Participatory Planning Pedagogy: A Children's Right to the City Initiative

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Abstract

This paper describes a Children's Right to the City initiative by the Society for Children and Youth of BC, a Canadian provincial nonprofit organization. The program and its underlying Participatory Planning Pedagogy (PPP) follow a student-led and rights-based approach that builds upon global Child Friendly Cities scholarship. The goal of the program is two fold: first, to uphold children's participation rights in local decision-making by ensuring that young people's perspectives are sought out and included in community planning initiatives and second, to provide meaningful sustainability and citizenship education through participatory planning and real-world local problem solving that promotes social change. Working in close collaboration with planning teams at the City of Vancouver, BC, Canada, the program is implemented within local public elementary schools. This paper will present the underlying theories informing the PPP curriculum, outline its implementation in practice, and discuss benefits, challenges, and future potential of this children's rights initiative.

Keywords: Participatory Planning Pedagogy; Child Friendly Cities; Children's Right to the City.

Introduction

The Society for Children and Youth of BC (SCY) is a Canadian provincial nonprofit organization advocating for children's rights as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The organization's mission is to improve the wellbeing of children and youth in the province through actualization of their rights. With more than four decades of advocacy, the current work of SCY focuses most specifically on children's participation rights. SCY's programs and services work to ensure young people's voices are included in provincial and municipal decision-making and within the justice system.

SCY's Child and Youth Friendly Communities (CYFC) projects began in the mid-1990s and build upon the global Child Friendly Communities (CFC) and Growing up in Cities (GUIC) movements of UNICEF and UNESCO. Over the past three years, the organization has been working on a Children's Right to the City initiative within the City of Vancouver to ensure that children and youth can regularly participate in community life and local governmental decision-making.

SCY has initiated and deepened collaboration between the City of Vancouver's Department of Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability, and the Vancouver School Board by delivering a school-based program that directly engages elementary students in ongoing city and park planning projects undertaken by the municipality. This child and youth engagement program delivers the Participatory Planning Pedagogy (PPP)-based curriculum for students in grades 2–7. Inspiration for this program and curriculum stems from the Growing Up Boulder (GUB) initiative in Boulder, Colorado, USA. PPP was developed based on the Great Neighbourhoods Curriculum (Derr & Kovács, 2017).

PPP connects a critical constructivist and decolonizing pedagogy with a critical planning approach called participatory planning in order to deliver environmental, sustainability, and citizenship education for social justice. PPP, as a form of critical education for social change, supports the development of young people's citizenship skills and environmental action competence (the ability, will, and knowledge necessary to take actions for sustainability) and at the same time works towards the actualization of children's participation rights. I begin this paper by introducing a significant issue regarding children's democratic education in Western society and how this negatively impacts young people's democratic participation. The goal of the Urban Explorers program and PPP curriculum described in this article is to address this concern

of limited democratic participation opportunities for children and youth. Following this introduction, I present the critical planning and education theories informing the PPP curriculum, then describe curriculum implementation in practice and highlight how activities connect to the theoretical foundations of this work. The paper ends with a discussion of the expected benefits, challenges, and future potential of upholding children's Rights to the City through this institutionalized, yet radical approach to citizenship and sustainability education.

Children's Rights and Democratic Citizenship

Western Societal Views of Children and Youth

Over the past several decades, there has been a notable paradigm shift in how Western society views children and conceptualizes childhoods (Beazley et al., 2009). This shift runs parallel to the increased support by the children's rights movements for young people's rights to civil participation and freedom of expression, and acknowledgement of their self-determination and unique competence to be active citizens (Beazley et al., 2009; Coyne & Carter, 2018). The emerging new sociology of childhood is gradually repositioning young people, both in research and in society, from objects to subjects, then participants (Beazley et al., 2009; Christensen & James, 2017).

While this paradigm shift is most notable amongst Western scholars, educators, and child-rights advocates, diverse approaches to childhood and varied conceptualizations of children in Western society remain (Hanson, 2012). Hanson groups these varied approaches into four categories that follow a continuum: the paternalistic, welfare, emancipation, and liberation views of children.

At one end, the paternalistic view considers children to be future citizens with no agency in the present (Hanson, 2012). In this view, children are highly vulnerable and lacking the adequate capacity, awareness, and judgement necessary to handle the freedoms of participation; it is the role of parents, educators, and governments to determine children's best interests (O'Neill & Zinga, 2008). In the welfare approach, children's vulnerability and need for protection continues to dominate the rights discourse (Hanson, 2012). Children, still considered to be merely future adults or citizens-in-the-making, are viewed at present to be incompetent, albeit with some level of agency. In this approach, if children are proven to be competent, a degree of participation in the form of youth voice is accepted (Aptekar & Stoecklin, 2014).

There is a notable shift within Hanson's (2012) emancipation approach that aims to balance protection, provision, and participation rights. Children continue to be viewed as vulnerable yet are also seen as competent human beings whose developing agency and autonomy necessitates participation in decisions affecting their lives (Hanson, 2012). Finally, Hanson's liberation approach at the other end of the continuum, considers children to be fully competent, independent, skilled, and capable humans who are citizens of the present. With equal rights to adults, children should have rights to full democratic participation along with equal rights to participate in the labour force; it is the responsibility of adults to prove incompetence when excluding children (Hanson). Advocates of Hanson's liberation approach claim that the incompetence argument, present within all other approaches, is in fact a breach of children's rights.

Progressive educators and child-rights scholars, including those from Child Friendly Communities and Growing Up in Cities initiatives, specifically attend to age-based discrimination and disempowerment (e.g. Hart, 2014; Malone & Hartung, 2010). Acknowledging children's capabilities, competence, and unique culture, these scholars, activists, and educators fall along the emancipation–liberation side of Hanson's continuum. However, Hanson (2012) contends that the dominant conceptual understanding of children in Western society – especially as reflected in institutional policies and practices – aligns with the welfare approach, overriding notions of children's competency and self-determination. This dominant view renders children and childhoods to be apolitical which is, in essence, a political act that justifies ongoing exclusion of young people from meaningful democratic participation (Hanson, 2012; Malone & Hartung, 2010).

Citizenship Education for Democratic Engagement

Radical democrat theorist Jürgen Habermas believed that in order to achieve deliberative democracy we cannot rely solely on spontaneous collective citizen participation – we will need to institutionalize participatory processes (Englund, 2010). Habermas suggested that alongside governments, it is the education system that can best support the development of a politically autonomous citizenry (Englund, 2010). Habermas' theory of communicative action – developed into a model of deliberative democracy – has immense pedagogical implications, where learning happens in the context of interdependent dialogic relationships (Murphy & Fleming, 2010), such

as debate, discussion, and persuasion (Englund, 2010). Democratic deliberation thus supports the development of intersubjectivity by making room for difference while leading groups to reach shared understandings and consensus (Innes & Booher, 2010; Sager, 2013). To achieve such participatory democracies, however, citizens need to develop competencies in critical thinking and deliberative discourse and “citizenship education should itself use participatory pedagogies” (Joldersma & Crick, 2010, p. 137).

Yet, there are significant concerns with current citizenship education in the Western education system. First, citizenship education tends to focus solely on adolescents and disregards younger age groups (Hart, 2014). Second, despite the availability of the highly participatory Inquiry Based Learning (IBL) approach – an excellent fit for citizenship education – this student-centred autonomy-supportive pedagogy is almost exclusively delegated to preschool rather than school settings (Hart, 2014). Third, the majority of classroom-based citizenship education targets individuals, individualizing the issue of a disengaged young citizenry despite the fact that the success of democracy lies in collective actions and participation (Biesta, 2008). Finally, the most significant issue in citizenship education is the notion that citizenship is an *outcome* achieved *after* education in it is accomplished rather than an ongoing practice. This places young people in the aforementioned problematic position of merely future citizens – a positioning that justifies dismissing young people’s actions and ideas as immature or irrelevant and young people as not yet ready for meaningful democratic participation.

With the welfare approach dominating institutional practices and policies (Hanson, 2012), Western children, despite growing up within democracies, will spend a significant portion of their young lives immersed in nondemocratic life experiences. This includes experiencing how groups lacking social and economic power (including young people themselves) are regularly excluded from genuine equal participation (Biesta, 2008). Within this real-life learning context school-based citizenship education alone cannot transform students into active and engaged citizens (Biesta, 2008).

Biesta (2008) proposes that we think of citizenship as an ongoing practice and acknowledge that any age group is already a member of society with needs and rights to participate. Civic learning accompanies rather than precedes acts of citizenship and democratic participation provides a life-long learning opportunity. In such “learning democracies” (Biesta, 2008, p. 174), society itself is the school for citizenship and it is the combined responsibility of

schools, governments, and society to ensure that acts of democratic participation can regularly be accomplished by young people during their formative years growing up. Therefore, effective citizenship education needs to move beyond the classroom with the use of participatory and community-engaged pedagogies (Biesta, 2008; Joldersma & Crick 2010).

Participatory Planning and Children's Right to the City

The Right to the City is a critical urban social movement that is a revival of Lefebvre's original 1967 attempt to address the exploitations and inequities of capitalism and its contemporary form, neoliberalism (Brenner, Marcuse, & Mayer, 2012; Harvey, 2013). Whilst the rights outlined in this movement include access to clean air, water, land, adequate housing, sanitation, mobility, education, and health care, they go beyond merely concentrating on equitable access to urban resources. As with all critical approaches, the Right to the City movement focuses on deconstructing the role of politics and power (Brenner, et al., 2012) and entails the right to collectively "change and re-invent the city," to have "power over the process of urbanization" (Harvey, 2013, p. 4).

Participatory approaches in planning, such as the Right to the City movement, and the Habermasian communicative action approach share the goal of advancing deliberative democracy, achieving "workable agreements" between diverse stakeholders (Sager, 2017, p. 93), and achieving social transformation by eliminating existing inequalities (McLaren, 2015). Participatory planning goes beyond merely informing and instead genuinely addresses and incorporates input of diverse publics, striving not only for a just process but also for just outcomes in planning (Sager, 2017).

The Growing up in Cities (GUIC) and the Child-Friendly Cities (CFC) initiatives were created with the general objective to provide opportunity for children – one of the many diverse and traditionally marginalized stakeholder groups – to participate in urban planning processes, and to guide local governments in the implementation of the principles outlined in the UNCRC (Mintzer & Cushing, 2017). CFC and GUIC initiatives thus can be considered as part of the broader Children's Right to the City movement (Whitzman, Worthington, & Mizrachi, 2010) that builds upon critical urban theory. Within this movement, acknowledging activist, educator, and planner Colin Ward's realization decades ago that "cities were being stolen from children," Hart (2014, p. 123) calls for a recognition of children's self-governing capability and contends

that social reformers knowingly eliminated children's free movement and free play in the city through the increased institutionalization and structuring of childhoods. Children's Right to the City initiatives aim to counter this trend, demanding that we give the city back to children and youth by positioning them as capable agents of change with the right and the competence to collectively reimagine and recreate their cities (Harvey, 2013).

Endorsing this view, SCY considers young people to be citizens of today with the right not only to safe and healthy physical environments but also to equal civil, political, economic, social, and cultural participation. SCY's Urban Explorer's program and PPP curriculum aims to establish Biesta's "learning democracies" (2008, p. 174), where children and youth, as citizens of the present, can regularly partake in local democratic decision-making to help shape their communities. Merging critical urban theory with a critical constructivist decolonial pedagogy, Participatory Planning Pedagogy aims to fulfill the need for deep learning, democratic social justice, and sustainability. In the subsequent section of this paper I will present the major educational theories informing the Urban Explorers program and PPP curriculum, outline how this curriculum has been implemented within local public schools, and highlight how various curriculum activities tie in with critical pedagogy and participatory planning praxis.

Participatory Planning Pedagogy

Critical Constructivism

The PPP curriculum builds on critical constructivist learning theory by embedding students in rich, authentic, real-world problem-solving contexts (Alt, 2015; Bhattacharjee, 2015). According to the constructivist epistemology, learning is essentially the construction of meaning, where an individual makes sense of their world through interactions with the physical and social environments (Buchanan, et al., 2016). Social interactions are not only the basis of learning but also enhance or augment it (Bhattacharjee, 2015).

While cognitive constructivism focuses on the individual's sense-making process, social constructivism examines the role of social and participatory processes in learning (Bhattacharjee, 2015). The cognitive constructivist Piagetian concepts of assimilation (where new knowledge is added to existing understandings) and accommodation (where new information challenges an existing framework, and requires the learner to revise that) together explain how the internal learning process is transformative for individuals (Bhattacharjee, 2015). The Zone of Proximal

Development (ZPD) central to Vygotsky's social constructivism explains how this new information necessary for transformative learning is gained: Through interactions with more advanced peers or instructors, learners can achieve a level of mastery of skills and concepts that they would not yet achieve individually (Schreiber & Valle, 2013).

Inquiry Based Learning

Inquiry Based Learning (IBL) is a constructivist student centred approach, where learners "research and explore, experiment, collaborate, make choices and use their imagination" (Buchanan et al., 2016, p. 24). IBL is a student-centred autonomy-supportive approach that promotes creativity and innovation, and consequently supports the holistic development of students to become caring and engaged citizens with the confidence, skills, and motivation necessary to address complex social and environmental challenges (Buchanan, et al., 2016).

PPP builds on both cognitive and social constructivist learning theory and follows the IBL framework's main features, namely that: (a) new knowledge builds on prior knowledge and is constructed by the learner, (b) social interactions significantly enhance learning, and (c) learning is situated, contextual, and developed best through engagement in authentic tasks (Alt, 2015; Bhattacharjee, 2015). Additionally, (d) as a critical pedagogy, PPP considers the main goal of education to be social change: a transformative process that motivates students to work towards a socially just and thus decolonized, democratic, and sustainable coexistence. These four key aspects of PPP's IBL framework will be further elaborated following the outline of the PPP curriculum implementation.

The PPP Curriculum

The PPP curriculum is delivered through the Urban Explorers participatory planning program, currently in its third pilot year. During these past three years more than 200 local public school students in grades 2–7 (age seven to 12) participated in the program, providing input for municipal planning initiatives. While the organization engages a broader age range of young people through various other participatory planning programs, this paper exclusively focuses on the school-based Urban Explorers program and PPP curriculum implementation.

Each school year municipal and school district partners are identified based on ongoing public engagement taking place for city and park planning projects. These planning projects are then incorporated into the PPP curriculum. Timelines for the planning projects are unique – some may take up to three years, while others are concluded within four to six months. Generally, student group engagement is aligned with the ongoing public engagement for each project, with slight adaptations made based on the class' availability. Examples of past planning initiatives students participated in include the Downtown Public Space strategy, major corridor plans such as the Broadway Plan, citywide and local parks master plan updates, and specific site redevelopment proposals.

The City of Vancouver engages with the public at many stages of planning projects, including the initial visioning, the goal-setting stages, as well as subsequent implementation. The planning teams at the city with which SCY collaborates have committed to embracing a participatory approach, aiming to both broaden and deepen community engagement, and ensure that input of diverse stakeholders is truly reflected in planning outcomes. To achieve this, partnering planning teams strive to engage hard-to-reach community groups at various stages of their projects and continue dialogue with community collaborators (such as SCY) as their plans or strategies are developed. While it is not in the scope of this paper to assess how each project incorporates child and youth input, an excellent example of how young people's recommendations were summarized and then incorporated can be viewed in the City of Vancouver Places for People team's *Child and Youth Centred Engagement* summary report (2018) and their recently approved *Downtown Public Space Strategy* (2020), respectively. The *Strategy's* "Vision and Values" section (p. 30) for example, directly reflects major ideas presented by Urban Explorers child participants, (see engagement report p. 19–32) and the *Strategy* presents a longer-term commitment to fulfilling Child Friendly City planning goals.

Curriculum Phases and Activities

The PPP curriculum's activities can be broken into three phases: An introductory and background phase, a student-led inquiry phase, and a final projects phase. The program is delivered by SCY facilitators over the course of approximately 12 to 16 one to one and a half-hour sessions and approximately three full-day fieldtrips. City planners and other guests, including high school and postsecondary youth mentors and urban sustainability experts are

invited to join students and deliver workshops or assist with the students' field work and projects.

The introductory phase of PPP presents students with the process of urbanization. For its first session, PPP has adapted the City on the Wall codesign activity (King & Chung, 2014) – a collaborative group drawing and storytelling activity (figure 1) introducing young people to urban growth, sprawl, and how cities transform landscapes. In the PPP adaptation the facilitator narrates the story of a settler, Robin, arriving in a land of wilderness and deciding to create a new home. During narration, students are invited to draw elements of the unfolding scenes. The narrative's adaptation includes the question "Is Robin alone here?" to which children unanimously reply "No!" then proceed to explain and draw First Nations people and their village on the site. The activity ends with a group reflection on this process of colonial urbanization, leading into a discussion of the present-day role of urban planning and planners as well as a dialogue on reconciliation and Indigenous-settler relations. In this form the activity thus presents PPP's central driving question (or ill-defined problem) representing a complex real-world issue (Krajcik & Shin, 2014): the urban sustainability challenge.

Figure 1.

Adapted City on the Wall Group Co-Design

Next, facilitators present the specific planning project for which partnering city departments seek student input. The following lessons and activities in phase one provide basic background information on community planning topics ranging from the history of colonization

to human and child rights, sustainable transportation, housing affordability, urban biodiversity, and public space planning. For example, the Timeline Stories are a compilation of events exploring the history of the land: present-day Vancouver. Students are shown images and stories of events spanning from time immemorial up to the present day. These stories are supplemented with educational documentaries of local First Nations people. The timeline history explorations intertwine Indigenous and settler immigrant stories, focusing on locally and culturally relevant events in the students' immediate community. The stories and accompanying images have also been adapted to a Timeline Card Game with which these history lessons become a play-based group activity.

During this initial introductory stage there is a strong focus on creating a safe social environment and promoting trust-based relationships (with facilitators, peers, and when possible with city planners) necessary for effective collaboration and deliberation. All sessions begin with a talking circle and many initial sessions also have theme-based ice-breaker games. The talking circle – an Indigenous tradition in which all members are on equal ground – aims to reduce power imbalances and foster trust and safety within a group. In PPP, the circle 'check-ins' shift gradually to circle-based group discussions. These group deliberations and an overarching decolonizing framework are central aspects of the program and the PPP curriculum that will be detailed in the following sections.

PPP's second or inquiry phase helps students uncover and dive deeper into their community's sustainability challenges. This phase includes school-based library research, group workshops, and guest presentations, as well as outdoor place-based field explorations, such as neighbourhood walks, site visits, and child-led city or park evaluations. As a first step a baseline assessment of students' current knowledge and understanding of local and global sustainability challenges is established with a collaborative mapping activity (figure 2). This group knowledge co-construction exercise begins by asking students to first, working individually or in pairs, list all the social and environmental problems they know of in the world and in their community, then, in small groups, to share and compile these and finally to add each issue from the compiled list to a large poster, grouping them under 'social' and/or 'environmental' challenges as well as local and global issues. This "sustainability challenges" map is then expanded with any additional issues identified by the city and the community. (These issues are identified through prior and ongoing public engagement for the select planning project.)

For the in-depth inquiry students individually select up to three local issues from the sustainability challenges map – choosing the issues they have a strong desire to address in their community. This form of issue prioritization provides further valuable input for planners, highlighting the local concerns young people deem most urgent to address.

Over the course of the following three to six sessions, students further explore their chosen sustainability challenges. This inquiry takes place both in school (or home) and through fieldtrips, and students are guided to research causes, consequences, and possible solutions to their identified concerns. Fieldtrips and guest workshops promote the community-engaged aspect of the program. For example, city planners lead parts of the city hall tour and city evaluation walk, local transit authority staff or transportation planners are invited to hold workshops on active and sustainable modes of transportation, and high-school or postsecondary youth volunteers mentor their younger peers during fieldtrips and the project-building phase.

Figure 2.

Collaborative Mapping of Local and Global Sustainability Challenges

Fieldtrips take place with cameras, and students photo-document what they consider community assets (things they like and would keep) and community needs (the social and environmental sustainability challenges). Fieldtrip destinations are identified through a group mapping of students' important places and activities, and fieldtrip routes are selected using a shared decision-making process. This place-based practice aims to deepen young people's sense of relatedness to place and people in their community by directly connecting their educational processes to the well-being and sustainability of their communities (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008).

The school-based portion of the inquiry includes guided individual or small group library-based research, during which students research the causes, consequences, and possible solutions to their chosen sustainability issues. As both the outdoor and school-based inquiry progresses the class can return to their group map of sustainability challenges for further dialogue and to add additional insights gained on needs and assets. These discussions provide an ongoing opportunity for deliberation of issues, possible solutions, and complex interconnections – all major steps in developing critical thinking.

In the third and final project phase students make recommendations for the city's specific planning initiative. Student projects communicate what young people see as priority concerns in the community and how they would like the city to address the various sustainability challenges with the given plan. Project work takes into consideration young people's diverse modes of communication and hence relies heavily on art-based methods, such as abstract design modelling and photo-voice projects. Students are presented with these two options – modelling and photo-voice – by the SCY facilitator, and the class is invited to also propose other project options. Students then choose what type of output they would like to create. While the majority of our program participants are excited to build abstract design models and many use their photo-documentation images to create photo-voice posters, other students in the past chose to create a stop-motion animation project or wrote visioning essays reimagining the city in 50–100 years.

Student project work builds on the previous inquiry phase, and projects are codeveloped with peers and supported by ongoing dialogue with youth mentors, experts, and city planners. For example, projects may be presented to peers, mentors, and community experts at various stages in their development, once again providing opportunities for discussion and debate – a process that allows for a reflective critical approach through ongoing revision and elaboration. A final showcase held at the end of the program allows students to present their ideas and recommendations as represented in their final projects to city planners and community members. (figure 3). These final projects provide the child and youth engagement input for the select planning project incorporated into the PPP curriculum.

Figure 3.

Final Community Showcase of Student Projects

While each part of the curriculum builds upon previous sessions, implementation of the three phases is not strictly linear – field explorations and school-based student inquiry (phase two) generally begin parallel to ongoing background lessons (phase one), and project work (phase three) may start while students continue their inquiry (phase two). A general overview of the curriculum implementation is presented below in figure 4.

Figure 4.

Implementation of the PPP Curriculum Activities: Phases 1–3.

Session	PPP Curriculum Activities	
	PHASE 1: INTRO/BACKGROUND	
1	• City on the Wall	
2	• Timeline Stories	
3	• Needs to Survive & Thrive Activity	
4	• Video Documentaries	
5	• Guest Presentations & Workshops	
6	• Urban Planning '101' Lessons	
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
↓		
	PHASE 2: STUDENT-LED INQUIRY	
	• Collaborative Mapping of Sustainability Challenges	
	• Important Places & Activities Mapping	
	• Neighbourhood Walk & Introduction to Photo-Documentation	
	• City Hall Tour	
	• Web-Based Research	
	• City & Park Assessment Fieldtrips	
	• Peer-to-Peer and Peer-Mentor/Expert Dialogues	
	• Student Reflections	
		PHASE 3: FINAL PROJECTS
		• Design Models
		• Photo-Voice Posters
		• Visioning Essays/Artwork
		• Stop-Motion Animation
		• Other Student-Selected Projects
		• Final Community Showcase

PPP's IBL Framework***A) Knowledge Builds on Prior Knowledge and is Constructed by the Learner***

In order to build knowledge on prior knowledge, teachers need to understand their students' existing schemas (Bhattacharjee, 2015). Effective learning begins with the study of issues students are actively trying to understand within their social–physical environments, and students' lived experiences and personal interests need to guide curriculum sequencing and framing (Joldersma & Crick, 2010). PPP achieves this with the two main mapping activities that take place in the initial stages of the inquiry phase of the curriculum.

First, the initial group mapping of social and environmental sustainability challenges allows the class to identify and take a baseline measurement of important issues that students are aware of and are possibly actively engaged in within their community. This mapping of sustainability challenges leads into the student-led inquiry, ensuring that students (and not the educator) determine the problems, challenges, and issues to investigate – which is a central aspect of the IBL framework (Buchanan et al., 2016). Similarly, the physical mapping of

important places and activities helps teachers identify their students' current lived experiences of the city, and these student interests and experiences guide fieldtrips.

A central aspect of this student-led approach is autonomy-supportive teaching, where the educator's main role is to guide and coach students along their knowledge-seeking journeys, to facilitate and mediate group discussions and activities, and to avoid a controlling attitude and simply 'giving' knowledge to students (Bhattacharjee, 2015; Schreiber & Valle, 2013). To successfully create such autonomy-supportive environments, educators need to know when to step in to lead and keep students on track, and when to step back, allowing students to self-direct and organize (Schusler, Krasny, & Decker, 2017). Despite a major misinterpretation that autonomy-supportive approaches are highly permissive and lacking structure (Hospel & Galand, 2016; Reeve & Halusic, 2009), the opposite has been shown – effective autonomy-supportive teaching is achieved when educators provide ample opportunity for students to make autonomous choices within a highly structured guiding framework (Reeve & Halusic, 2009). A trusting student–teacher relationship, opportunities for mimesis (i.e. modelling), and providing time for reflection are also key pedagogical elements in this approach (Joldersma & Crick, 2010) and are partially achieved with the regular talking circles.

PPP's school-based inquiry sessions may take place individually or in small groups, and students are asked to record their learning on an Inquiry Guide form. Yet, as the following section will outline, it is through dialogue with peers, experts, and community members that students develop a deeper critical and intersubjective understanding of issues – where knowledge is co-constructed by the learners through social interactions. Thus, while PPP acknowledges that individual growth and transformation is an important aspect of the learning process, it also exemplifies how we cannot separate individual learning from this process of group knowledge co-construction.

B) Social Interactions Enhance Learning

PPP's constructivist classroom promotes the presentation of varied understandings of a concept or phenomenon: peers, instructors, and experts with diverse lived experiences and cultural backgrounds share their perspectives to facilitate collaborative, cooperative knowledge co-construction (Bhattacharjee, 2015). For example, the initial City on the Wall and Timeline Stories, as well as other lessons (video documentaries, guest presentations) on Indigenous history and culture ensure that students learn about the local First Nation's experience of settler

colonialism. In addition to Indigenous history and culture, students examine multicultural settler experiences in their local community, gaining a broader and more critical awareness of their community's past than what traditional Eurocentric hero-stories may portray (Regan, 2010). This decolonial approach is a central aspect of PPP that is addressed further below.

The two group mapping activities not only guide inquiry but also provide opportunity for students to share and discuss their perspectives of the community's social and physical environments. This sharing of varied understandings and lived experiences (both historical and present) critically engages students with other's meaning-making processes, allowing them to recognize the validity of diverse value systems or ways of knowing (Joldersma & Crick, 2010). Consequentially students can reflect upon their own meaning-making and recognize any underlying assumptions, possibly ones presented as 'truth' within the dominant value system. This process supports students' ability "to bridge life-worlds" (Joldersma & Crick, 2010, p. 145), which is a vital skill necessary for democratic deliberation and consensus building where the aim is to reach decisions that work well for all the diverse stakeholders and to effectively manage coexistence in shared spaces (Sager, 2017).

C) Learning is Situated, Contextual and via Authentic Tasks

PPP as an IBL approach is also highly interdisciplinary. By integrating learning in the real-world context of civic engagement – namely, public participation in urban planning – tasks allow students to experience "the natural complexities of the real world" (Bhattacharjee, 2015, p. 69). Unlike in many other school-based IBL programs where class projects merely mimic real-life scenarios, the planning projects incorporated in the PPP curriculum actually *are* real-life problem solving of real-world complex phenomena. Furthermore, inquiry is driven by student's real-world experiences of their community mapped out as assets and needs.

The final phase of PPP follows project-based and problem-based pedagogies, focusing on problem solving, critical thinking, and collaboration skills through engagement with the authentic task (Brassler & Dettmers, 2017; Herman & Pinard, 2015; Krajcik & Shin, 2014) of sustainable urban planning. The most accepted notable difference between project- and problem-based learning is that the first focuses on artefact creation, whereas the latter is more concerned with the learning process; both position students in the active role of problem solvers (Brassler & Dettmers, 2017). PPP essentially combines the two, focusing on both the transformative learning process and artefact creation through problem solving.

Students' final projects allow them to explore, test, and revise ideas – and through this process restructure their basic understandings (Buchanan et al., 2016). The project-building activity requires students to collaborate and problem solve together as they create projects representing solutions to various urban sustainability challenges. Discourse once again is key: an essential part of testing ideas happens through dialogue with peers, which entails the skill to listen and also to challenge or question one's own and others' (including experts') accepted or dominant forms of knowledge. This dialogic approach, discussed above, is vital in all phases of PPP and promotes critical thinking (Alt, 2015) and intersubjectivity (Englund, 2010).

PPP immerses students in place and in community to offer place-based experiential learning opportunities. Place-based pedagogies, traditionally set in natural environments (Park, 2018), are found today in diverse rural, suburban, and urban settings (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008). Pragmatist educator John Dewey – considered a North American forefather of IBL (Herman & Pinard, 2015) – viewed the original role of place-based education to be “promotion of civic engagement and living an ethical life” (Park, 2018, p.18). At the heart of a place-based approach is the goal to develop in students care and concern for their social and physical environments and the motivation to take collective democratic actions to improve these (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008).

D) PPP's Decolonial Framework

Calderon's land-education model (2014) advances the social justice potential of place-based education. Land-education makes visible and challenges dominant settler/colonial perspectives and land relations (or land ethics) by presenting an Indigenous knowledge and understanding of place, thus decolonizing and indigenizing social and environmental education. Embracing this greater goal of decolonizing traditional schooling to achieve social transformation is what makes PPP a critical constructivist pedagogy.

With this critical angle, the purpose of education shifts from purely serving the individual to serving society (Kincheloe, 2005). In critical pedagogy there is a focus on understanding the interconnected nature of teaching, learning, knowledge production, and the role of power in knowledge validation and how these affect social injustices and inequities (McLaren, 2015; Kincheloe, 2005). As a critical pedagogy, PPP sees the main goal of education to be social transformation and to support transformative learning that inspires students to work towards a more just, sustainable, equitable, and democratic coexistence.

The education system plays a central role in either working towards the elimination of injustices or the reproduction of these (McLaren, 2005). Conservative, neoconservative, and liberal educational approaches, with a positivistic, ahistorical and apolitical stance (McLaren, 2015), are presented as value-free yet are in fact anything but that (Kopnina, 2015). On one hand mainstream environmental, sustainability, and social studies education in North America is highly anthropocentric – discriminating against nonhuman species and viewing the natural world as nothing more than an exploitable resource (Kopnina, 2015). On the other hand it presents the capitalist neoliberal growth mindset – economic growth and development as the only way to achieve sustainability and wealth accumulation as the equivalent of the ‘good life’ – as ‘real’ and ‘true’ knowledge (Van Poeck and Vandenabeele, 2012). Yet this neoliberal growth economy overwhelmingly serves the interests of power-holding elites (Kopnina, 2012) and plays a central role in reproducing global and local inequities (Jickling & Sterling, 2017). Unpacking such ideological agendas present in the education system and portrayed as neutral and objective is fundamental to critical pedagogy and the PPP curriculum.

The growth mindset – essentially a Western worldview rooted in industrial capitalism, and now enhanced by the neoliberal global economy – has become part of the hidden curriculum of schooling globally (Kopnina, 2012; Van Poeck, & Vandenabeele, 2012). Leaving it unchallenged is a failure of our educational systems, as it maintains existing social order and power imbalances and fails to meet the promise that education will create equal opportunity (McLaren, 2015). Given this context it is not at all surprising why Canadian urban Indigenous students continue to face major challenges within these educational institutions that fail to serve them. PPP aims to address this failure in education by raising an awareness, knowledge, and understanding through a decolonial approach.

PPP, as an urban environmental education with a decolonial framework, aims to be education for reconciliation and, thus, education for social change. The Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (2015) report requests that all K–12 education include curriculum that teaches the history and culture of Canada's Aboriginal people. Decades, indeed centuries, of silencing Indigenous histories and worldviews has resulted in Canadian students remaining ignorant of the true history of colonial oppression (Regan, 2010; Tupper, 2014). This is a major failure of Canadian education that allows inequalities and colonial mindsets to persevere (Tupper, 2014).

The decolonial approach is embedded into PPP activities from the initial session. The adapted City on the Wall activity leads students through their city's settler colonial history using storytelling. Ensuing discussion then unpacks and challenges – through presentation of Indigenous views and understandings – the underlying dominant value systems. The aim of the adapted City on the Wall and Timeline Stories activity is to promote critical thinking and dialogue about our true history of colonization. Both activities provide an opportunity to show students how (his)stories can silence and make invisible various groups, cultural views, value-systems, and experiences whilst privileging others. The Timeline Stories are a form of “truth-telling” for reconciliation (Regan, 2010, p. 54). They aim to “unsettle” our settler histories (Regan, 2010, p. 19) by interjecting experiences of First Nations and of people of colour into dominant Euro-centric hero stories. When these perspectives are missing from mainstream educational discourse and from general public awareness, the result leads to the ongoing ignorance, misunderstandings, prejudice, and racism prevalent within BC and across Canada (Regan, 2010; Tupper, 2014). It is however paramount that Indigenous perspectives not get absolved into a multicultural framework – a common educational practice and also a divisive political tool that hinders decolonial efforts by presenting Aboriginal history and worldviews as merely one-of-many diverse voices in Canada (St. Denis, 2011). PPP fieldtrips to, for example, an urban Indigenous garden or the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology allows students to learn about place through stories and dialogues with Indigenous elders and knowledge holders.

The Needs and Rights to Survive and Thrive activity provides an opportunity to further decolonize mainstream education: here students can debate the dominant, utilitarian, anthropocentric worldview which marginalizes nonhuman communities and views nature merely as an exploitable resource (Jickling & Wals, 2008; Kopnina, 2015). This world view is contrasted with Indigenous philosophies of “kinship ethics” where rights to survive and thrive transcend humans to include all of nature – an intuitive “moral and ethical sensibility” (Lange, 2017, p. 40) that, in my experience as program facilitator, I find is innately present in children yet ‘rationalized’ away under the dominant neoliberal mindsets we acquire as we grow.

Discussion and Conclusion

The Urban Explorers program and its Participatory Planning Pedagogy described in this paper aim to fulfill children's participatory rights through the delivery of a critical constructivist decolonial curriculum. Following Indigenous and critical constructivist epistemologies means recognizing that all existence is an outcome of relationships – that all beings are *in* and *of* relationships. This entails that what may be perceived as individual growth in education is in fact a part of social transformation. Acknowledging this important role of education and educational institutions, PPP's goal is to ensure that schools and local governments are not reproducing existing inequalities and thus maintaining an unjust social system – one that excludes children and youth and marginalizes Indigenous people and people of colour – but that these institutions work towards societal transformation.

The PPP program and curriculum positions children as capable and competent citizens of today who, along with all citizens, are on a lifelong journey, developing skills and knowledge for responsible democratic citizenship. As a Children's Right to the City initiative, PPP aims to go beyond the protection and provision rights of children, to actualize young people's participatory rights. These rights to participation include the right to be freely and visibly part of urban spaces, to autonomously play and move around the city. They also include children's right to reinvent, to shape the city by being a part of ongoing urban discourse and democratic decision-making.

Genuinely participatory approaches in planning ensure that diverse publics are engaged meaningfully and that engagement processes avoid manipulation, decoration, or tokenism – which are three forms of nonparticipatory engagement with generally detrimental outcomes (Hart, 1997). In participatory planning with any age group, participants have the choice whether or not and to what degree they wish to participate (Hart, 1997) and decision-makers take seriously and incorporate the input received, aiming for more just outcomes (Sager, 2017). Hart's Ladder of Children's Participation – adapted from Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation – presents five degrees of participation, beginning with “assigned but informed,” then “consulted and informed” (1997, p. 41), followed by three upper rungs with gradual increases in young people's decision-making power. These range from shared decision making with adults, to fully child-led projects.

Hart (1997) notes that while shared decision-making or child-directed initiatives may seem to be superior forms of participation, this is not necessarily the case. One key factor is

children's choice: young people may not wish to lead or initiate a project yet may happily participate when assigned a role or task within it. A second key feature of participatory work with children is that the extent of their power over the outcome needs to be clear from the initial stages of engagement (Hart, 1997); that is, participants must clearly understand where their input will affect decisions and by whom these decisions will be made (Swerhun & Avruskin, 2012).

In current planning practice the more commonly used *Spectrum of Public Participation* (International Association for Public Participation, IAP2, 2018) similarly presents five degrees of engagement (inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower) that significantly align with Hart's original five rungs. IAP2's core values guide the bulk of public engagement processes at the City of Vancouver. These values include a commitment that public input will be appropriately reflected in plans, that participants will receive necessary information throughout the process, and that reasoning for final decisions will be communicated to the public (IAP2, 2018).

While Hart (2014) asserts that formalized political participation limits Children's Right to the City – their authentic form of unstructured participation in urban public life and discourse – PPP takes a divergent approach. Building on Habermas' radical democratic principles, PPP aims to achieve the goal of Children's Right to the City through an institutionalized form of participation. The goal is to normalize children's democratic experiences both for children themselves and for society in general. By embedding this participatory practice within the education system, PPP can standardize an ongoing practice of young people's citizenship through a unique IBL approach achieved with real-world authentic tasks – direct engagement in community planning initiatives. With its autonomy-supportive teaching environment PPP provides a great degree of choice for students – a central feature of participatory work. This form of standardized participatory planning with children – adult initiated consultation with final decisions made by local government – may fall along the lower rungs of Hart's (1997) ladder or the IAP2 spectrum (2018). Nevertheless, such participatory practices will promote Biesta's "learning democracies" (2008, p. 174), with citizenship education taking place in society (not merely in the classroom) and through real-world acts of citizenship.

However, such a genuinely participatory democracy can only be reached if we continue to advance a reconceptualized view of childhood and of children's roles in society. An underlying assumption within PPP is that just as civic education accompanies acts of citizenship

(Biesta, 2008), so will the overall view of children as skilled, competent, and capable citizens accompany young people's acts of skilled participation in their local democracies. The PPP curriculum provides the platform and the framework on how to achieve this on a larger scale – every planning project children participate in shows planners, educators, and community members how deeply meaningful children's contributions are. One partnering municipal planner provided the following post-program feedback:

One thing that blew my mind with these children was how ... just how aware they are of all the issues, and they have values already at a young age that are really compelling ... and they *get it!* They are much more morally intelligent than most adults I know.

Despite these outlined benefits, numerous challenges exist even within democracies that aspire to be truly participatory. One is to ensure that the knowledge and insight of young people is not merely listened to but is also taken seriously by policymakers (Innes & Booher, 2010). When one group's knowledge, thoughts, and input are viewed as less valid than another's, this "substantive inequality" becomes a major obstacle in developing true intersubjectivity in democratic deliberation (Papastephanou, 2010 p. 44). This concern of devaluing or dismissing knowledge based on age, ethnicity, or class remains common in both education and planning – and young people's input traditionally has been the most invisible and least valued in Western societies where welfare approaches dominate our notion of childhood (Hanson, 2012). To Papastephanou (2010) the challenge is to move beyond merely reaching agreement with each other in dialogue: this goal of intersubjectivity must be extended with the additional goal of equal treatment of others. Ignoring the structural inequities within our society will only result in maintaining the current hypocritical democratic system (Harvey, 2013; Legacy, 2017) – one where young people's lives are vastly undemocratic (Biesta, 2008) – and this, in turn, will maintain the ongoing unjust outcomes (Baiocchi & Ganuzza, 2017). Educational and planning processes *and* outcomes must address and not reproduce existing inequities within society – failing to do so is the failure of our educational and our democratic systems.

Consequently, a major role of SCY, along with all child-rights advocacy groups, is not merely to help deliver participatory programs such as Urban Explorers and its PPP curriculum but to support ongoing and deepening collaborative work between institutions with the greatest impact on children's lives – namely municipal governments and school boards – and to ensure

that young people's ideas are acknowledged as valuable input by decision-makers within these institutions. Such a genuinely participatory democracy will accomplish what Kincheloe (2005) argued is the purpose of critical-constructivist education: it will ensure that children and youth are not merely consumers of knowledge but also part of the knowledge production process, thus regaining their right to "re-invent their city" (Harvey, 2013, p. 4). PPP aims to infuse the education system with a practice of decolonized democratic participation for children and youth. In such "learning democracies" (Biesta, 2008, p. 174) school-based education will no longer merely attempt to counter or compensate for real-life nondemocratic learning; instead it will expand real-world acts of children's democratic citizenship. Growing up with these practices ingrained in everyday culture will advance the shift towards a reconceptualized view of children as citizens, a shift that in turn will foster a more participatory democracy.

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