studies explore its commodification for place branding and visitor experiences. For example, Vietnam's tourism brand, #VietnamNow, aims to showcase the country's natural beauty, cultural heritage, and vibrant atmosphere. The brand highlights immersive and adventure travel experiences, emphasising Vietnam as a destination for those seeking to "Live fully". Anthropologists highlight decolonial and multisensory approaches, arguing that **place personality** is co-constructed through embodied practices and contested narratives. In tourism and heritage studies, place personality is instrumentalised for branding and experience economies yet risks homogenization under neoliberal logics.

Place personality remains valuable for analysing place attachment, cultural sustainability, and urban regeneration, but critiques persist regarding its potential to essentialise dynamic identities and/or exclude marginalised voices. This concept is important for understanding place attachment, cultural sustainability, and tourism development. However, critics argue it risks oversimplifying dynamic, contested identities or being exploited for commercial purposes. Thus, while *personality of place* offers valuable insights into human-environment interactions, its application requires critical, context-sensitive approaches.

### 2.7. Challenges with teaching a sense of place in outdoor education

A critical approach to teaching a *pedagogy of place* is essential, and while I advocate for developing a *sense of place*, in Leather and Thorsteinsson [6] we have challenged this alternative

pedagogy for outdoor education. There are three key problems which we have wrangled with so far. That is not to say they are the only ones to be considered, but they have been most significant for us. From our teaching, they are based on human relationships with culture, time, and nature as I now discuss.

#### 2.7.1. *Sense of place and our relationship with culture*

A *sense of place* can be used in relation to place-making and place-attachment of communities to their environment or homeland. The utility of a *sense of place*, the discussion of culture and history, involves grounding ideas and experiences in the local and personal. This becomes problematic when place-attachment to a homeland becomes dominated by localism and nationalism, where the primary emphasis is on promotion of local or national culture and interests as superior over and above that of other peoples, regions or nations. I suggest that place-based educators need to be careful and mindful, reflexive and sensitive to these possibilities when developing a sense of place. It is important to have a balance and to understand the difference between having a sense of pride and the feeling of love, devotion and an attachment to a community, grounded in respect for others who share the same sentiment, and *localism* and *nationalism* which is based on exclusion or detriment of the interests of others (groups, peoples, nations), arguably an excessive, aggressive patriotism. This is not a new critique of outdoor education practice, nor one solely aimed at place-based outdoor education. For example, Baden-Powell's Scouting Movement and the themes of militarism, imperialism, nationalism, masculinity, homophobia, and racism were present during its formation and early years of operation. Scouting developed at the beginning of the 20th century in the context of British imperial struggles in Africa and not unsurprisingly its origins reflect the beliefs and values of the time. The legacy of the British Empire and preparing young men for war and the implicit values within this – the Scout movement, Outward Bound etc. – continue to haunt today's British cultural construction of this approach to education that we in the UK call "outdoor education".

The places where we teach have a history. There are more-than-human histories, as well as human stories of romantic encounters, ancient horse roads or infamous battles of settler colonialism. Outdoor education is often conducted in places with difficult histories of colonialism, particularly in countries of the British Empire. There is an argument that our heritage stories should not be lost, rather they should be listened to and retold, thereby woven into the narrative allowing this rich history to live in the contemporary world of adventure travel. When we journey in the present, this is shaped, determined and influenced by the past. Place-based outdoor education

challenges the dominant discourse of colonial ways of conquering nature – the "blank canvas" discussed below and allows us to engage with the narratives of others. Understanding that there are no distinct and unconnected worldviews existing in which individuals act through autonomous agency, but through the relational work of teaching and learning outdoors, we develop a sense of "worlding." This leads to a deep, inherent responsibility to care for more equitable relationships with other people and the more-than-human world during the Anthropocene.

#### 2.7.2. *Sense of place and our relationship with time*

Time(s) reveals itself in a place. Through place we – all – students and tutors – can experience where people lived, and we can put ourselves in their footsteps. We live in the present moment and can think, imagine and speculate about the future. We can be place responsive and act to influence the future of the place. A complex and often unaddressed issue in outdoor education is the neglect of time's role in shaping our understanding of place and pedagogical approaches. It is argued that time has different layers; *cyclical* – like the tides and seasons, *linear* – like hours and minutes and *dot* time – instantaneous, like a digital blip, as found in traditional "fast outdoor education" [12]. The pedagogical heart of placed based outdoor education is the slowing down of the times during which we introduce our learners to the concept and practices of place. This approach is challenging because an overcrowded school curriculum squeezes outdoor education to the margins in these settings. We can see this 'time(table) famine' where school-based outdoor education reflects the faster cultural and technological phenomena, and as such the possibility of a sense of place, engagement in nature's spaces, or some attachment to them, is compromised [12]. Given that attachment is important to us when developing a *sense of place*, then *fast outdoor education* proves problematic and so we must acknowledge the potential power of the proximal, the spatiality and geographies of movement in the outdoors, which are compromised by the absence of the consideration and examination of time. Slow pedagogy is a serious response to Dewey's unheeded call in education for a philosophy of experience [4].

When on an adventurous journey, places may possibly be passed through and treated as spaces, as a blank canvas upon which to create our own story and place, without the other meanings that are already connected to them. In outdoor recreation for some, the aim is *hunting for trophies* – climb the rock face, conquer the mountain top, ski the black run, kayak the class IV rapids and so on. Trophy hunting shows that the owner has been somewhere and done something. For example, in the UK, The National

Three Peaks Challenge involves climbing the three highest peaks of Scotland, England and Wales, often within 24 hours. Participants may then display their achievements on social media; Instagram has #3peaks for this trophy. These social media posts add to the discourse and social constructs of how to be (a human) outdoors. They can shape people's ideas about what constitutes climbing mountains and being physically active in nature. Our approach in place responsive outdoor education is to harness these outdoor recreation activities whilst being mindful of the negative consequences that trophy hunting can have if it is the sole focus of an outdoor education programme.

As an antidote to this approach, my teaching is informed by a couple of ideas. Firstly, using three chapters of the book *Philosophy of Walking* [5] with students: *Walking is not a sport*, *Solitude*, and *Slowness*. The concept of *slowness* is not the opposite of speed, but of *haste*. By slowing down, in silence and solitude, people become more self-aware of their senses, emotions and the places they move through. One view is that outdoor recreation is not about the outdoors and nature but our reaction to it. The essential issue is about an embodied sensing of the place – seeing, feeling, touching, smelling, tasting – so that the place can be mentally understood. Secondly, from the concept of *Psychogeography* I find the concept of the *dérive* – or the drift – as a way of moving through and across the land to help develop our more-than-human connections. The *dérive* can be considered the specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals. Similarly, the famous naturalist John Muir disliked both the word hike and the activity hiking. He argued that people ought to *saunter* in the mountains – not hike! He took the meaning from religious pilgrimages and argued how the mountains are our Holy Land, and we ought to saunter through them reverently, rather than hike. Drifting can be thought of as being carried slowly, by a current of air or water, or other useful English synonyms such as stroll, amble, float, linger, wander, meander, stray, and hover, or from my London slang “bimble”. Perhaps we should just walk and talk like the Greek philosopher Socrates once did. Pedagogically this is simply to go for a walk and encourage students to pay attention to something along the way and be ready to talk about it. We all lead busy lives with endless noise and endless multiple connections to others and the distractions that these create away from the present and living in the moment. There are times with our students in Iceland and England where the activities we purposively include in our teaching create opportunities to become more of a *human-being*, rather than a *human-doing*.

### 2.7.3. Sense of place and our relationship with nature

The *place* in which we locate our teaching has a more-than-human past. There are ecosystems, inanimate rocks and mountains as well as the highly active volcanoes, tectonic plates, rivers and waterfalls. While many of these places have had human settlement, there are places in the world that have not, for example the Vatnajökull National Park in the interior of Iceland. These places may have been given names (and arguably been settled in that respect) but the point we highlight is that our relationship with *place* is multi-layered with both human and more-than-human influences.

I argue that it is essential to reconceptualise humanity as an integral part of the ecological whole, moving beyond anthropocentric paradigms. However, caution is necessary. In our efforts to dismantle the nature-culture dichotomy, we must avoid conflating all entities, including wilderness, under the archaic and problematic umbrella of “nature”. The concept of ‘nature’ can be a dangerous oversimplification. It's crucial to acknowledge the spectrum of environments, from our cities and farms, to the truly wild spaces that still work independently of human control.

As educators, we need to acknowledge the radical differences in the *knowing* and *being* that take place across different settings, from the local urban park to the distant arctic tundra and everything else in-between. For us, the forces and beauty of nature (however conceived) are fundamental to our *sense of place*, for we experience it directly, in all types of weather. Sometimes we are teaching, at others we are doing things for our own enjoyment. Not only because of the fresh outdoor life, or Nordic *friluftsliv*, but also because we love the magnificent natural structures, from the vast mountain ranges to the smallest wildflower, the pebbles on a beach, and the ripples on the ocean.

## 3. Contextualising Place-Based Education in Vietnam

Vietnam's educational landscape is shaped by Confucian traditions, socialist legacies, and more recent neoliberal reforms [7]. Confucian values – benevolence (*ren*), ritual propriety (*li*), moral exemplarship, and hierarchical pedagogical routines – remain woven into Vietnam's educational philosophy and practice. These values have been selectively integrated with global pedagogical ideals to support ethical development and civic responsibility, while also facing critique for limiting creativity and critical thinking [8]. Vietnam's political leaders continue to prioritise education as a national project. The strengths and limitations of the system are in its political settlement and embedded accountabilities [8]. The alignment between elite political commitment, centralised public governance, and

mass schooling in a party state setting remains a decisive force shaping educational intentions and institutional coherence [8].

The post – Đổi Mới reforms – reforms that sought to transition Vietnam from a command economy to a socialist-oriented market economy – have expanded privatisation, financial autonomy, the growth of private and semi-public schools, and internationalisation in higher education. These neoliberal policy shifts – such as tuition-driven revenue models, private institution licensing, English-medium instruction, and quality benchmarking – are now deeply embedded in Vietnam’s tertiary education sector. The coexistence and tensions among Confucianism, socialism, and neoliberalism in Vietnamese universities, sometimes they mutually reinforce each other, whilst at other times these practices appear to conflict [7]. Vietnam’s educational landscape continues to be shaped by Confucian traditions, socialist-orientations, and neoliberal reforms [7]. These frameworks now interact in complex hybrid forms:

- Confucian moral and pedagogical legacies underpin longstanding cultural values around learning.
- Socialist-state governance still retains central authority over curricular standards, teacher deployment, and equity policies.
- Neoliberal market logic increasingly influences institutional diversity, financial models, and global academic integration.

Education is highly valued as a vehicle for social mobility, yet outdoor and experiential pedagogies remain peripheral. The country’s colonial past under French rule and the subsequent wars with the United States have left deep social, cultural, and environmental scars, shaping both collective memory and contemporary land relations. French colonial policies restructured agrarian systems, imposed extractive economies, and redefined territorial governance, while the devastation of the Vietnam – US War disrupted rural livelihoods, displaced populations, and embedded contested narratives of land ownership and use. These historical legacies continue to influence national identity, local resource management, and community relationships to place [8].

Vietnamese philosophical traditions, particularly those influenced by Buddhism, Taoism, and animist practices, offer rich frameworks for relating to place. Concepts such as *tình cảm* (emotion or sentiment) and *thiên nhiên* (nature) resonate strongly with the aesthetic and embodied dimensions of place-responsive pedagogy. The practice of ancestor worship and veneration of land spirits (*thổ công*) reflects a deep moral and spiritual connection to place

that precedes and resists colonial definitions of land as property.

At the same time, any attempt to introduce Western models of outdoor education – particularly those firmly rooted and still influenced by British colonialism – must contend with the potential to replicate colonial logics. It is essential to move beyond translation and towards co-creation with Vietnamese educators and communities.

#### **4. Adapting Place-Responsive Pedagogy for Vietnamese Settings**

Drawing on the two foundational texts Leather and Thorsteinsson [6], and Thorsteinsson et al., [10], the following outlines adaptations and my suggestions for implementing place-responsive pedagogy in Vietnam, grounded in critical reflexivity and cultural humility.

##### **4.1. Slow Pedagogy and Time-Rich Learning**

Vietnamese educational culture often prioritises efficiency and academic achievement. Introducing slow pedagogies, such as contemplative walking (*đạo bộ*), storytelling, and sensory mapping, requires a cultural shift but aligns with Buddhist practices of mindfulness (*chánh niệm*). These practices can cultivate the aesthetic and reflective capacities needed for place attachment [5].

##### **4.2. Engaging with Local Histories and Stories**

As in Iceland [10], a pedagogy of place in Vietnam should include local narratives, folklore, and historical accounts. For example, exploring sites such as the Cu Chi Tunnels, ancient capital of Hoa Lu, or local village temples could help students encounter place as layered with struggle, resilience, and meaning. Storytelling by elders and local guides becomes a central pedagogical method.

##### **4.3. Embodiment and More-Than-Human Relations**

Fieldwork can be designed to include practices that facilitate embodied learning, such as traditional farming techniques in rice paddies, harvesting herbs in medicinal gardens, or engaging with water ecosystems in the Mekong Delta. Such activities resonate with Vietnamese cultural practices and offer tactile, sensual pathways to relational knowing.

The more-than-human world [1] is not an abstract concept in Vietnam; it is woven into everyday life through animism and ritual. Animism, a core aspect of Vietnamese folk religion, posits that spirits (*Thần linh*) inhabit natural elements like mountains, rivers, and trees. These spirits are not merely symbolic but are considered active agents in the world, influencing events and requiring respect and appeasement through ritual. As outdoor educators we should create space for learners to honour these relationships in culturally appropriate ways. For

example, it would be useful to meet, talk, and witness farmers performing rituals to ensure good harvests, and fishermen appeasing the spirits of the sea before venturing out. These practices demonstrate a deep awareness of the interconnectedness of all things and the influence of the more-than-human world on human lives.

#### 4.4. Critical Reflexivity and Postcolonial Consciousness

As European outdoor educators, it is vital for us to avoid romanticising Vietnamese landscapes or exoticizing its people (that is to portray someone or something unfamiliar as exotic or unusual, to romanticise or glamorise the people and landscapes). Instead, the pedagogy must focus on the critical conversations about colonial histories, including my own country's involvement, and promote mutual learning. This entails creating dialogic spaces where Vietnamese voices lead and Western contributions are in service rather than dominance.

Our "postcolonial consciousness" needs us to recognise the lasting effects of colonialism on Vietnamese society and culture. We need to challenge the assumptions and power structures established during the colonial era and seek to understand the world from the perspective of those who were colonized. In doing so we can work towards a more just and equitable future, free from the legacies of colonialism. I suggest that a co-constructed Vietnamese pedagogy of place may help us to achieve these goals.

#### 4.5. Language and Translation

The Icelandic study [10] highlighted the challenges of language and how things maybe "lost in translation" in place-based education. In the Vietnamese context, careful attention must be paid to how terms often used like "experience" "comfort zone," "risk," and "nature" are translated and understood. Collaborative lexicon-building with Vietnamese educators and students can ensure conceptual clarity and cultural resonance.

As an academic visiting Vietnam for the first time in October 2025, I am not yet well versed in Vietnamese language or culture. As a curious academic and researcher, I used the tools available to me online and asked for a translation. I am really interested in developing an appropriate lexicon as well as learning from Vietnamese practices.

The translations offered to us are:

1) "Phương pháp sư phạm dựa trên địa phương trong giáo dục ngoài trời"

*Literal translation, accurate and formal.*

- Phương pháp sư phạm = Pedagogy
- Dựa trên địa phương = place-based

- Giáo dục ngoài trời = outdoor education  
Best choice for academic and educational audiences.

2) "Giáo dục ngoài trời theo hướng gắn kết với địa phương"

More natural, less formal; emphasises relationality and connection.

- Gắn kết với địa phương = connected to place/local context Suitable when emphasizing experiential, relational, and cultural engagement.

3) "Sự phạm của giáo dục ngoài trời gắn liền với địa điểm"

*Stresses place-specific identity, slightly more philosophical tone.*

Gắn liền với địa điểm = tightly linked to location/place Good for reflective or theoretical contexts.

#### Recommendation for Your Paper and Presentation

"Phương pháp sư phạm dựa trên địa phương trong giáo dục ngoài trời"

This is the most academically transparent and culturally neutral option, which will be understood clearly by Vietnamese educators and translators.

I am excited to see if this information is true!

#### 5. Implications for Practice

If place based outdoor education is of value to the education system in Vietnam, then the implementation of a place-responsive pedagogy in Vietnam appears to require more than curricular innovation. It needs systemic change, including teacher education reforms, institutional support for field-based learning (fieldwork), and cultural partnerships with local communities and knowledge.

A useful recent development is the 2018 General Education Curriculum (GEC) of Vietnam is characterised by several key pedagogical shifts aimed at enhancing the relevance and application of student learning. A central tenet is its practice-oriented approach, which emphasises increasing opportunities for students to practice and apply theoretical knowledge to complex, real-life situations. This is closely aligned with the integration of local and social contexts, where learning is situated within social activities and community-based projects that connect academic content to local heritage and contemporary societal issues. Furthermore, the curriculum strongly advocates for hands-on and experiential learning, designing activities that provide students with direct, experiential opportunities to deepen their understanding and develop practical competencies.

Universities can pilot modules that blend ecological science with local cultural studies,

integrate experiential fieldwork into education, leisure or tourism degrees, and offer professional development for educators in slow, sensory pedagogies. Partnerships with NGOs, national parks, and local temples can provide rich sites for co-learning.

Additionally, digital storytelling and photo-elicitation can serve as reflective tools, enabling students to document and narrate their sense of place in multimodal ways [6, 10].

## **6. Conclusion: Towards Decolonising Outdoor Education**

In this paper I have attempted to bring together two bodies of work on place-responsive pedagogy and situate them within a Vietnamese context, acknowledging both the possibilities and limitations of such a move. As a European educator, I must continually reflect on how my presence and pedagogies intersect with local histories and epistemologies.

Vietnamese landscapes, histories, and cultural worldviews offer fertile ground for reimagining outdoor education beyond its colonial roots. A pedagogy of place in Vietnam can honour both the specificity of place and the universality of relational learning. However, this, I argue, can only happen if I/we listen more than we speak, collaborate more than I/we direct, and approach each teaching moment as a guest rather than an expert.

## **References**

- [1] Abram, D. (1997). *The spell of the sensuous: Perception and language in a more-than-human world*. Vintage.
- [2] Barrett, L. F. (2017). *How emotions are made: The secret life of the brain*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- [3] Cresswell, T. (2014). *Place: An introduction*. Blackwell.
- [4] Dewey, J. (1925/2012). *Experience and Nature*. Dover Publications.
- [5] Gros, F. (2014). *Philosophy of Walking*. (J. Howe, Trans.). Verso.
- [6] Leather, M., & Thorsteinsson, J. (2021). Developing a Sense of Place. In G. Thomas, J. Dymont, & H. Prince (Eds.), *Outdoor Environmental Education in Higher Education: International Perspectives* (pp. 51-60). Springer.
- [7] London, J., & Duong, M. -H. (2023). *The politics of education and learning in Vietnam*. RISE Programme Working Paper Series.
- [8] Nguyen, D. L. (2020). Colonialism and national culture. In *The Unimagined Community* (pp. 23-50). Manchester University Press.
- [9] Taylor, K. (2001). *The birth of Vietnam*. University of California Press.
- [10] Thorsteinsson, J. F., Leather, M., Nicholls, F., & Jóhannesson, G. (2025). Exploring a pedagogy of place in Iceland: Students understanding of a sense of place and emerging meanings. *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education* 28(1), pp.19-41.
- [11] Tuan, Y. (1977). *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. University of Minnesota Press.
- [12] Wattachow, B., & Brown, M. (2011). *A Pedagogy of Place: Outdoor Education for a Changing World*. Monash University Publishing.