Experiencing Beach in Australia: Study Abroad Students' Perspectives

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Abstract The current "Australian-*ness*" of outdoor environmental education is an evolving "set" of socio-cultural constructions. These constructions can be interpreted within the circumstances of an empirical study of tertiary study abroad students' participation in an undergraduate semester long unit "Experiencing the Australian Landscape" (EAL) as an ambivalent mixture of belonging and beach, or solidity and fluidity. This ambivalence imparts various meanings within and about the Australian context of beach as a "place". The study is based on an interpretive mixed method ethnographic and phenomenological small-scale case study. It finds that the beach experience is influenced by various social discourses, such as neo-colonialism, individualism and mobility. Participants experienced the beach in a fluid sense of non-belonging, despite the EAL intention of fostering a place-responsive pedagogy. In order to understand their experience and its alleged link to an enhanced environmental awareness, an embodied dialectic descriptive interpretation of place experience is suggested.

Introduction

Outdoor environmental education in Australia has a somewhat confused identity largely due to being an uncritical "set" of sometimes imported and mediated social and cultural constructions (Payne, 2002, p. 5). The enigmatic, sometimes, contradictory nature of outdoor environmental education persists despite some promising examples of recent research that have selectively emphasised some of the intersections of the "natural" and "cultural" as it might be found in Australia (for example, Payne & Wattchow, 2009; Stewart & Muller, 2009). Thus, it is possible that the "Australian-*ness*" of outdoor environmental education is a local or national project worth pursuing when globalising forces in education increasingly confront the pedagogical prospect for naively fostering an Australian "place" identity, if indeed that is important. Following Payne (1983), Australian outdoor education has drawn sporadically from the discourse of environmental education over the past two decades (for example, Brookes, 1993; Lugg, 1999; Martin 1993, Thomas & Thomas, 2000). More recently, a nascent pedagogical movement highlighting the characteristics, qualities and virtues of "place" has been promoted in Australian outdoor environmental education (for example: Birrell, 2001; Brookes, 2002; Stewart, 2004; Wattchow, 2005).

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The exploratory small-scale interpretive study reported on below aims to examine critically the emerging role of place in the discourse of Australian outdoor environmental education (Garrard, 2010), but significantly and originally from a more global perspective of study abroad (or international) students at an Australian university. The research participants were undertaking a one-semester undergraduate third year level outdoor environmental education unit, "Experiencing the Australian Landscape" (EAL), at Monash University in 2009 that included two fieldtrips to the beach, or more generally to places on the coast. Experiential learning is a central part of this unit. Focussing on study abroad students is relevant for Australian outdoor environmental education and the interest in place and its pedagogies in at least two respects. First, Australia, including its tertiary education sector, has increasingly been exposed to globalisation (Australian Education International, 2009), and place-responsive outdoor environmental education units are recommended for study abroad students as a way of experiencing Australia (Monash University, 2010a). Second, study abroad students can be seen as an example of postmodern cosmopolitan beings who do not belong to one place but globally move across borders, physically and imaginatively (Gunesch, 2007; Rizvi, 2005). Considering our current mobility (Urry, 2007), study abroad students' place experience is informative as an archetype (Weber, 2002) for a deeper consideration also of "local" students' place experience.

This paper comprises three main sections. In the first section, using EAL as a text, adopting Bauman's (2000) socio-physical concept of fluid and solid, a set of two contradicting elements will be identified as potentially constituting a distinctively Australian feature for interpreting study abroad students' experiential learning in EAL. They are *beach* and *belonging*. While the former historically relates to the significance of the liminal space (Turner, 1974) for the "new" settlers to narrate "Australian-*ness*" (Drew, 1994; Dutton, 1985; Fiske, Hodge & Turner, 1987; Huntsman, 2001), the latter can be understood as the Antipodeans' counteractive expression of loss and want (McLean, 1998).

However, as will be developed via conceptual and empirical means in this study, the notions of place and belonging to it, or dwelling in it (Garrard, 2004), must be treated cautiously in the postmodern Australian context for at least three reasons. First, making a claim for belonging in Australia by non-Indigenous Australians may be a sensitive issue due to the consequences of Australia's colonial history. Any fleeting expression of belonging in place can be challenged as an act of *neo-colonialism* (Plumwood, 2000), particularly when considered against the much longer term histories and legacies of Australia's indigenous populations. Second, the rise of *individualism* (Hales, 2006) may well have decreased the relevance, appropriateness and importance of place (to which one potentially belongs to) by a weakening of the meaningful social ties of those individuals with communities, families and their historical ways and geo-political settings of being together and taking responsibility for each other in certain locales. Third, *mobility* (Urry, 2007) as a counterforce challenges the traditional notion of belonging or dwelling, by conceptualising (local) place as progressively (Massey, 1994) relative (Appadurai, 1996) and/or agents as cosmopolitans.

Despite the pedagogical difficulties associated with uncritically assuming that students, local or international, can fleetingly belong somewhere or in some place in the current social condition in Australia, successful outcomes of place-responsive pedagogies have been reported and claimed (Stewart, 2004; Wattchow, 2008a). However, as Wattchow (2007) also observed among his students, different types of place experience other than belonging can be identified in place-responsive outdoor environmental education. In the third section, based on a mixed method case study of a small sample of study abroad students' experiences *of* and *in* (Malpas, 1999) Australian beach, two

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additional phenomenological themes (van Manen, 1990), "*tropical projection*"and "*filling in a map*", will be suggested that help express this under-researched and under-theorised difference in the ways that claims are made on belonging and place.

Beach and Belonging

In Australia, the curriculum and pedagogical field related to outdoor education has been largely an import from the United Kingdom, Europe and, more recently, North America. Recently, merging with some "existential" type "currents" (Sauve, 2005) of environmental education, belonging to "place" has become a more influential discourse within Australian outdoor environmental education.

EAL, a semester-long undergraduate level outdoor environmental education unit offered at Monash University in Melbourne, is one of the representative examples (Payne & Wattchow, 2008). As well as taken by local students of outdoor education towards the end of their degree programs, EAL is promoted as a "uniquely Australian option" (Monash University, 2010a) for study abroad students who usually stay at Monash University for one semester to one year. EAL is particularly popular among study abroad students at the Clayton Campus where the majority of them study. In 2009, when Nakagawa attended as a participant researcher, 30 out of 32 students who enrolled in the unit were study abroad students. In addition to the weekly lectures, the students were required to participate in fieldwork twice during the 13 week semester for three to four days each: the first fieldwork program was to Point Leo in Mornington Peninsula; the second one to the Wilsons Promontory National Park. Both of these locations are on the Victorian coast in Southeast Australia. The fieldwork excursions primarily focused on the beach where students participated in activities such as snorkelling, rockpooling and beachcombing. The fieldwork programs are titled ELP's – experiential learning programs that, allegedly, "recycle" with the university based academic learning program (ALP) and, if well recycled, are claimed to represent a fuller notion of experiential education (EE) (Warren, Mitten & Loeffler, 2008, see also Dewey, 1938/1991). We focus only on students' experience of the ELP part of the unit given that strong educational claims in outdoor environmental education are often associated with the pedagogical values of learning through "direct" experience via a set of certain activities.

Besides the focus on the beach, "sense of place" was another emphasis in EAL (Monash University, 2010b). In this context, the term generally means "the subjective and emotional attachment people have to place" (Cresswell, 2004), rather than a value-free psychological phenomenon. Sense of place has been rephrased, with a positive connotation, such as "topophilia" (Tuan, 1974), "insideness" (Relph, 1976), or "belonging" (Wattchow, 2005) to indicate its significance not only for our identity development and transitions over time but allegedly also for the benefit or well-being of nature. At this point the environmental value is assumed or promoted within outdoor environmental education. Wattchow (2005) writes:

> A focus on relationships with nature in Outdoor Education has gathered momentum in recent years and now a major component of most programs… In many ways this focus echoes the broader community's attempts to explore a relationship with Australian nature… It represents part of a collective exploring to find a place we can identify with in the deepest sense – a place we can call 'home'. (p. 14)

As Martin Heidegger (1993) suggested, to dwell in a place like home is to care and spare, and modern environmental deterioration can be improved if nature *in a particular place* becomes our home and consequently if we learn to apply the particular

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positive relationship with the place to the wider environment. The two three-to-four day fieldtrips in EAL, particularly the one to Point Leo, are designed for its students to feel a sense of belonging, as one of the course objective is specified as to "identify how educational approaches can contribute to a deeper understanding of outdoor experiences and place attachments" (Monash University, 2010b).

The purposes of EAL, therefore, can broadly be characterised by these two elements: *beach* and feelings of *belonging* there fostered pedagogically as "immersing" in, "attaching" to, and developing an affinity. This combination of beach and belonging, employing Bauman's (2000) socio-physical metaphors of *fluid* and *solid*, is unique in the sense that those phenomena are of opposing social ontology. Bauman writes:

> Fluids, so to speak, neither fix space nor bind time. While solids have clear spatial dimensions but neutralize the impact, and thus downgrade the significance, of time (effectively resist its flow or render it irrelevant), fluids do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready (and prone) to change it … (p. 2)

In other words, the beach as the fluid is a *mobile* place where the flux of tide is continuously changing, whereas the belonging as the solid is an act in a *fixed* place to which one attaches over time.

These somewhat contradictory opposing metaphors as signs are not limited to their physical aspects but can be extended to the socio-cultural and ecological levels where their particular meanings are historically constructed. Bennett (2007) wrote that the liminal topology of the beach has been typically adopted by Australian writers, such as Robert Drewe and Tim Winton, to dramatise the national psyche. This is, however, not to generalise "Australian-*ness*" of Australian outdoor environmental education through EAL; rather, it shows how the two competing conceptualisations of place are tied together and somewhat non-problematically included within the pedagogical discourse of Australian outdoor environmental education. By introducing this puzzle for interpretive purposes, our aim is to both confuse and clarify the concept (and practices) of "Australian-*ness*" itself, but from the broader globalising imperatives and perspectives of study abroad students' various experiences of EAL.

The fluidity of beach as a broad construct is closely associated with its physical setting where the border of land and sea constantly changes. However, it also influences how we make (or do not make) sense of place on the beach. This is due to its topos of "in-between place" (Bærenholdt, Haldrup, Larsen, & Urry, 2004, p. 51). Consequently our performance in the beach bears a liminal character in which we transit (therefore do not belong) and transform ourselves (Turner, 1974). In the modern capitalistic urban society, the transformation often takes the form of recreation in which the labour force as a way of life is rejuvenated and reproduced, although leisure time is also socially organised and recreation is indeed an embodied praxis (Abbas, 2004). The beach, thus, is not a place to belong but primarily a "place" to visit and play. The "times" spent there and the "nature" of the experience of that "nature" form warrant critical attention if strong rhetorical claims are made for "place pedagogy" and, indeed, experiential learning and education in outdoor environmental education (Payne, 2003a).

This liminality of beach is particularly relevant in Australia where the beach is a widely recognised national symbol (Broeze, 1998; Phillips & Smith, 2000). This is due to how Australia has been positioned historically as well as geodemographically as a British colony. The new settlers often had an ambivalent relationship with Britain and the centre of Australia in which the semantics of inside/us and outside/them were occasionally replaced with each other (Drew, 1994). Lifesavers on the beach have been a caricature of national heroes who colonise the beach as the natural frontier into

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the human domain (Fiske, Hodge & Turner, 1987). The beach is an egalitarian place where social status symbols are shed with clothes (Dutton, 1985). The beach as a liminal becoming place implies the multiculturally transitional dynamism Australia faces today (Huntsman, 2001). The symbolism of beach is a partial history of modern Australia itself.

Belonging also has a special meaning in Australia. McLean (1998) argued that modern Australia's origin is oceanic, which unconsciously represses non-Indigenous Australians to be refugees. McLean traces the settlers' efforts to make sense of Australia in landscape art and concludes that it was not an easy process: he writes "[t]he scar Australians bear is antipodality" (p. 7). Belonging is still a culturally sensitive issue, as a well-known debate between Plumwood (2000) and Read (2000) strongly suggested. Plumwood asserted, referring to the history of colonisation, any non-Indigenous way of connecting to the land in Australia is not appropriate. Read argued that place attachment is a personal phenomenon that can be parallel to others. Belonging in Australia is, therefore, perhaps desirable but can be an expression of loss and want, and its various tropes have been revealed in ecocriticism as a way to represent culture-nature relations historically (Garrard, 2004).

Problems of Belonging

Beach as many Australians understand it historically and the notion of belonging have been identified as major yet ambivalent aspects of EAL. Here, belonging is considered in relation to the complex social conditions in which we are positioned today. The hope or anticipation for belonging, as it might occur in contemporary Australian society, must engage with the discourses of *neo-colonialism*, *individualism* and *mobility* if it is to have any validity or credibility in any claims made educationally for a place responsive pedagogy.

The debate between Plumwood and Read suggests that it is not only the mentality for belonging which may be a particular cultural element of "Australian-*ness*" but also the sensitivity required to deal with the phenomenon in relation to Indigenous Australians. Otherwise an act of belonging may also be an act of neo-colonialism in which the meaning of the land is reconstituted as newly acquired territory into the web of the colonial power.

Neo-colonialism is also implicit when Australian nature is perceived as wilderness (Rose, 1996; see also Nash, 1982 for how the notion of wilderness and desire for it has been played out in and on the American Mind, and influenced that set of constructions of Australian outdoor education). Griffiths (1996) warned that such an idea is another form of *terra nullius* in which the histories of Indigenous Australians are erased and their existence is categorised as part of nature, thus non-human. In relation to outdoor environmental education, wilderness extends into two aspects: wilderness to be technologically conquered; and wilderness to be worshiped as the dualistically contraposed antipode of the industrial urban (Cameron, 2001; Cronon, 1996). For example, while Wattchow (2008a) maintained that belonging, or "an intimate, sensory and an embodied response to the river place itself" (p. 12), as a theme that was identified among his students and that it possessed a great value for the place-responsive pedagogy in outdoor environmental education, he (2007) also observed two major differing themes, "rivercraft" and "romancing the river" which both derive from the concept of wilderness. Rivercraft refers to concerns related to one's skills for the mastery of wilderness, while romancing the river is a perspective in which nature as wilderness is separated from human and its abstract experience is prioritised over the experience in the river place itself.

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Individualism also problematises belonging. In the discourse of outdoor (environmental) education, Hales (2006, p. 53) observed that "place has become less important in the construction of individual identity and the shaping of social relations". He argued that this is due to the rise of individualism. In order to theorise individualism, Hales employed the concept of "risk society". Beck (1992) argued that due to rapid socio-technological advance, human risks such as environmental deterioration and social deviation have been significantly increased in the modern age. Within this risk, Beck also was critical of the privileged middle class "escape" to wilderness and desire for nature. If used as a form of critique, the wilderness-nature intersection beyond those everyday risk cultures actually obfuscated social critique because, according to Beck, such a "naturalistic misunderstanding" constituted a "morality beyond morality" and critique of society beyond social critique. In order, therefore, to deal with the complexity of the risks, our knowledge becomes more dependent on the professionals who foresee the risks in advance with specialist knowledge rather than relying on the traditional communal institutions. In relation to individualism, knowledge of individuals (and also individual identity, if it is valid to say that identity derives partially from knowledge) is cut off from a *gemeinschaft* (Tönnies, 1974), or a homogenously communal place to belong. Instead, it is alienated in the space of professional knowledge.

Place, or more precisely its semantic solidity in this context, is also threatened by "time-space compression" (Harvey, 1990) due to the technological advancement of communication and transportation and other forms that accelerate the "fast" individualisation and intensification of what Payne (2003b) has referred to as the technics of experience in environmental education. Acknowledging the significance of a heightened *mobility* in postmodernity, a challenge is thrown up to the relevance of traditional anthropological place where its cultural integrity is supposed to be independently unique (Augé, 1995; Meyrowitz, 1985; Ong, 2009). Rather than being solidly independent against others, place "progressively" changes reflecting its internal co-existence of plural narratives (Massey, 1994).

Agency is also affected by mobility. An understanding of mobility as a social phenomenon, Urry (2007, p. 141) argued, requires a consideration of social organisation of human subjectivity as well as objectivity of place, in order to avoid both linguistic and technological determinism (see also Robertson, 1992). In *Tourist Gaze* (1990), applying Foucauldian governmentality (see Foucault, 1990 for the difference between "right of death and power over life") Urry suggested that modern subjects have embodied the discourse of relative and mobile, thus consumable, place, which is often generated by tourism professionals. Tourists practise the internalised discourse and gain pleasure, which also results in reproducing the authority and capital of the tourist professionals.

Although place-responsive outdoor environmental education strives to facilitate affinity to the more-than-human world (Abram, 1997) at the level of sensuous embodiment or pre-discursive/practical consciousness (Giddens, 1984), our place experience can be also influenced by ontological historical realities, such as neo-colonialism, individualism and mobility, within which we are situated. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty (2002) emphasised that our embodied perception is neither only sensuous (empiricism) nor only conceptual (intellectualism). Rather, the body is *emplaced* (Pink, 2009, p. 25), that is, our body is embodied into *a certain space and time* which attributes certain existential conditions to our perception. Merleau-Ponty explained: "I am not an individual beyond class, I am situated in a social environment, and my freedom, though it may have the power to commit me elsewhere, has not the power to transform me instantaneously into what I decide to be" (p. 520).

On these three thematic grounds, there is, therefore, considerable importance in critically interpreting study abroad students' archetypal experiences of beach in

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Australia and any alleged belonging to it in rhetorically claimed place responsive pedagogy that, in reality, occurs over two very short temporal periods of three to four days of peripatetic "experiential learning" at different beachscapes. In the following section, referring to the qualitative data gathered from a small number of study abroad students who were enrolled in EAL in Semester One 2009, a few types of place narratives lived (Entrikin, 1991), or *speaking of* place (Wattchow, 2008b), that differ from belonging will be used to highlight the complexity of place experience.

Study Abroad Students' Experience of Australian Beach

In this section, based on an interpretive mixed method ethnographic and phenomenological small-scale case study of a sample of study abroad students, the findings reveal two major themes of students' lived experience of Australian beach. The themes differ from the notion of belonging given in the relevant place literature of outdoor environmental education. The four research participants (with pseudonyms) in the study were one Israeli female (Abby), one American female (Brigitte) and two American males (Chris and Don). All of them were in their early to mid twenties at the time of data collection. Triangulation (Creswell, 2007, p. 208) of the multiple sources of data was employed to increase the plausibility, credibility and richness of the interpretation of the data. The data sources included: individual semi structured and conversational interviews of approximately 60 minutes each with each participant three times over the duration of a semester, adopting the general interview guide approach (Patton, 2002, p. 349); participants' unit journals as protocol writing; and thick description of the sample through ethnographic participant observation (Emerson, Frez & Shaw, 1995; Geertz, 1973) during the weekly academic class meetings and the two three-to-four-day fieldtrips, in which Nakagawa attended as a student/researcher.

The locations of these two fieldtrips were Point Leo and Wilsons Promontory. Point Leo is located on the shore of Western Port Bay near Phillip Island, a well known tourist site for international tourist, 70 kilometres to southeast of Melbourne. Point Leo is a preferred place among campers who enjoy water activities such as surfing and boating. Wilsons Promontory lies approximately 200 kilometres southeast of Melbourne. Known as "The Prom" among Victorians, it is one of the most popular National Parks in Victoria not only for family camping at the town of Tidal River but also for more serious overnight bushwalking, now often renamed as "backpacking" following the cultural logic of North American outdoor education and recreation. Although beach was a main focus in both of the fieldtrips, due to their coastal locations as well as the fact that "beach" is part of "coast" in our daily language usage, the terms "beach" and "coast" were often used interchangeably by the research participants in their interviews and writings.

Each method and its sourcing of data provide a particular form and limited type of representing the participants' experience of Australian beach. This "messy" methodological "assemblage" (Law, 2004) was used to satisfy as best as possible the aims-means-ends congruence now demanded in the framing of environmental education research (Reid, 2009) and in this critical ethnographic study of the phenomenological understandings of study abroad students' lived experience and, possibly, sense of belonging in or of an Australian beach. For this double hermeneutic re-representation (Giddens, 1984, p. 284), van Manen's (1990, p. 101) four fundamental lifeworld existential aspects are adopted as providing a conceptual and contextual framework for the methodology. They are: *spatiality*; *corporeality*; *temporality*; and *relationality/communality*. Within this framework, due to the limitation of words in an article like this, this paper primarily focuses on the dimension of existential spatiality, although those four lifeworld existentials are inextricably intertwined with each other through

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which a fuller meaning of their beach experience is interpreted and constructed. In adopting this interpretive frame, two other themes of place experience emerged that appear to be particularly relevant for study abroad students in Australia. They are "*tropical projection*" and "*filling in a map*". Examples related to each theme are provided so as to highlight the problematic nature of claims being made about both a pedagogy of place and the belonging that can potentially be attributed to it.

Experience is a complicated matter (Fox, 2008). As such, when meaning of place experience is interpreted in relation to spatiality, it is crucial to examine the potential metaphysicality of space as well as the influence of spatial physicality, and this is to be cross-referenced to other lifeworld existentials (for instance, see Thrift, 1993 for the inseparability of space-time). For the study abroad students, the beaches they visited in EAL were not only the spaces filled with physical objects (e.g. water, sand, etc.) but also metaphysically and metaphorically representing aspects of Australia as "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006). One common imaginative projection of "Australian-*ness*" onto those actual beach places was the idea of the tropical, in relation to the world-famous Great Barrier Reef in north-eastern Australia. On the first page of Brigitte's unit journal, a map of Australia was drawn and only included the locations of Melbourne and the Great Barrier Reef. When Chris first arrived in Melbourne, he was very determined to visit the Great Barrier Reef so as to best characterise his Australian experience in the limited time he felt available to him as a study abroad student:

> *I'd say the top thing I want to do is to see the Great Barrier Reef. (Chris, First Interview)*

Other study abroad students also positioned themselves according to their tropical imaginary, particularly into their first fieldtrip to Point Leo. It was above all during the snorkelling activity when they realised through their bodily senses that their pre-conceptions of the "Australian-*ness*" did not match with this particular beach place. The result was, at least initially, negative.

> *I'm not dealing well with the weather, the cold weather, I mean. I was really cold and I started coughing. I even cough until this day since we went snorkelling. (Abby, Second Interview)*

> *Snorkelling sounded exciting because you'd expect like something, somewhat tropical, but it seemed like everything that we saw was really grey and a lot of seaweed. And it was a lot of shallow water. (Don, Second Interview)*

> *I didn't like when we were snorkelling. He [the instructor] said to look for fish and everything and I could not see a thing. It was so murky and full of seaweed, and I guess this kind of goes back to my former perception of Australia. When you think of snorkelling you think of like very clear pristine water with colourful fish, so that's kind of what I was thinking when we were going there … First of all it was cold in the water and second of all I didn't even see anything cool. (Brigitte, Second Interview)*

These data extracts demonstrate how they thought about an Australian beach, and experience of it, was, indeed, preconceived and heavily coded with these symbols: tropical warm weather, abundance of colourful fish, absence of seaweed, and pristine deep water. In Point Leo, however, the beach was the total opposite: cold, no fish, abundance of seaweed, and murky grey shallow water. These characteristics of the beach in Point Leo were perplexing for those study abroad students who were imagining the snorkelling space to be like the Great Barrier Reef. They struggled to have any

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positive feelings or awareness of attachment to the beach place. Their sensibility was, essentially, one of disappointment. Pedagogically, it appears that if the conditions for snorkelling were inappropriate, then the instructor was most likely more concerned and "locked into" delivering the snorkelling activity.

This negative snorkelling experience in Point Leo was, however, not totally negative for them. This leads to the second theme of "filling in a map". Brigitte reflected her snorkelling experience as the following:

> *I guess that was the point, you know. There're all different water environments … they are not all going to look like Cairns and the Gold Coast. I mean, this is Point Leo, this is what this water environment looks like and it doesn't look like those. So it was negative at that time but I guess now I'm reflecting on it and it's not a bad thing. (Brigitte, Second Interview)*

Clearly, Brigitte acknowledged the diversity of beaches. Snorkelling at Point Leo was perhaps negative for belonging, but it was positive for experiencing the otherness of Australian beaches with which she might then construct a larger picture of her Australian-*ness*. It is "larger" in the sense that her knowledge of Australian-*ness* spread "horizontally" rather than deepened "vertically", as in filling in a map of Australia with diverse places that they had visited. This horizontal knowing of Australia is also observable in the following extracts.

> *It influenced my idea of Australia because you got to see another part of it, something I hadn't seen before … It's just more of getting the knowledge and being able to say that you saw that area … It's more sort of filling in a map, like I have been there and yeah I have been there and know what it looks like. (Don, Third Interview)*

> *I know more about Australia because I got to see two areas that I guess wouldn't be able to see if I wasn't doing this unit, like Point Leo and Wilsons Prom. I got familiar with these two areas … like geographical places that belonging to Australia. (Abby Third Interview)*

The diversity of experiencing two beaches only in EAL also brings pleasure of experiencing something new.

> *It was a good experience because, you know, you are going to the beaches … like Bells Beach or other beaches like St Kilda ... they kind of get redundant. They kind of get the same and it's good to know that natural beaches are right there like Point Leo and Bushrangers Bay. It's good to know that, you know, there are other things out there, not everything is the same around the coast. It's different no matter where you go. I love the fact that I have experienced two different kinds of beaches now. (Chris Second Interview)*

A preference for seeing more places horizontally and, presumably, superficially over staying in one place for a longer time to understand the place from inside is common among study abroad students (Gmelch, 1997; Papatsiba 2006), and this is partially due to their high mobility. As the moving and mobile body is also gendered (Kiewa, 2001; Newberry, 2003) and sexually-oriented (Dignan, 2002) to a degree that modifies the nature of place experience, their body is also mobilised (Urry, 2007) in particular ways so as to embody a "tourist gaze" (Urry 1990) as a desire to see as many spatial features as preferred sites within a limited, if not compressed, time. The above two themes are its consequential configurations in relation to spatiality: study abroad students brought in their pre-conception of Australia that was globally generated and circulated

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by tourism professionals ("tropical projection") and other sources or mediums such as the movie "Crocodile Dundee"; and understood the country two-dimensionally utilising the highly mobile network and gained pleasure by experiencing differences ("filling in a map"). These themes, which relativise the very notion of place, suggest a fixed physical/embodied notion and static spatial-temporal notion of belonging must be approached cautiously while its experiential pedagogies need to be treated as problematic.

Addressing the mobility factor as a significant historical reality, Payne and Wattchow (2008; 2009) critically challenge outdoor environmental educators to consider "slow pedagogy" as a pedagogical option to the peripatetically fast in outdoor education that, for many years, has been characterised as the celebration of the "journey". Distance and/or height are emphasised pedagogically; often the more the better for experiential learning. Payne and Wattchow's slow ecopedagogy is alternative in that it encourages the pedagogue to "pause or dwell in spaces for more than a fleeting moment and, therefore, encourages us to attach and receive meaning from that place" (2009, p. 16). However, a question still remains: if individualised intensification and "compression" of the spatiality and temporality of "experience" lived is a predominant attribute among study abroad students, can slow pedagogy convince or persuade otherwise their exotic/global and mobile/journeying desire to see as many things as they possible on their respective or collective sojourns into "nature"?

Discussion

The above conceptual and empirical sketches of two spatial themes of study abroad students' experience of Australian beaches raise some interesting questions about the notion of "Australian-*ness*", at least of their interpretation of experiences of its "place", and now it appears more enigmatic than before. Australian beach was imagined to be somewhere tropical, which was soon to be deconstructed by the sample into being considered as one part of a more diverse form of "Australian-*ness*". What does "Australian-*ness*" mean now after a stereotype has been negated then synthesised into a systematic category? Does it differ from, say, "American-*ness*" or "Israeli-*ness*" in the globally mobilised world? How does place-responsive pedagogy or slow pedagogy affect meaning of placeness (or placelessness)? What are the roles of the other lifeworld existentials, especially of temporality, in relation to spatiality? This paper cannot answer to those critical concerns but only seeks to raise issues and questions around them to be researched further. They are, to name some: place and mobility; localisation and globalisation; semantic relationship among different geopolitical units represented by the term "place" (e.g. city, state, nation state); and hermeneutics of lived place experience. And, while we have studied international study abroad students' perspectives, we feel that the questions raised above are equally salient to, for example, students who see themselves as Australian, or identify strongly with it. Moreover, we have flagged how other constructions such as gender, physical ability, and class will, indeed, shape the experience of, for example, beaches and other "places", environments and "natures".

Meanwhile, for claims to be made about Australian place-responsive outdoor environmental education, a critical examination of "Australian-*ness*" is still relevant, as is the pedagogical place of experiential learning in the absence of theoretical or academic interventions such as we have undertaken here in incorporating, for example, themes concerning colonialism and globalisation. If one current aspect of "Australian-*ness*" within Australian place-responsive outdoor environmental education can be identified as an ambivalent mixture of beach and belonging, or fluid and solid, the balance between those two competing concepts is being broken by various other social objectivities (and their subjective internalisation and externalisation – Berger & Luckmann, 1967), such

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as neo-colonialism, neo-liberal individualism and global mobility, to incline towards the former. Particularly for study abroad students who are more intensively mobile and less nationally/culturally "qualified" to belong to an Australian place, it is questionable if the pedagogy of place-responsive outdoor environmental education can always be accepted in the way it is commonly given. While "local" students were not included in this study, they are not immune from the same qualifications we critically introduce. Indeed, an "Australian" student from the "bush" may feel disoriented and deplaced at the beach, in the city and so on. Indeed, there might be many "Australian-*nesses*" all of which require cautious treatment if bold claims are to be made pedagogically and on behalf of enhancing a critical environmental or ecological consciousness. Further study is needed of a range of demographic and geographical/historical considerations.

At this point, based on Merleau-Ponty's embodied dialectic of sense and concept, Gruenwald's (2003) suggestion to employ eclectically both "critical pedagogy" for beach/fluid and "place-based education" for belonging/solid seems, initially, insightful for Australian outdoor environmental education. The place-responsive pedagogy normatively *prescribes* students' experience *in* place to be of belonging or positive sense of place as a practical experiment to bring time and space back to pre-industrial pre-modernity after which human environmental risks widely emerged. In addition to that, it is important to treat other forms of lived experience *of* place *descriptively*, which may be equally significant for an interpretive understanding of the relationship between self and nature mediated through various relevant historical realities in the mobilised world. Although it is not yet clear how that awareness might lead to a pedagogy of the environmental sustainability, this paper concludes with an autobiographic anecdote to suggest its possibility.

> *In the Grampians, we were on a bus on an unsealed road. Suddenly, one of the instructors pointed out the window and said that there was a deer in the bush. Because I had never seen a wild deer in Australia nor in Japan (where they were often regarded sacred), I tried to look for it. Then I found two deer – probably a mother and a child – quietly standing close together. Although the bus was shaking loudly, it was a calm moment. Human dynamics absorbed into static nature – I thought that I 'experienced the Australian landscape'. Then, the instructor added, 'They are pests here.' He explained that the deer had been imported by European settlers for hunting sports and they had been destroying the native vegetation and that had caused an ecological damage to Australian nature; therefore the government was culling the deer. The way he talked, it seemed to me, was not particularly sympathetic to the deer. His explanation made sense yet I was disillusioned. At the same time, I felt I understood what Australia could mean and wanted to know more about the relationship between the nation and nature in Australia, which somehow might relate to myself as an outsider here. (Nakagawa's recollection from Experiencing the Australian Landscape in 2001)*

Keywords: place-responsive outdoor environmental education; experiential learning; study abroad students; beach; belonging; mobility.

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