

*We are place; place is us*

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Abstract

The way we see place is the way we see ourselves; the way we see ourselves is the way we see place. Our thoughts, values and identities are shaped by how we perceive place and our relationship to it. Shift in perspective about place can result in a shift in our way of perceiving ourselves - from being isolated to place to being connected. The purpose of this study is to understand the conditions that lead to a sense of place or a sense of connection to our inner self. Research participants were 10 college professors from various disciplines who engage their students in meaningful learning by connecting them to natural ecosystems. The shift in research paradigm - from an observer's point of view to a participant's point of view resulted in a change in perception of place and self. The perspective of place in this study evolved into three stages: first as a concept, second as a process, and third as a relationship. The methods of analysis also evolved into three stages. In the first stage, transcribed interviews were analyzed using the Systematic Grounded Theory of Strauss and Corbin. In the second stage, a reflective method of analysis gradually developed. At the third stage, the reflective analysis was integrated to the systematic analysis. The study shows that there is a relationship between our perception of place and perception of self. Direct meaningful experiences through nature-centered learning can develop an intimate connection between our inner self and place.

Key words: sense of place, grounded theory, chaos theory, quantum theory, shift in perspective

The separation of science and humanities in the curriculum at all levels is a reflection of a kind of thinking that divides nature and culture (Selby 1999). Reason (2008) refers to this thinking which separates humanity from nature as a “crisis of the mind” (33). Reason explains that this crisis comes from educational forms that tend to “divide the world by academic discipline, advocate dominion over nature, promote individualism and rights over citizenship and responsibility, and separate rationality from feeling and valuing” (2008, 27). The separation of humanities and science in the curriculum creates an illusion that humanity and nature are separated from each other. The dismal consequence of this is the disconnection of self with nature.

## SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to explain the relationship of self with place. This study sought to answer this research question, what is the relationship of self with place?

In this study, place refers to Nature and self is viewed as a process of becoming whole. The perspective of self evolved into three stages. In the first stage of the study, self is viewed from the third person perspective or “they” referring to the research participants excluding the researcher herself. In the second stage, self is viewed from the first person perspective or “I” referring to the researcher herself. In the third stage, self is viewed from the second person perspective or “we” referring to the researcher and the other research participants. The perspective of place also evolved into three stages: first as a concept, second as a process and third as a relationship.

The relationship of self and place is referred to as sense of place in the literature. Sense of place consists of “feelings, attitudes, and behavior towards a place which varies from person to person, and from one scale to another (e.g. from home to country). Sense of place [also] consists of knowledge, belonging, attachment, and commitment to a place or part of it” (Shamai 1991, 354). Shamaï (1991) describes sense of place in terms of levels and identified commitment to a place as the highest level of sense of place. Shamaï (1991) explains that deepest commitment to a place is realized through the sacrifice of important attributes and values such as prosperity, freedom, or, in the most extreme situation, life itself. At this level there is readiness to give up personal and/or collective interests for the sake of the larger interest of the place. In this study, sense of place is viewed in terms of phases or stages rather than levels.

## METHODS

### RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

We were 10 college professors from various school and various field of discipline (philosophy, social science, marine ecology, mass communications, food chemistry, science education, cultural anthropology and zoology). Our common characteristic is our strong commitment on the use of nature-centered learning in understanding our discipline. Together with our students, we are engaged in meaningful learning through direct interaction with natural ecosystems. Grounded data consisted of transcribed interviews of the other research participants and the

researcher's field observations, memos and personal journals.

## METHODS OF ANALYSIS

The method evolved from a positivistic to a constructivist paradigm in the process of understanding the phenomenon. This method referred to as systematic-reflective grounded theory method integrated the systematic grounded theory of Strauss and Corbin (1990) with the reflective method that emerged in the course of the study.

## SYSTEMATIC GROUNDED THEORY OF STRAUSS AND CORBIN

Grounded theory is a specific methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss for the purpose of generating a theory culled from actual human experiences rather than simply applying a theory to understand human experiences. It is also known as constant comparative method (Walker and Myrick 2006) since different pieces of data are compared for their similarities and differences (Corbin and Strauss 2008). The theory generated from grounded data is derived from qualitative analysis of data which involves coding of data (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Coding is an analytical process of taking raw data and raising it to a conceptual level (Corbin and Strauss 2008). The coding process of Strauss and Corbin (1990) involves three phases: open, axial, and selective phases. In practice, the phases overlap and occur simultaneously. Although the coding process is iterative, it should not be seen as a linear process.

The first phase is the open coding process. "Open coding is the part of analysis that pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data. Without this first basic analytical step, the rest of the analysis and communication that follows could not take place. During open coding the data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data (Strauss and Corbin 1990, 62). Categorizing is the main analytic process and concepts are used to label discrete happenings, events, and other instances of phenomena. Furthermore, concepts are grouped together under a higher order, or more abstract concept called a category.

The second phase is the axial coding process. Axial coding is "a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories. This is done by utilizing a coding paradigm involving conditions, context, action/ interactional strategies, and consequences" (Strauss and Corbin 1990, 9). In the axial coding process, an analyst selects a core category or phenomenon that was identified in the open coding process. The core category is connected to the other categories in the axial paradigm to show interrelationship of causal conditions, phenomenon, context, intervening conditions, strategies and consequences (Creswell 2005).

The third phase is the selective coding process. In the selective coding process, the theory derived from data is refined and developed as relationships among the categories are further validated from data (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

## EMERGENCE OF THE REFLECTIVE METHOD

Patterns, relationships and connections among the categories emerged when I abandoned the axial coding paradigm. The preconceived framework for categories (e.g. causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, strategies and consequences) restrained the emergence of the relationship among the categories. Glaser, a co-proponent of Strauss in the discovery of the grounded theory (cited in Creswell, 2005 ) views the axial paradigm to be limiting the emergence of a theory. Creswell (2005, 401) writes, “ Glaser, however, stresses the importance of letting a theory emerge from the data rather than using specific, preset categories (Glaser, 1992), such as we saw in the axial coding paradigm (e.g., causal conditions, content [context], intervening condition, strategies, and consequences).

After abandoning the axial paradigm, a reflective method of analysis emerged in the process of developing the theory. The process involved simultaneous and repetitive pattern analysis (a,b,c) and synthesis of data (d, e and f). The reflective techniques that evolved in the process included

- a) paying attention to words that appear often in the data;
- b) visualizing words through color coding;
- c) selecting words and isolating words from data;
- d) rearranging chosen words in space through a concept map in order to make sense of the words;
- e) connecting chosen words to create a new word, a new sentence, a new logical diagram, or a new paragraph; and
- f) creating new forms of thought such as combined words, a logical diagram, a new sentence, a new paragraph, or a creative composition like a poem.

This reflective technique also involved recognizing word patterns as they seem to appear in space. Unlike the traditional way of reading from left to right, word patterns were recognized by reading the words from right to left, top to bottom and bottom up. It also involved recognizing a pattern in the position of subject and object in a sentence. The reflective method that emerged in this study made me aware of the changes in my process of thinking and the development of spatial thinking.

I was aware of a shift in my thinking as my analysis changed from being conceptual to being visual and spatial. My analytical and linear thinking may have developed from my training as a science educator. Singh H. and Singh A. (2002) relates analytical, linear left brain mode of thinking to traditional philosophy which may have been influenced by the Newtonian scientific paradigm which views the world as a giant clock, or a machine made up of isolated parts (Stapp 2009).

The shift from analytical, linear thinking to spatial thinking was a consequential effect of a shift in the method of analysis from systematic to reflective. Consequential effect of shift in the method is a shift from linear to non-linear thinking. Non-linear thinking is thinking in terms of processes, patterns, connections and relationships rather than concepts. It is thinking in terms of wholes, systems and integration rather than thinking in terms of fragmented parts and parallel opposites, and thinking in terms of phases and stages rather than thinking in terms of levels.

## FINDINGS

This is how the theory of sense of place emerged in this study. The shift in perspective of the researcher - from third person point of view, to first person point of view, and then to second person point of view (from “they”, to “I”, and then to “we”) is the condition that has brought about the theory of place which explains a unique evolution in our understanding of way of thinking, of nature of self and nature of place, and of the relationship of self and place.

## THEORY OF SENSE OF PLACE

This study discovered that nature of self is similar to nature of place. The patterns that describe self is similar to patterns that describe place- self and place are dynamic quantum systems that co-evolve with each other.

Zohar (1990 cited in Selby 1999) explains that quantum systems co-evolve. A new quantum system (with its own particle and wave aspects) evolve when two quantum systems meet. The particle aspect of the two systems stays somewhat separate but their wave aspects overlap and merge giving rise to a new system. Likewise, the theory of sense of place views self and place as quantum systems co-evolving together (Selby 1999).

The co-evolution of self and place is similar to the process of the evolution of the universe. As the universe continue to expand, space, time and matter are created. Similarly, the inner self is in the process of becoming whole as self consciously interact with place. The process of becoming is similar to the process of expansion of the universe. The core of the process is pure thought [Immaculate Conception], pure love and pure joy. This process is illustrated in the visual representation of the model generated in this study (Figure 1).

The theory of place proposes two ways of understanding the relationship of self and place. The first relationship views self as a whole within a larger whole rather than just part of a whole. The second relationship views place as an integral part of self.

- 1) Self is within place; and
- 2) Place is within ourselves.

Since self is within place, when a slight change happens in one's state of mind, this is felt by place. Likewise, when a slight change in place happens, this is felt by a conscious self since place is within ourselves. This conscious evolution of our own consciousness -deep understanding of the relationship of self with place is referred to as sense of place. In this study, sense of place can be viewed both as a condition and a consequence – the condition is evolving and dynamic and the consequence of the evolutionary and dynamic process is the emergence of a unique identity with a higher order of consciousness and with a new system of thinking.

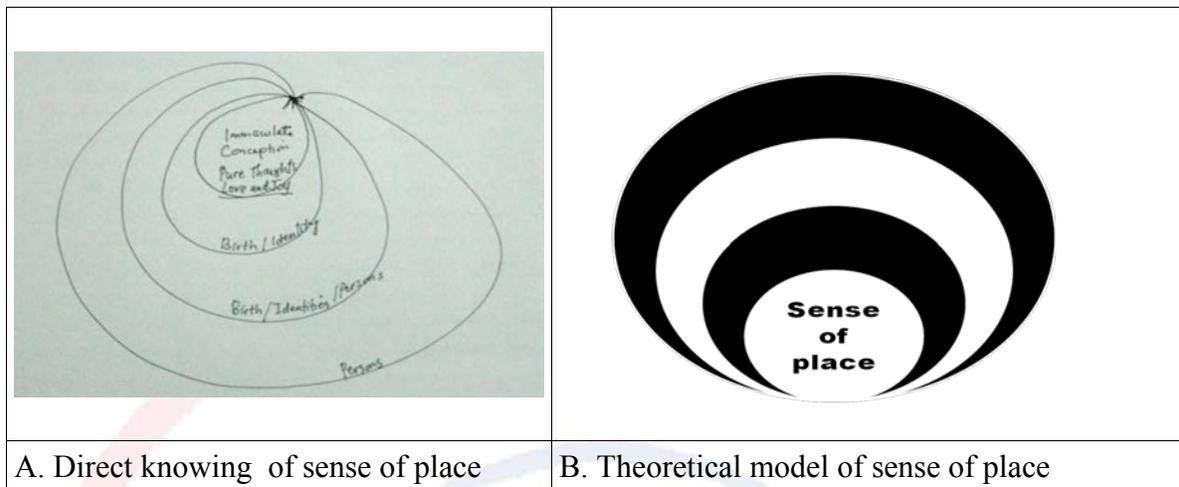


Fig 1. Theoretical model of sense of place (B) evolving from direct knowing of sense of place (A)

#### SUPPORTING THEORIES, BELIEFS AND PRINCIPLES

The theory of sense of place integrates post modern perspective with indigenous perspective. Chaos and quantum theory belong to new science that proposes new systems of thinking which resonate with indigenous holistic thinking .

Similar to chaos theory, theory of sense of place proposes conditions that can result to a new system of thinking- a shift in thinking from linear to non-linear thinking. The literature refers to this condition as the edge of chaos, (Singh and Singh 2002). Singh, H, & Singh, A. (2002, 32 ) defines edge of chaos as “a condition, not a location. It is a permeable, intermediate state through which order and disorder flow, not a finite line of demarcation. Moving to the edge of chaos creates upheaval but not dissolution. The edge is not the abyss; it is the opportunity for productive change [10]. Edge of chaos is “where innovative ideas and advancement reside” and where “ linear systems begin to fail and non-linear systems begin to dominate” (Singh, H. and A. Singh, 2002, 32).

Sense of place and edge of chaos are similar to what the Aztec people refers to as Nepantla, a “place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic tenets, and identities inherited from your family, your education, and your different cultures. It is the zone where you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it” (Anzaldua and Keating 2002, 549 cited in Chin 2006).

The unique evolution of sense of place is similar to what Reason refers to as “ a radical shift in awareness and worldview.” (2007, 40) and sense of place is similar to what Bateson refers to as “outcome of third-order learning” ( Chalton 2003, 114-15 cited in Reason 2007). Reason writes “this involves a radical shift in awareness and worldview – what Bateson describes as the shift from Learning I, in which learning is acquired from within an existing frame, to Learning II, which takes place through changing the frame (Bateson, 1972; Hawkins, 2004) – or even at times (and I write very cautiously) to Learning III, where there is a transcendence of the ego world and

an experience of deep participation in the processes of the planet.” (2007, 40). Bateson refers to “the outcome of ‘third-order learning’ [as] can be something very like enlightenment. It can reveal 'a world in which personal identity merges into all the processes of relationship in some vast ecology or aesthetic of cosmic interaction ” (Chalton 2003, 114-15 cited in Reason 2007).

Quantum perspective recognizes that Nature is integral, consisting of both mental and physical aspects, “two aspects of a rationally coherent whole” (Stapp 2007, 142). It also recognizes the role of human beings as “co-creators in partnership with a global creative power of a universe shaped in part by our conscious thoughts” (Stapp 2009, 10 ). It overturned classical physics of a mechanical universe and provided a profound conceptual change in the “conception of man from that of an isolated mechanical automaton to that of an integral participant in a non-local holistic process that gives form and meaning to the evolving universe” (Stapp n.d., 140). Similar to quantum theory, the theory of sense of place proposes a shift in understanding of the role of human beings from being passive witnesses to active participants and a shift in understanding meaning of place from having merely physical attributes to having both physical and psychological attributes.

The indigenous perspective resonates with the quantum paradigm. Similar to the indigenous perspective, the theory of sense of place views human beings within Nature rather than above Nature (Slikkerveer 1999). Likewise, it recognizes that human beings and non-human beings dwell together in Nature rather than separated from each other. Singh, H. & Singh, A, (2002) writes “ it is humankind's destiny to evolve through learning new systems [of thinking]. The systems that will survive in the future will be those that will be in harmony with nature ” (32).

In this narrative of a philosophy professor who has engaged throughout his life to the grounds of his country vividly describe the conditions that shaped his identity and his system of thinking.

When I was there, I was not even thinking of the dead body on my side. I was feeling something very peaceful. It's all quiet. For me its weird, very beautiful. So I've never forgotten it. I've never forgotten lake Tikub. I'll never forgotten Chaong. I've never forgotten the mountain near it. That's form part of me. When you see beauty in things like this, uniqueness in things like this, you don't forget. If you don't forget, that's part of you. . . Because I've walked the ground, I've known the ground so much. The grounds of this country. Not really the nation, I mean the country, the land. The very land, the very earth, the very rivers, the very grass, blades of grass. When you get to know that, you get to have an attachment to it and so it is part of my identity.

I don't need to imagine some soul, or some forces, or some priest to tell me what this all about. I'm more of like a Dumagat who does not know the pope or does not read any book or any bible. And I can still say, well I think I love this place and I recognize the peacefulness of this place. That's what makes it universal. It will not matter if I'm talking to a Dumagat or a T'boli that I've met in different places, who have never read a book because they are so illiterate, never seen a television. When we're talking about peacefulness in the uniqueness of birds, we understand each other, as part of my experience. . .

And if I die, I become part of what I've seen. It's all right. If I die and there is no heaven, it's alright. I'm part of this beautiful world. It's like the message of the Little Prince. You hear laughter all over. That was what I saw in that lake. (PJ).

## IMPLICATIONS

Sense of place can be developed by a kind of education that provide direct meaningful sensory experiences of natural ecosystems outside school. This education is referred to as nature-centered education (NCE) . Nature-centered education (NCE) is anchored to a philosophy that is based on the principle of oneness and interconnectedness of human and nature. It recognizes that nature and humanity are not two aspects of reality but integrated into one - humanity is a whole within a larger whole which we call Mother Nature. This is the challenge to the present educational system– to recognize that the separation of humanities and science in the curriculum created an illusion that humanity and Nature are separated from each other. The dismal consequence of this is a fragmented self. Integrating humanities and science through nature- centered education can restore our sense of place and consequently our sense of self, and our sense of identity.

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