

Decentering the Adult Gaze: Young Children’s Photographs as Provocations for Place-Making

Drawing on more-than-human literacies and visual methods, this article demonstrates how children’s images can decenter adult conceptualizations of “place” and be provocations for place-conscious education.

We think we are moving through the world, while the whole time the world is pulling us along, telling us where to walk, where to stop, where to take a photo.

—Teju Cole, 2018, p. 14

In an article entitled “Take a Photo Here” for his *New York Times* “On Photography” column, Teju Cole explored the ways that complex spaces can often be photographed in the same ways time and time again by mainstream photographers, visiting tourists, and even longtime residents of a city or town. Consider, for example, what a person who has never been to New York City might imagine based on mainstream photographs: an LED-lit Times Square, the emblematic frontal view of the Statue of Liberty, skyscraper-crowded blocks, the harried movements of yellow cabs. Instagram feeds, Flickr, *National Geographic*, *Life Magazine*, etc. that circulate the images in our everyday lives have a common visual language that communicates an aesthetic dimension (Lutz & Collins, 1993). These repetitions and reproductions of images come to define place as they train us how to look, where to look, and what is worthy of looking at.

Conceptions of place are produced in and through dominant lenses and colonial ways of seeing, and rarely do our visualizations and understandings of place draw upon children’s experiences of their local environments. Gillian Rose (2008)

notes that “specific visions of places both draw on, and reproduce, ideas that are grounded in social power relations” (p. 153); in that case, dominant adult-conceived visual narratives can elide the intricacies and realities of everyday life for children. While iconic photographs of New York City (as one example of place) predominate, photographers like Helen Levitt and Andrew D. Wagner, for example, redirect our attention from iconic scenes of the city to the perspectives of young people living and learning within specific spaces and places within the city. Helen Levitt, who took street photographs in NYC for seven decades, made children the protagonists of the city through pictures of their playful activities in several series in the 1930s and 40s (Gand, 2009). In *Here for the Ride*, Wagner (2017) depicts the subway as a site of social formation for NYC youth. While adults may think about playgrounds and afterschool clubs as places most identifiable with children and youth, Wagner focuses on the subway as a significant place for young people. “Kids have so much agency in the subway. They have their own community in a way,” he notes in a *Paris Review* article (Boryga, 2018). These photographic series *remake* the city and our perspectives of it. Rather than portraying NYC as an exemplar of urban renewal and capitalist superiority (ideas that are important to many adults), Levitt’s and Wagner’s series force the questions: To children, *what*

is a place? What are children's renderings of the places they inhabit?

We look to children's photographs of their local places to begin to respond to this inquiry. As visual scholars of childhood and youth, we understand that children make photographs that reflect their embodied connections to, and movements within, their local environments (Somerville, 2007). We argue that children's images can serve as guides to our adult movements through our local spaces, as well as the relations we have with the more-than-human world (nonhuman sentient beings and materials). In this article, Tran discusses photographs taken by two- to five-year-olds across an image-based study. The children's pictures create "new versions of place" (Hackett & Somerville, 2017, p. 380) that decenter our adult ways of seeing the local areas we traverse. They also make an argument for Vivek's work with pre-service teachers (PSTs) on image-making practices that reorient them to their localities. Vivek encourages PSTs to look at the world through a camera lens, adopting a shift in perspective from conventional image making practices. This practice potentially reorganizes PSTs' sensual fields and engages them in non-dominant practices of place-making.

Studying Place Stories through Photography

Place-conscious (or place-based) education is having its time in the sun, and for good reason. In addition to offering pedagogical possibilities, places play a role in the co-constitution of children and youth identities (Somerville, 2007) so literacy has to be understood within the context of place. Kinloch (2009) reminds us that examining the intersection of literacy with place requires that we understand literacy beyond the context of school. That is, children "read and write the world as they build literate identities during out-of-school time" (p. 321). While Kinloch writes about youth, the same can be said for children as their place literacies and consciousness do not suddenly emerge the moment they reach their teenage years. Children are always on the move: their movements through, negotiations with, and explorations of, place are already happening in the early years. These movements, in and of

themselves, are "communicative [practices] that always [occur] as a more complex entanglement of relations with more-than-human worlds" (Hackett & Somerville, 2017).

To tell stories of place and these complex relationships with more-than-human worlds, we turn to photography in our work with young children, youth, and pre-service teachers. The acts of creating, viewing, and circulating images informs our notions of particular places. Simultaneously, details like who is using the camera, how, and for what purposes, matter to stories of place (Orellana, 1999). Photographs that children make are compositions of their local places; they are products of how children "read their worlds" (Capello & Hollingsworth, 2008, p. 443). In this section, we discuss more-than-human literacies and visual methods *with* participants, as a framework to examine two related questions: 1) How do children photograph their local places, and how can their images decenter adults' visions and conceptualizations of place? and 2) What and how can PSTs learn from children's and artists' mapping and photographic practices?

More-Than-Human Literacies

Places are read and understood in multiple ways by its different inhabitants. That is, places are not simply physical locations but rather sites wherein the different inhabitants make their own meanings, and their meanings are distributed, multiple, and produced within and through particular arrangements of human and nonhuman relations. Take, for example, the case of school as a shared place. A school is "both a specific local place and a metaphysical imaginary" (Somerville, 2010, p. 330) wherein knowledge is constructed from the vantage point of its inhabitants, human and otherwise. Each student, staff, and faculty member calls up different stories, discourses, and affects about the place of school (whether it be physically within the building, in virtual spaces, or relationships that flow out of the school buildings). Similarly, the classroom pets and plants, library books, gym equipment, and food waste, as examples, "tell" their own stories; they map out different—and sometimes overlapping—organizations of relations within the same spaces.

The human and more-than-human subjects, separately and together, produce different and new mappings of familiar spaces.

Nxumalo and Rubin's (2018) conception of "more-than-human place literacies" works to dislodge humans from their self-determined position as the principal protagonist within the story of place and within literacy as it is commonly understood (i.e., as a social practice). Rather than conceiving of literacy as a human-oriented and human-organized activity that benefits other like-minded humans, Nxumalo and Rubin note that viewing literacy as more-than-human "unsettles the centrality of humans as subjects whose intelligence and agency enables their sole consumption and production of meaningful messages" (p. 203). By attending to children's encounters with place—instead of necessarily how children read or even make meaning of place—Nxumalo and Rubin refer to the ways that "literacy learning emerges through children's co-constituted relations with elements of local place ecologies" (p. 203).

Wargo (2018) adds that young children's literacy practices are *often* engaged with the material, imaginative, and more-than-human aspects of their surroundings. For example, Iris, a participant in Wargo's study with six- to eight-year-olds, used a GoPro and her body to explore the space from the perspective of an ant. Moving closer to the earth, she screeched, "I'm an Ant! Look! . . . I can hold my body close to the ground. I am seeing the ground as an ant would . . . this is the perspective of an ant" (p. 13). The children in Wargo's research show us that rather than thinking of learning as a product or of literacy as a means to an end, the "focus is on the intra-actions of people and materials, movements, and surprises" (Kuby, 2017, p. 879) that are diffracted through moments of creation and contact.

Visual Methods

Cameras have been deployed by literacy scholars to document and disrupt the subjugating gaze of certain groups over others (e.g., adults over children, white over BIPOC, etc.). They have been tools for children to provide an insider glimpse into literacy understandings that can evade teachers' assessments (Cappello & Hollingsworth, 2008), to problematize

structures steeped in whiteness (de los Ríos, 2020), and to act as part of multimodal presentations of the self (Ghiso, 2016). Similarly, visual scholars have pushed on how photos can communicate multiple messages over space and time (Luttrell, 2010, 2020), not always in representational ways (Vellanki & Davesar, 2020). Depending on arrangements of human and more-than-human entities, photographic meanings can transmute across material, social, and affective dimensions. For example, Vellanki and Davesar (2020) demonstrate how image and text can come together to offer rearticulations of place, memory, and identity. In their work, thirteen-year-old Urja used the camera and photographs to engage with and respond to the material world around her. She also used these images to embark on flights of imagination into pasts and futures, making connections with other places and other worlds.

In this article, we position young children as place-makers and knowledge producers who have unique perspectives of their local places. Alison Clark, who introduced the Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2005) wherein very young children make and narrate photographs, has long advocated for environmental design that accounts for children's perspectives of their schools and play areas (Clark & Moss, 2005). Nolas and Varvantakis's (2019) *Children's Photography Archive* also provides salient examples of how places matter in children's lives. The photos made by children in Athens, Greece; Hyderabad, India; and London, England, depict "what a childhood gaze might look like and how children shape their worlds through the many ways in which they represent those worlds" (p. 4). These scholars understand that the camera is an important tool to recognizing different children's perspectives (Orellana, 1999).

To better (not but fully) grasp children's *more-than-human place stories* (Nxumalo & Rubin, 2018), we use visual methods—specifically children's and PSTs' photography—as a tool for noticing the layers of children's place stories that do not necessarily privilege humans as primary to the story of their world. Children's photographs, as opposed to photographs adults *take of* children, are outward facing; that is, the pictures they make proclaim their

position *within* worlds (Templeton, 2020). While adults center children in photos, almost as though children are *placeless*, child-made images bring place, materials, and more-than-human worlds into sharp focus. In the following sections, we tell the more-than-human place stories of photographs in Tran's research with very young children's image-making. We use that as a visual and aesthetic argument for Vivek's photography-based work with PSTs. Vivek discusses how his workshop with PSTs on photography shifts their orientations toward map-making or, in other words, their practices of looking, noticing, marking, and being with the world.

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What Is a City to a Four-Year-Old?

The setting and time of this place story is New York City circa 2016 when I (Tran) collaborated with two- to five-year-olds to understand their photographic practices and presentations of self through images and corresponding narratives, told verbally and extraverbally (Bengochea et al., 2020). Across ten weeks, children in one preschool classroom at a university-affiliated childcare center took turns with a digital camera to document their worlds as *they* saw fit. During a group meeting with the 11 children, I gave them a prompt to "take pictures" with the rationale that I was interested in how children make images. The children took up this provocation on their own terms, each taking home the Kodak Pixpro camera to make between 11 and 157 pictures on the 256 MB memory card. From there, I adapted Luttrell's (2010, 2020) collaborative seeing approach to move through multiple phases of research that illustrate how children's relationships with the content, narratives, and utterances of images change over the course of the study and within particular contexts. These stages included a one-on-one auto-driven photo-elicitation interview (Clark, 1999), at the end of which the child selected several "favorite" photos; a child-led group meeting wherein the photographer

shared those favorite pictures with classmates; and moments in which the children's photos were edited for displays in photo books (by them) and bulletin boards (by me) in the classroom.

The Liminal Spaces of Childhood

For sure, all 633 photographs made by the 11 children took *place* somewhere, whether in homes, in the classroom, or in transition between school and home. While a great number of photos depicted classroom life, many of these seemed to be test shots for the children as only three of the 60 total favorite photos (selected to share with peers) took place within the classroom. The children together made 181 images of public spaces—street corners, sidewalks, parking lots, and subway platforms, for example. These places were marked in images with other children and families but also the many dogs that also share NYC walkways, sidewalk-planted trees, and fencing and gates that denote places for play and rest.

These were not photographs of purposeful destinations but oftentimes presentations of liminal spaces. Unlike adult-made photos of New York City, they were not repetitive; each child had their own rendition of their movements through the city (with shared concepts). Jaylen (age three and a half) documented his trek from school to home (for more of his photographs, see Templeton, 2020). The photos depict his crowded subway ride, views of other children and floor displays of soda and bread in a local bodega (corner stores), pauses to capture the view, and sidewalks lined with garbage and recycling bags (see Figure 1). While he included shots looking up at the sky and the fire escape ladders on apartment buildings, Jaylen's images consisted of many objects and materials at his eye level or lower. "Look, garbage!" Jaylen exclaimed at the sight of the bags; the soda bottles, he noted, were in the store where they stopped to get something to eat. The children's perspectives were closer to the ground, reminding us that who makes images matter. While visual sociologists traditionally have advocated for valid sociological images to be those taken from the vantage point of the "human eye," this begs the question, *whose eyes?* Orellana (1999) maintains that "the human eye is positioned at many

Figure 1. Jaylen's photos.



different heights and its inclinations are shaped by social contexts” (p. 80). The idea of “the social” for children is important to probe.

Children’s More-Than-Human Worlds

Within the children’s pictures, the social contexts involved more-than-human social engagements. Images of their public excursions also brought up the way that humans share city sidewalks with dogs, squirrels, and cats that live in the wooded areas of the local city parks. Though New York City is often depicted by adults as a “concrete jungle,” Kamea (almost three years old) zoomed into bushes to show the “pokey leaves” that sometimes prick her. She also captured two images of an Osage orange, a common fruit enjoyed by squirrels and found on park grounds. One image was a “before” image with the Osage orange intact; the second was an “after” image with the orange smashed and smeared across the cement

ground. Jaylen showed how he walked through the city as, in several photos, he captured the movement of his feet (sometimes alongside his mother’s) on the city pavement. There he was, walking through the city on his way home. Yet, when I asked him about one of his sidewalk images (see top left of Figure 1), Jaylen remarked that “that street is taking us to home.” His phrasing reminds us that the act of going home for children can involve the active participation of the street. It was not just that children take streets home, but that recognizable streets, as part of important routines, are also taking *them* home.

Constituting nearly one-third of the photographs taken by all 11 children, the children’s pictures of the city were significant not only in number but also in how the images set into motion recognitions, recollections, identifications, memories, and imaginings of futures. The children examined images of public spaces carefully, in case a street,

a train stop, or a place was “theirs.” Stacy said she would ask me for the camera to make photos on a future trip to Disney. When the photographs were on display, images of the subway trains and platforms provoked conversations wherein some children declared their position within these places. For example, as the children discussed a photograph of a platform, Suri (almost three years of age) noted, “my mom and dad live there.” After pausing, she added emphatically, “*I* live there!” Though there was no degree of certainty as to whether it was a 7 train or an A train, Suri was certain that the train represented where she and her family were emplaced. It did not need to be a photograph of a family living room or even a NYC apartment building; a subway car was emblematic enough of the city the children thought of as home.

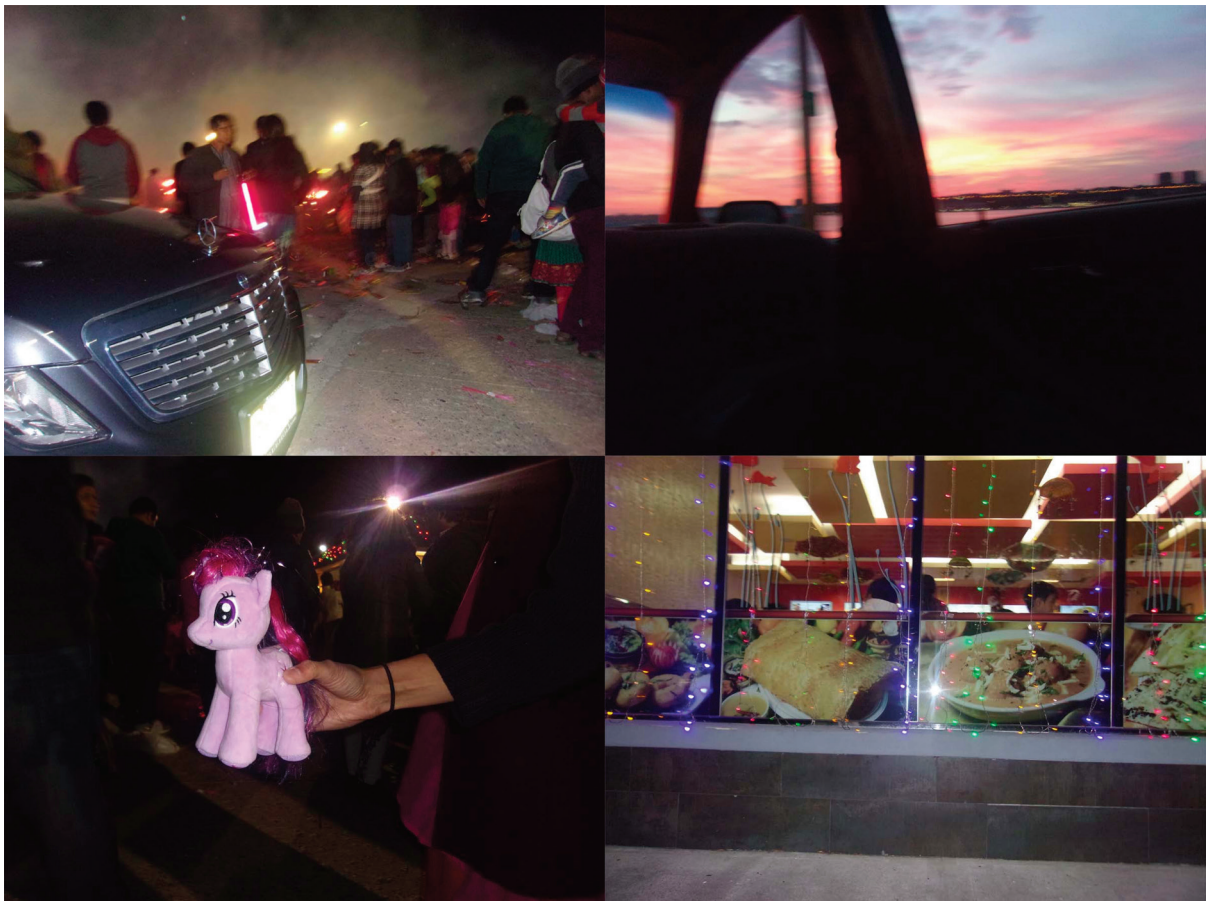
While the familiar aesthetics of New York City subway platforms, subway cars, and leashed dogs

on sidewalks are part of the ways that the young children mapped out their city, Saryu (age four and a half) made photographs that mapped out her own cultural space within the city. Like Jaylen, she documented a transition from her departure (her home in NYC) to her destination (a Diwali festival in New Jersey). Taking along with her a My Little Pony, Saryu imaged the sunset from the back of the car to the Indian restaurant where the family ate to the confetti-festooned parking lot of the celebration (see Figure 2).

Why Look to Children’s Photographs?

In early elementary classrooms, we ask children to learn about their neighborhoods through a curriculum that focuses on addresses (e.g., children must memorize their street address), places deemed significant (often directed by adults) (e.g., stores, libraries, hospitals, playgrounds), and people who are considered

Figure 2. Saryu’s photos.



“community helpers.” Rarely are liminal spaces accounted for as significant places to children though scholars of children’s geographies and aesthetic practices have written on children’s connections to streets (Matthews, 2003; Trafi-Prats, 2009). Trafi-Prats (2009) asserts that “forms of spatial occupation of the street, including the performance of usual itineraries and social encounters in the neighborhood, [are] an essential element for the growth of children’s social identity as well as their senses of location and sociability” (p. 8). That is, children’s activities in liminal spaces of the street, bodegas, and subway platforms are where they learn about who they are in relation to the worlds around them. For Saryu, the parking lot and the exterior of the South Asian restaurant were embedded within religious and ethnic practices (Yoon & Templeton, 2019).

Children’s presences with(in) these places are what give place its “identity.” Though adults attempt to relegate children to bounded areas such as playgrounds, schools, and backyards, children’s images assert that they are in and of their localities. “Public spaces are physically, socially, and affectively organized and re-organized by children’s engagements with(in) them” (Templeton, 2020, p. 4), and the presence of children impacts networks of relations within city microsystems (neighborhood blocks, bodegas, community gatherings in public spaces), and their images can cue us to those relationships. However, the reality is that the social, affective, and material arrangements of city streets, suburban blocks, and shared public spaces are largely determined by adults. Not only that, but typically the first units in early elementary social studies curriculum focus on “my community” or “my neighborhood” *from adults’ perspectives* as though children do not already know their neighborhoods in other ways. Adults understand places in terms of Cartesian maps, departures and destinations, and two-dimensional aerial views. In the following section, Vivek shares stories of mapping with PSTs who have been schooled into dominant (adult) practices of placemaking. We think that children’s photos, as renditions of their entanglements with their local environments, can act as a meditation for adults and educators to reframe our conceptions of local

spaces. Vivek’s story of mapping with PSTs through photography and children’s creative engagement with places helps us to see what we, as teachers and teacher educators, can do to look beyond our own adult notions of what makes place.

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Mapmaking, Photography, and Shifting Perspectives of Place

Mapmaking fulfils one of our deepest desires: understanding the world around us and our place in it.

—Katharine Harmon

Maps shape how we engage with, understand, and move through the worlds we inhabit (Marchant, 2020). Maps are political, shaped by decisions about aesthetics, what to include/exclude, and what things/beings are worthy of being marked. Before the advent of the camera, maps offered pictorial representations of place: guiding travelers, offering a foray into landscapes of other geographies, and capturing our relations and imaginations of the world around us onto a two-dimensional plane. As adults, most of us have been socialized into thinking about mapmaking and map-reading in narrow, functional terms primarily focused on navigation and identification. However, an exploration of mapmaking practices opens up the possibilities for reorientation to local ecologies and generate alternative visions of placemaking.

For nearly four years now I, Vivek, have been using photography to support PSTs’ exploration of mapmaking practices. The instructions are simple: I ask them to make a map of their neighborhood—either the one they are currently living in or the one they grew up in. Then, using a different color, I ask them to mark, in any way they choose, a place

where they play. They follow this up by marking a place where they love to eat. In both instances, I remind them to mark places that may not be obvious at first, defining “places” expansively to include points like the neighbor’s kitchen, the couch on which they like to sit and play, the tree that they like to swing on. I ask them to look at each other’s maps and to share any similarities/differences they notice. A majority of the adults who participate in this activity end up making maps that offer a top-down view of their neighborhood. Most maps have the streets marked and named but are devoid of any other beings (see Figure 3).

I made a similar map when I was first introduced to this activity by Stephen Vrla, current curator of humane education at the Detroit Zoo, who uses it to talk about our notion of the environment and the natural world. I realized that I was simply reproducing the maps that I see on a day-to-day basis: Google maps, *National Geographic* maps, maps we use to travel, etc. Harmon (2004) calls these maps “the ‘use it or lose it’ variety” (p. 11), and their primary function is to help us get from point A to point B. These are the kinds of maps that find prominence in schools and are used to teach young children to be map readers; they present an already “ordered and structured” notion of a place as seen from above (Cowell & Biesta, 2016) and are rendered through

a human-centered notion of usability. This orientation to mapmaking is similar to the curricular focus of schools: learning is less about relationality and exploration (Vasudevan, 2011). Instead, it is a structured and organized endeavor to meet preexisting and standardized goals. In this ordering, children’s desires, explorations, and curiosities about their worlds are quelled and replaced with adult understandings. In an attempt to break open this schism between children’s imaginations and schooling, I share maps created by children that challenge dominant mapmaking practices.

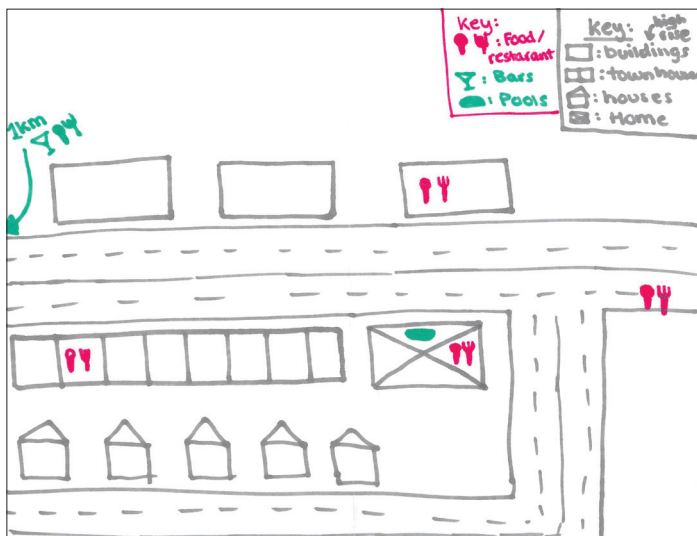
My Sweet Home: Learning from Children’s Mapping Practices

Samina Mishra, Sherna Dastur, and the Children of Okhla’s 2017 book *My Sweet Home: Childhood Stories from a Corner of the City*, is a striking example of how children’s notion of place is often in stark contrast to adult orientations. Mishra and Dastur’s project began in response to the Batla House Encounter in 2008, when two young people living in the neighborhood were murdered by the police. News channels proclaimed Okhla, an industrial suburb of Delhi, to be “a terrorist hub,” and Mishra and Dastur wanted to challenge and change the Islamophobic narrative about the place and the community that lives there. The stories, maps, and images in the book are of the everyday; it began as a workshop, with 20 children living in the Okhla area. About it, Mishra (2017) writes:

Everyday life in which people went to work and children went to school, in which birthdays were celebrated and kites flown, in which exams were taken, friendships made and broken, cricket matches played etc. Sounds pretty similar to your everyday life, doesn’t it? (n.p.)

The maps in *My Sweet Home* are a reminder that children’s engagement with place brings a more-than-human understanding of local ecologies. In Amna’s map, space and time are compressed to offer a foray into all the living and nonliving beings that have impacted her. Markedly different from the maps made by adults in my classroom, her map includes fish in a small pond, people walking, fruits on a tree, and myriad colors. A generous reader might consider Amna’s choices atypical while

Figure 3. A map made by a preservice teacher, before the photography workshop.



others might question its “usability” as a map. The maps are provocations for us to rethink our relationship to space, our surroundings, and how we have been socialized to think about mapmaking.

Perspectival Shifts: Photography and Placemaking

The children in *My Sweet Home* remind us that as adults, we have to move past our habitual ways of seeing (which are typically developmental and anthropocentric) and be reinvented to a way of seeing, being with, and relating to the vibrancy and pulsations of the more-than-human. Using the book as a provocation, I invite PSTs to embark on their own mapmaking adventures using photography as a means to reorient their relationship to and understanding of their surroundings. In particular, I ask them to play with perspective, which is about the spatial relationship between the photographer/viewer and the objects within an image. I ask students to create ten images of their neighborhood

while exploring different perspectives: bird’s-eye view, point of view, eye-level, and worm’s-eye view. In order to create these images, students, along with their cameras, are propelled to enter into a varying range of physical and imaginative relations with their surroundings.

This seemingly simple perspectival shift results in a myriad of different images of the same place (see Figure 4). The PSTs explore various beings and materials that are often overlooked by adults. M photographed her neighborhood through the inside of a decaying pumpkin that I assume was left after Halloween. E’s POV photograph of a vending machine marks this techno-food device, an important part of students’ lives, and also stands as a reminder of how the food we consume traverses huge distances and is touched by many people before being dispensed by a machine. Another photograph shows a car air freshener hanging from the rear-view mirror with trees and houses in the background. In another image, we see a bird’s-eye view

Figure 4. Photographs created by prospective teachers.



of three children, possibly returning from school, stopping to notice something along the sidewalk.

These photographs, akin to the photographs created by the young children in Tran's study, bring attention to the materiality of space. If maps often function to depict places as temporally static, the photographs and the maps created by the PSTs are snapshots of place as well as the human and more-than-human materials that make it. Each time I do this activity, I learn more about the places that the PSTs photograph. It is a reminder to me, and hopefully my students, that if we, as adults, pause our obsessions with teaching young children the adult ways of seeing and being in the world, a whole myriad of understandings, relationships, and possibilities emerge.

Many of us have seen a stray cup or other detritus on the street, but how many of us have noticed it, tried to get close to it, to photograph it? The young children in Tran's study are noticing, seeing, and being in the world; their photos pulsate with, and draw attention to, all that we move with in our everyday lives. In *My Sweet Home*, Amna notes that her grandmother's home is also about the trees that surround it: "I really like going to my grandmother's house because there's a guava tree." Within these examples, children are attending to their local ecologies and making meaning through interactions with materials, people, and other beings. Ultimately, I hope that the PSTs use this experience to inform their placemaking practices in the classrooms and communities they will work with.

Discussion

In this paper, we highlight how decentering the adult gaze with an attention toward children's ways of being in and with their local ecologies can support alternative visions for placemaking. Attending to how cameras can attune us to the more-than-human elements—often on the peripheries of our vision or disregarded as refuse—that are part of children's and youth's place-making, we use children's photographs to see, sense, and organize places differently. Children's and youths' photographs of their local places are curricular potential (Leu et al., 2016). They tell us about "the experience of being human in connection with the others and with the

world of nature, and the responsibility to conserve and restore our shared environments for future generations" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 6). Importantly, they challenge developmentalist and anthropocentric models on which much of contemporary social, political, and educational experiences are ordered. The figure of the human is often imagined as an adult, and nature is abstracted to the macro (e.g., green pastures, tall mountains, oceans, and animals in the wild) rather than the micro worlds and micro ecosystems that surround us all the time: *Look, there is a moth flying around here, there is a blade of grass that is growing from a crinkle in the concrete!*

The photographs of children and PSTs in our work invite us to acknowledge how human lives are dependent on and relate to multispecies and the more-than-human. In many ways, urban lives have been constructed to push these considerations to the periphery or at least to conceal them. Densely populated urban landscapes, whether in New York City or Tokyo or Delhi, are dotted with human-made structures with other species and the more-than-human folded in and pushed to the corners of our vision and consideration. For example, the adult impulse is to get "rid" of trash so we aren't troubled by the decay and detritus of our consumption practices. However, contemporary practices are simply about moving trash from our line of sight and into spaces where other humans (those oftentimes minoritized and financially under-resourced folks charged with handling the trash) and more-than-human species have to deal with the consequences of this practice.

The photographs created by the children in Tran's study and the PSTs Vivek worked with bring attention to the disregarded and discarded materials within their local ecologies. Careful not to overdetermine children's and PSTs' photographs, we treat the objects across photographs as provocations for further inquiry. For example, pictures of garbage and recycling bags made by three-year-old Jaylen, along with images of decaying pumpkins made by PSTs, invite us to think alongside scholars such as Nxumalo and Rubin (2018) who have written on the need to examine and question our relationships to waste, including "[investigating] waste legacies and [responding] to waste's impact on more-than-human

life” (p. 206). These images are markers of observations and noticing that our respective participants, irrespective of age, embarked on and *are* situated within more-than-human place stories that perhaps are less innocent than we think. In fact, we must acknowledge that the places we write about in this piece are part of stolen and unceded territories of various Indigenous nations located in the northeastern and midwestern part of what is known by settlers as the United States. We understand that places are shaped by the more-than-human bodies, human bodies, and stories/histories of the place (Nxumalo & Rubin, 2018). Considering this can “unsettle an innocent framing of the stories” (p. 204) of children’s, artists’, and PSTs’ photographs and maps in this writing.

While we cannot make easy claims about children’s and PSTs’ motivations behind photographs of materials within their local geographies, the photos bring attention to alternative ways of understanding our relation to place and placemaking practices. Indigenous scholars remind us that places are storied, “shifting over time and space and through interactions with flows of people, other species, social practices” (Tuck & McKenzie, 2014, p. 19). In contrast to the linear, static, and (settler-)colonial practices and histories taught in schools, children’s image-making practices invite us to think about the storied nature of place and the entanglements of matter and lives. As adults/educators we might have the impulse to write off the images children make as unremarkable and useless. However, if we stay with the trouble, to borrow from Donna Haraway (2016), and question our own preconceived notions and curricular narratives about place, these images hold the potential to animate important conversations about how we think about place and placemaking in our curriculum and educational practice.

Conclusion

We must acknowledge the oculocentric, or vision-centered, nature of this work and dominant practices of placemaking. While we are both drawn to the possibilities of image-making practices, we are aware of its ableist assumptions (Wargo et al., 2021) and note that approaches centering other

senses (movement, touch, smell, hearing, etc.) and multimodal frameworks can also attune us to placemaking in diverse ways (Hackett, 2014, 2016; Thiel, 2020). For example, Wargo et al. (2021) tell three stories of how an engagement with the sonic resonances of children’s everyday lives can offer “us distinct ways of understanding and knowing the world” (p. 16). They also challenge us to consider that our habits of placemaking are embedded within particular sensibilities (for them, sonic; for us, visual) that may require reeducating.

In contrast to the linear, static, and (settler-) colonial practices and histories taught in schools, children’s image-making practices invite us to think about the storied nature of place and the entanglements of matter and lives.

By sharing this work, we invite educators to play with how they teach and engage map- and placemaking practices within their classrooms. Of course, teachers and scholars have long explored these ideas. Caroline Pratt, a teacher and champion of early childhood progressive education in the late 1800s and early 1900s, utilized “city surroundings as curricular material” (Dyson, 2016, p. x) to explore with kindergarteners the spatial and material dimensions of the docks by their school in NYC. Comber (2016) has written extensively on the practices of Marg Wells, a teacher who explored with her students various ways to document neighborhood walks that served as points of inquiry. We wish to add to these important works by noting that adults may make efforts during neighborhood walks with children (and cameras) to restrain themselves from urging children toward particular destinations. A stroll around the block may not have a particular landing point or objective; rather, it can be a time for wonder (Bentley, 2012), for noticing, and for being with the more-than-human world.

Most importantly, we hope that this article simply *moves you* to create and explore placemaking in and out of the classroom. We imagine that you and your students have unique ties to placemaking: sounds, textures, smells, poems, sensations, etc.

(see Brownell & Wargo, 2017; Heiman et al., 2021). Consider these alongside the rigid and increasingly prescriptive curricular mandates. Ultimately, our quest for socially just futures will come not through standardization and efficiency but through play, experimentation, and inefficiency. We dream of a future where there will be myriad ways to relate to a place, and that schools, instead of socializing us into creating the same images/maps of these places, will create room for these (other) visions and ways of knowing our local spaces.

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INTO THE CLASSROOM

readwritethink
Lisa Storm Fink  NCTE

Shared Experiences, Individual Impressions

Turn field trips or other events into opportunities to learn new vocabulary, practice writing and technology skills, and create myriad stories using images and text about common experiences. First, students have an experience that they photograph. After quickly recording their initial impressions of what happened, students discuss their experience in terms of a sequence of events. They then work with older buddies to choose photos and write accompanying text in presentations. Finally, students present their work, describing their individual perceptions.

<https://bit.ly/3ImJWCf>

Telling a Story about Me: Young Children Write Autobiographies

This lesson plan for first and second grade students invites them to write and publish autobiographies based on personal photographs. It begins with the students taking, selecting, and recording relevant information about photos. Students then work in

small groups and independently to create their autobiographies.

<https://bit.ly/3i7mD4r>

Mail Time! An Integrated Postcard and Geography Study

Receiving mail is exciting, especially when it is delivered to school! In this activity, students write to friends and family asking them to send postcards. This activity provides motivation for writing and reading and provides a wonderful opportunity to learn about maps as students discover where their family members and friends live. Students arrange to have pen-pals by writing to family members and friends, asking them to send back postcards of the places where they live. Once letters are mailed, students share the postcards they receive with the class as they arrive. Graphs can be constructed to record how many towns, states, and countries the postcards come from. In addition, students can research the places where the postcards came from.

<https://bit.ly/3KcP11x>