

Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis

ISSN: 2325-1204. Journal homepage: <https://www.iastatedigitalpress.com/jctp/>

Volume 11, Issue 3, 2022, Article 3, <https://doi.org/10.31274/jctp.12961>

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Recommended Citation

Germinaro, K. (2022). Healing through geography: A spatial-learning analysis and praxis. *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis* 11(3), Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.31274/jctp.12961>

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Healing Through Geographies: A Spatial Learning Analysis and Praxis

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Learning takes place in and across settings. In this conceptual piece, a spatial learning praxis is presented to put into conversation concepts of human geographies, critical education and learning sciences as mechanisms to facilitate healing from geographic harm and oppression. I begin by providing context for the links between oppression and trauma. I then highlight how trauma can persist for learners and explain the consequences of ongoing trauma for students of color. Building on critical pedagogy, sociocultural theories of learning, Black feminisms, Black geographies, and Indigenous methodologies, I explore how these conceptual foundations can help inform a framework for healing-centered learning. This framework is grounded in learning and identity, socio spatial relationships, and geographic oppression and opportunity. I end by showcasing the ways teaching, learning, and the design of learning environments can facilitate a deeper, more inclusive, and more sustainable understanding of spatial justice and healing. One that carefully attends to relational onto-epistemologies and connections to space, place, and land.

Keywords: Geographies | healing | Learning Pathways | race | trauma

Educational scholars often conceptualize psychological trauma as being in the past and related to community violence without recognizing the traumatic effects of constant or ongoing oppression (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019). Particularly, within critical education studies, methods and frameworks for addressing trauma tend to focus on the existence of the child or student's past trauma, experiences outside of school, or ways in which the school system is oppressive to non-dominant groups. Yet, when we think about oppression akin to trauma, we can conceptualize trauma as constant. Trauma in this paper is defined as both *racial* and *historical*. Racial trauma is a response to racism and/or racist mechanisms invoking danger or threats. Historical racial trauma is compounding violence across time and space with the intent to kill, erase or impair a specific group of people (Chioneso et al, 2020). By extension, it occurs consistently throughout the learning process, since learning is ongoing and continuous (Nasir, 2020).

Through understanding learning as a spatial praxis as well as moving toward placemaking and becoming "place having," educators and learners alike can address the systemic and institutional trauma that occurs in those spaces and places (McKittrick, 2011). Traditional geographies (McKittrick, 2006) see space as physical and static. In contrast, place is defined in this paper as iterative, socially produced, and malleable, allowing for a clearer understanding of the ways that geographies have been used to oppress others—particularly those with marginalized racial, gender, ethnic, and class identities (McKittrick, 2006). Through this human geographies framework, more specifically derived through Black geographies, one can better support spatial learning praxis and spatial liberation and healing (Annamma, 2018). Spatial learning is being proposed as place-based inquiries of time and space across alterable ecologies and geographies. By understanding trauma through a geographic lens, a spatial learning analysis highlights the ways minoritized identities are oppressed through socio-ecological systems over

time and seeks to identify intervention points for learning and healing within an ecological framework.

This paper explores the ways in which oppression of identities (e.g., race, sex, gender, class) is being theorized, the connection of oppression and trauma to geography, and the opportunities for learning and identity to play into healing. Black feminism, human development theories, Indigenous studies, sociocultural identity and learning theories, Black geographies, and multicultural education guide this paper’s theoretical framing and analysis. In addition to identifying a gap in the literature on trauma and geography—which rarely speaks to historical trauma as it relates to systemic oppression or geographic oppression over time—this paper aims to historicize the relationship between spatial oppression and trauma. Finally, through a discussion of the connections between learning, identity, and healing across time and space, this paper confronts existing modes of understanding on learning and examines how learning as a spatial praxis can facilitate healing and a deeper sense of resilience through identity restoration and repair.

How Oppression Becomes Trauma and Affects Learning

Understanding how trauma affects student learning is necessary to allow students to heal through learning. Trauma has the power to inhibit learning and shows up in different ways. Policing in schools and forms of discipline that contribute to trauma have a negative and disproportionate impact on Black and Brown students (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Although trauma-informed schooling has been integrated in many ways across different school settings and contexts, it is extremely limited in addressing socio-cultural factors that cause trauma (Cohen & Barron, 2021; Fondren et al., 2020). Keeping in mind that oppressed identities often refer to parts of an individual’s identity that are marginalized by dominant society and are both historically and geographically produced (Fondren et al., 2020) current trauma-informed approaches often overlook identities and geographies that experience spatial trauma. This allows spaces like schools and other educational settings to exist as sites of trauma or oppression. In the context of this paper, trauma is described and conceptualized as how an individual experiences violence and stress, specifically chronic stress and racism through a spatial lens. Oppression causes chronic stress as it persists over time and across space, particularly for marginalized identities (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008). Additionally, geographically specific oppression and violence often affect communities of color through the state-sanctioned policies of dispossession, harm, and maltreatment (Tate, 2008).

A geographic understanding of chronic stress allows us to conceptualize how it affects the learning of youth in schools where trauma and oppression persist. As Dorado et al. (2016) stated, “chronic stress and trauma occurring as a result of microaggressions combined with the effects of implicit and explicit bias contribute to inequity and disproportionality in suspensions, expulsions, and drop-out, and can be particularly toxic” (p. 165). This supports the notion that oppression affects an individual’s educational journey. Schools can be toxic and trauma-inducing places. To address this, we must recognize that pedagogies supporting the needs of all learners and acknowledging the connection between learning and identity can positively affect their well-being—including those experiencing trauma and stress affiliated with their oppressed identities.

For Black and Brown folks specifically, the importance of having a relationship to place and land is well documented (Elliott-Groves, 2019; Nxumalo & ross, 2019; Poe et al., 2016). With healing-centered approaches and facilitation, the opportunity to repair and restore oppressed

identities surfaces as the connecting point between learning and healing (French et al., 2019; Ginwright, 2018; Gutiérrez, 2008; Spencer et al., 1997). Furthermore, drawing on Black feminism (hooks, 1990; McKittrick, 2006), culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogies (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017), developmental studies (Spencer et al., 2020; Stevenson, 1995), Indigenous education (Bang, 2020; Barajas-Lopez & Bang, 2018; Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017) and human geographies (King, 2019; McKittrick, 2011; Summers, 2019) can provide valuable conceptualization to identify the gap for spatial learning praxis. The element of learning is pivotal to development, and learning can emphasize healing to invoke and design curriculum, pedagogy and education, and social change efforts while also elevating the bar for well-being and resilience.

Learning as a Protective Mechanism

Trauma can also be defined and explored through how an individual experiences violence, both chronic (e.g. microaggressions) and acute (e.g. car accident). Communal trauma disproportionately affects neighborhoods inhabited by communities of color (Buka et al., 2001; Kiser & Black, 2005). This geographic trauma is perpetuated through socio-ecological forces that disrupt everyday learning experiences within school. Sitler (2009) argued for the educator's goal to be one that uses a pedagogy of awareness and provides ongoing support for the needs of all learners. Therefore, both the teacher and their pedagogy serve as a piece of intervention to promote healing.

Similarly, a body of literature supports the critical approach of assessing students' experiences in school, focusing on their realities from a critical lens and examining how their race plays a role in their education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). By naming and understanding the structures in place that contribute to injustice and racism in school, students can recognize how to move towards dismantling these power structures (Ginwright, 2015). Racial coping self-efficacy can support an individual's ability to take action against racism and racist acts as they are experiencing them (Schwarzer & Renner, 2000). As a form of literacy, racial socialization increases one's efficacy in combating racial stress while also acknowledging and identifying that form of stress—ultimately to move towards problem-solving and systemic change (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019). Moving towards a space of healing from racial trauma supports the positive development of learners.

Lastly, in their discussion around the interdisciplinary nature of learning, Nasir et al. (2021) emphasized that learning is promoted, shaped, and understood as a dynamic process that considers culture, social interactions, biology, evolution, and development psychologies. Similarly, Black geographies present a unique framework that confronts the ways human and cultural geographies are socially produced and cultivated through resistance and action by Black folks who have been rendered placeless. Paying attention to how folks have been left placeless promotes the need for confronting trauma and learning how to enact spatial justice. In *Demonic Grounds*, McKittrick (2006) discussed the ways that studying and learning about these connections between identities, places and spaces, learning, and oppression can pave the way for geographies to be alterable. Operating from that understanding—one that holds the complexity of learning and the alterability of geographies—learning has the power to shift towards healing and resilience.

Extending the Work: A Rhetorical Shift

Currently, the approaches to addressing racial trauma in educational spaces briefly describe learning as part of the process, yet they do not dive deeply into the necessary elements of a learning experience for optimal learning to take place. Learning happens in and across settings. By conceptualizing healing as a learning process, this paper is calling for learning spaces to be healing sites by centering oppressed identities in the learning process. There is a breadth of research surrounding trauma-informed care and where it sits within the context of schooling. The majority of trauma-informed care work aims to suppress trauma symptoms to improve students' well-being and improve academic achievement, and a review of the existing literature identifies a symptomatic approach that does not appear to attend to racialized geographies and learning spaces as oppressive (Fondren, 2020; Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016). This symptomatic approach can prove problematic, as it does not develop the skills needed to create sustainable change and heal trauma. Thomas and Crosby (2019) introduced a review on trauma-informed schools that aims to detail the key elements and processes involved in a school becoming trauma-informed. In their review, they presented a way to disrupt the cycle of trauma to avoid re-traumatizing youth and further perpetuating their traumatic experiences.

Most of the literature has been dedicated to the safety and physical needs of students. Carmen et al. (2015) found that "ontological healing involves and represents the amelioration of the 'soul wounds,' that are left on the Other-ed subject by the persistence of systemic forces, such as institutional racism and legacies of colonial relations, which limit agency and negatively construct subjectivity" (p. 829). Similarly, Duran et al. (2008) drew connections between the psychology of liberation and healing soul wounds to combat the historical trauma of colonization and disconnections to land. Centering healing and liberation in this way can help foster a space of belief in students by pushing them in the right ways, having them understand and see their progress, and supporting cooperation and a sense of belonging or connection to place (Sitler, 2009).

To conclude, trauma-informed care has the potential to support movements in addressing trauma in school. At the same time, it has many limitations in how it further perpetuates trauma through the symptomatic, deficit-focused, and Western methods of addressing issues. These limitations largely prevent trauma-informed care from addressing the holistic narrative of understanding of why trauma started, exists, and persists for many communities of color. Furthermore, it ignores how this trauma affects the learning of youth in schools—specifically regarding racial trauma. In contrast, a narrative of healing and engagement holds potential to acknowledge and address trauma to promote healing and social justice for marginalized communities through identity, learning, pedagogy, and critical theory.

Identity Oppression Through Geography: Case for Healing-Centered Learning Spaces

Combating geographic oppression through the mechanism of spatial learning incorporates identity healing frameworks to facilitate cultural learning pathways (Nasir et al., 2020). As Shange (2019) detailed, youth are already resisting and learning how space plays a role in their educational experience—often understanding how schools as spaces are oppressing them. They navigate physical geographies of school and life regularly; learning and utilizing language about these experiences allow them to develop skill sets to facilitate and articulate their heterogeneous onto-epistemologies concerning geography.

Geography as a field provides opportunities for learning about physical space and allows youth to identify racialized geographies regarding how a place has been used as a systemic tool of oppression. Through attention to spatial relationships and oppressed identities within a space, Black geographies center on liberation and justice (Gilmore, 2007; King, 2019; Summers, 2019). By applying a Black geographies lens to the learning and development process, one can unearth the socio-ecological factors underpinning the experiences of Black and Brown folks' relationship to space and place while also identifying points of intervention where trauma has persisted with a particular space or place. For example, at a macroecological level, Pearman (2020) conducted a longitudinal study on the relationship between gentrification and urban schooling across the U.S. from 2000 through 2014. In this study, he identified the association between white gentrifiers, declining school enrollment, and divestment switched to reinvestment in a particular area. These social facts highlight the racist-classist notions of geographical harm, catering to white and wealthy families. Additionally, investment in communities of color has been thwarted through redlining and the disinvestment of money flowing towards Black and Brown communities (Hillier, 2003).

In the context of learning spaces, a spatial analysis of schools is necessary. Schools are funded by property tax dollars, and when less money is funneled into communities of color due to racist policies, schools have less money. When property taxes rise because white people move into an area, schools receive more money as a result of Black, Brown, and lower-income folks being pushed out of those areas. Urban inequality can be understood through various patterns and causes of gentrification as well as its effects on schooling in urban neighborhoods (Milner, 2012). This process inflicts place-based and geographical trauma on those being displaced. The process of gentrification “exposes how public spaces become privatized by white, middle-class interests, and the transformation of urban space demarcates the boundaries of who belongs and who does not” (Summers, 2019, p. 119). With that in mind, understanding the ways that Black and Brown folks build a sense of place, while also understanding socio spatial relationships, can shift the focus from trauma to mechanisms of healing and learning. Thus, building a sense of place in learning settings counteracts the spirit-murdering of youth in learning spaces through identity restoration (Love, 2016). A spatial learning approach and analysis gives researchers, practitioners, and educators insight into the connections between learners and ways to build toward liberation, and healing.

Healing Geographies Through Learning

The processes of learning and healing are cyclical, ongoing, and often require working outside of a binary that would support an end to the process (see Nasir et al., 2021; Chioneso et al., 2020). In other words, one does not learn or heal and then reach a point of “learned” or “healed.” Instead, these processes are iterative, and as we learn we heal. As we experience life and learning, we must further learn to heal from different circumstances and stressors. In disciplines from Indigenous methodologies to ethnic and racial studies, healing has been operationalized as a framework to combat trauma (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2019; Chioneso et al., 2020; Dell et al., 2011; Ginwright, 2018). While taken up in different ways, each of these frameworks focuses on getting to the root problem rather than taking symptomatic approaches to healing from trauma. In doing so, these frameworks help promote sustainable healing over time instead of just eradicating the symptoms being experienced by individuals.

These methods were operationalized to focus on the political nature of healing (Carmen et al., 2015; Desai, 2020; Ginwright, 2018). Needing to be healed necessitates an acknowledgment of harm taking place. Therefore, another critical focus is liberation or the freedom from perpetual trauma. This healing process therefore requires a recognition of safety—where students can learn, "reflect, grow, belong and heal, without the added tension of validating their experiences and trauma to" others (Carmen et al., 2015, p. 842)—and this may not be achievable in all contexts. The aim of ontological healing is not to erase these injuries but to "allow the student to engage in the process of critical analysis around the conditions that cause the injury" (Carmen et al., 2018, p. 829). Ginwright (2015) detailed the ways that radical healing allows youth to build communities they want to live in, providing space for transformative agency through learning. Building on Ginwright's contributions, French et al. (2019) defined radical healing as the "psychology of liberation... being able to sit in a dialectic and exist in both spaces of resisting oppression and moving toward freedom" (p. 19). Radical healing occurs while working towards reclaiming space and creating a homeplace in the context of a school that has been a site of oppression. These components of radical healing provide insight for how learning can be facilitated to invoke a psychology of liberation.

In thinking through the role of learning in the radical healing process, it is helpful to consider the components to facilitate that learning, including some of the logistics and operations for how to facilitate healing-centered learning methodologically. For example, healing centered engagement is an approach that centers on culture, spirituality, civic action, and collective healing (Ginwright, 2018). This approach humanizes trauma while also eliciting the strengths a community must combat the narrative of being defined by trauma. How healing takes place must be political, and healing is a liberatory process. For this framework to be effective, it is crucial to highlight narratives involving restoration, liberation, emancipation, positive identity formation, collective experiences, salutogenic approaches that sustain well-being. In the context of geographies, being rendered placeless is characteristic of folks furthest from educational justice. Systemic and institutional pillars of racism and control have kept cultural place-making limited to specific places; this has been carried out through racist policies and practices such as redlining, over policing, environmental racism, segregation and integration, food deserts, the war on drugs, white flight, gentrification and displacement (McKittrick, 2011). In seeking to operate from a definition of what a Black sense of place is—and what that means for youth learning through geographies—McKittrick (2011) defined a Black sense of place as "the process of materially and imaginatively situating historical and contemporary struggles against practices of domination and the difficult entanglements of racial encounter" (p. 949). Hence, the development of a sense of place resists the destruction of a sense of place and geographies as well as addresses the perpetual infliction of trauma and oppression on those who hold historically oppressed identities requiring an engagement with history for learning (Espinoza, 2009). Spatial learning promotes resistance and serves as a mode to start the process of radically healing through geography.

A Pathway Forward: Healing-Centered Learning Through Geographies

Healing allows students to engage in the process of critical inquiry into why their trauma is perpetuated, developing their understanding of themselves as they confront history in places where there has not been space for self-love or the love and care of marginalized folks (Carmen et al., 2018). The healing-centered learning framework aims to act as both a guide and

methodological approach to reframing learning environments as sites of healing. These learning environments need to foster different elements and serve a particular purpose in order to avoid perpetuating trauma or ontological violence. This builds on decolonizing place and land (Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017) while focusing on the ways the body is affected by disconnection from land and connections to place—in addition to understanding how healing those connections and relationships through a spatial learning praxis invokes the healing of place-specific racial identities. This framework promotes a focus on connections and relationships between human and cultural geographies, the complexities of learning, and the roles of developmental processes pertaining to healing and justice. Consequently, healing-centered learning environments have the power to change and desettle geographies of oppression.

Spatial Learning and Identity Development as a Liberatory Practice

Learning is a constant and cyclical process occurring across time and space. Learning has been articulated at times as a static process, yet scholars have been pushing the field of learning sciences to reconceptualize learning as being on the move and an active process (Marin et al., 2020). This section of the paper aims to detail the ways in which these scholars support and discuss learning as a social and spatial relationship process (Bang, 2020). According to various socio-cultural scholars, both literary and figurative tools can moderate learning activity (Lantolf, 2000). Socio-cultural learning theories can mediate the oppression of identities to understand how to promote the healing of identities.

Moving towards introducing the socio-cultural identity theories framework, this paper first considers the framework of cultural learning pathways (Nasir et al., 2020), which builds on the original framework presented by Bell et al. (2012). As defined by this framework, "learning pathways also result from personal or shared concerns, challenges or desires (e.g., concerning a pressing circumstance, threat, or opportunity)" (Bell et al., 2012, p. 273). For example, creating a space of racial belonging or healing in a school could be understood as a symbolic tool in a learning environment and situated as a process through which students learn, develop identities based on their healing journey, and address their trauma. Scholars in learning sciences also situate learning on the move for spatial justice and inquiry as a means of addressing geographical and sociohistorical injustices (see Bang, 2020; Gutierrez, 2008; Marin et al., 2020; Taylor, 2020). Understanding the plurality of identities in education should inherently encompass promoting identities by understanding histories, highlighting the importance of the student's cultural histories as well as their present and evolving stories, and recognizing the ways they have been pathologized in society while working towards learning. As detailed by this framework, interests and concerns are the catalysts for goal-directed learning, leading people through learning experiences while they develop new interests and concerns.

Civic Discourse and Action for Spatial Justice

Additionally, learning should center ontological development and positive identities across time and space. Lee et al. (2021) provided a significant amount of literature and synthesis on learning and engaging in civic discourse to confront public issues and social injustices while also being guided by fundamental rights. Within communities and social groups that we individually engage in, identities are negotiated, changed, and adjusted because of the variables within that context. A learner's experience with civic discourse starts early on and is shaped by socio-

cultural factors across contexts and time (Lee et al., 2021). Civic discourse can provide elements of learning and knowledge construction for spatial justice through civic action.

For example, through connecting learning and place, mobility is a means to have students tell the story of their community and its history (Taylor et al., 2018; Taylor & Hall, 2013). This method of inquiry allows youth to build a relationship with the community they live in through their movement within the community, through learning about the history of the place, and then through advocating for change. In the context of Taylor and Hall (2013), youth use biking as a mode of understanding how and why there were not adequate and safe avenues of using a bike to travel. They were able to confront and learn about the racialized narratives and unequal geographies of their community, and they engaged in civic discourse as a mode to becoming historic actors. Through this method, youth were able to engage in sociocultural learning methods of healing-centered engagement and identity development regarding place. This delineated the intersections of learning and development to support civic engagement and action through a healing and geographic framework.

Furthermore, Anderson et al. (2021) provided an exhaustive representation of the ways ethnic communities have worked towards justice—and at many points at the intersection of spatial justice—through civic action and attention to resilience and agency. Working through civic discourse and learning for spatial justice provide insight into how learning and place-based identity development can facilitate the development of a community, thus building and promoting socio spatial relationships of healing.

Learning Through Geographies

As demonstrated by the previous study featuring youth who built stories associated with places in their community, social and spatial relationships are used as a method to learn and unearth what is taking place within communities with respect to geography. Shange (2019) illuminated how place, although very physical, also includes strong elements of feeling and emotion. Concepts of space and place must include more elaborate explanations and stories associated with those feelings and emotions. Understanding places as dynamic and not static, both in physical movement as well as the beings and individuals within them, is the mechanism that allows the social production of space to be understood and explored.

For example, Woods (2007) detailed how blues artists built social and spatial relationships through music. As a method of learning within the blues community, “the truth was spoken and sung as it was shrouded by metaphors, ever changing terminology, African American vernacular English, triple entendres and misdirections” (Woods, 2007, p. 59). This method of storying through blues music allowed for the “systemic investigation and analysis of the state of the world, and provided language to discuss freedom dreams, place-making and plans” (Woods, 2007, p. 59). Blues and music holistically have served a strong role in Black communities to create stories and express resistance to place-specific oppression, while also providing learning and methods of talking about current issues in a way that strives for liberation and justice. Similarly, music provides learning opportunities to resist and story the urban landscape (Martinez, 1997). Artists can build geographies of divestment, violence, and gentrification through their music, allowing listeners the opportunity to learn how space is affecting the well-being of individuals in those areas.

Furthermore, Nxumalo and Cedillo (2017) brought into conversation Black feminist geographies and Indigenous onto-epistemologies to decenter the learner, while shifting focus to

the more-than-human relations across geographies and ecologies in environmental education. This shifts the focus to location and understanding ecologies and political geographies through justice-centered lines of inquiry work towards spatial justice and healing. Gordon et al., (2016) went into detail about critical spatial learning and the methods used to confront geographic oppression and promote knowledge-building about these topics. Analyses based on critical spatial methods are necessary (Annamma et al., 2017). Furthermore, mapping is a key methodological approach to addressing and confronting spatial histories and invoking civic discourse for learners to understand the intertwining social and spatial narratives. Music-making, storying a place, and critical spatial learning are a few methodological examples that allow for geographies and spatial relationships to be told, explored, analyzed, and developed.

Nature-Culture Relations and Environmental Justice

As learners engage in cultural learning pathways (Bell et al., 2012) pertaining to racialized geographic oppression and the stress they have experienced, they can garner knowledge to deepen understanding of the systems-level perpetuation of trauma over time, space, and the contexts their identities inhabit (Ginwright, 2018). This also invokes learning across time and place while supporting resistance to oppression through exploring and discussing civic issues. Relationships to space extend past physical space and expand to land, more-than-human animals, and ecologies (Pugh et al., 2019). McDaid and Bang (in press) discussed the ways youth learners build relationships to and with plants, providing insight into the ways they then develop modes for advocacy and social change for their more-than-human companions. This supports the larger effort to combat geographic oppression through spatial learning and justice.

As learners build relationships to beings within an environment, they are also able to support the overall justice and healing of that environment. Similarly, through centering Indigenous students' science learning and relations to spaces and places, the well-being of not just the individual but the geography that individual is in can become a component of the learning goals (Bang et al., 2020; Bang & Marin, 2015). This idea is further supported by the ways in which environmental education for Black youth can combat anti-Blackness through Indigenous and Black geographies and embodied encounters with spaces (Nxumalo & ross, 2019). As learners develop and build knowledge through social and spatial relationships, they are able to heal identities that have been oppressed. Like the learning process, social and spatial relationships are not singular or static; instead, they are regularly produced and reproduced (Germinaro, 2022). To address racialized geographic oppression, centering spatial learning and relationships as they pertain to identity promotes justice and healing across individuals and ecologies.

Pedagogical Techniques Enacting Healing

In order to prioritize healing, it is vital to situate learning as the mechanism to facilitate identity development and repair of oppressed identities. Moreover, reconceptualizing learning is a critically important intellectual and social project currently (Lee et al., 2021). Mechanisms of teaching and learning that facilitate identity repair and development of oppressed ideas are situated in civic education, culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogies, and healing-centered forms of literacy and development. When the pedogeological focus is on the restoration of an identity, learning environments can facilitate civic engagement as a protective factor against oppression and discrimination (Hope & Spencer, 2017). A field-shifting body of work supports

educators and those supporting learners in their pursuit to promote positive educational experiences (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Marin & Bang, 2015; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017). By being taught about learning how to heal, a person can use social change and justice practices to build transformative agency and autonomy—previously stripped away—and work toward their political act of healing. Everyday instances of centering healing through learning can start small and on a more individual scale, then compound into a collective emergent strategy of social change that focuses on healing (brown, 2017). Healing is a political act, and identity restoration and learning how to heal from systemic oppression are acts of resistance.

There is a clear need for teaching and learning methods that situate the culturally diverse histories and experiences of learners as space-based knowledge holders (Paris & Alim, 2017). Educational researchers must center identities and cultures by extending the physical and figurative walls of the classroom (Alim et al., 2020). A learning pathways framework is a synthetic and pluralistic approach that attends to the multi-level, longitudinal nature of how cultural processes are essential to learning (Nasir et al., 2020). Therefore, the teacher and their pedagogy serve as vital interventions to promote healing. As students and learners are sustained, they build connections with their heterogeneous onto-epistemologies, furthering their identity development. Furthermore, the pedagogical process that invokes healing must be political, must be sustained, must be cultural and historical, and must be centered on the interdependence of healing and learning as processes that are continuous and infinite in the face of persistent oppression and trauma (Carmen et al., 2015; Ginwright, 2018; Paris & Alim, 2017).

Civic discourse and reasoning present a unique learning opportunity with implications for learning and identity development. As someone's identities are experiencing systemic oppression, these stressors require adaptations—which in turn influence how young people learn to navigate their societies as well as who they are, ultimately shaping their long-term outcomes (Spencer et al., 2020). Different fields continue to intersect and inform how young people can learn and develop in their communities and across their learning pathways. Civic engagement matters for people's psychosocial development and is correlated with academic achievement, self-efficacy, transformative agency, and less negative trauma responses (Ginwright, 2018). As young people develop civic identities by learning about expectations and responding with identity-based healing, they become historical actors (Gutierrez et al., 2019). At the same time, they come to form a sense of identity within their socio-cultural context and can thus learn to identify themselves as agents of change and as citizens (Spencer et al., 2020).

Discussion & Future Directions

Operationally, there is an opportunity for researchers and educators to take a more political approach to liberation and justice by exploring human geographies and theorizing the urban landscape as both a frame to understand oppression and a unit of analysis to design for identity restoration and repair. McKittrick (2011) described the socio-ecological effects of the killing of a city through sociopolitical tactics and measures to affect the individual, thus subjecting spaces to systemic oppression and harm resulting from that exposure. Furthermore, Boggs and Boggs (1966) highlighted how spatial oppression is structural and necessitates civic learning and reasoning discourses to allow youth to understand how space can be and has been oppressive. This idea highlights how the city itself often affects intellectual, mental, and physical health while inflicting trauma. The killing of the city kills the person.

Attending to the ways that a sense of place is created through learning allows researchers to focus on how socio spatial relationships can afford and promote a sense of place for oppressed identities (Snyder et al., 2012). This form of resistance provides an understanding of the ways socio-cultural learning and identity theories can combat oppressive narratives regarding place-specific relationships and learning. Specific socio-cultural identity theories posit the undeniable link between learning and identity (Nasir, 2020) and, more specifically, cultural learning pathways (Bell et al., 2012). As a reframe, geographies of oppression can be reimagined as pathways where collective healing takes place, thus invoking resistance, transformative agency, and growth through civic learning.

Understanding geo-onto-epistemologies allows for mechanisms for learning to move past resilience and into healing, sustaining change over time. The goal of this paper is to build on the work of current scholars and shift how learning environments are designed by ensuring the necessary elements are included to address trauma through identity development. This paper also supports changing the narrative to promote learning as the mechanism to move children of color from experiencing trauma to experiencing healing across various settings through learning—in part by addressing the root causes of racialized geographical stress and trauma. Making sense of why and how students, and their healing, are shaped by the learning process helps learning environments become sites of community health, and it shifts power to students and communities to reflect on their purpose as physical and psychosocial sites of healing.

Conclusion

Spatial learning as a method to attend to geographic oppression and trauma in learning environments is healing, and it is deeply needed as a form of justice in motion. Spaces are racialized, thus the identities associated with those spaces and places are racialized. An identity associated with a racialized geography is learned, and it can cause stress or trauma that is often affiliated with that place. An identity formed through a place that facilitates social and spatial relationships could heal through a geographic frame. Combating that trauma allows for cultural learning pathways of racial identity development through the concepts of place and space. Additionally, combining a learning pathways approach with a geographic unit of analysis may be productive for continuing to theorize essential dimensions of context and spatial learning—ultimately expanding our understanding of local settings to neighborhoods, cities, and states (Nasir et al., 2020).

Human geographies, culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogies, Black and Indigenous education, sociocultural theories of learning, and Black feminisms collectively inform a method for approaching and thinking about identities that have been oppressed in the urban landscape due to place-specific discrimination and trauma (e.g., redlining, policing, white flight, gentrification, food deserts). As we strengthen our understanding of the ways that spaces have been used to oppress Black people across socio-ecological levels and concepts, we can devise a method to combat that oppression through civic reasoning and discourse learning. Learning is tied to identity development. Learning serves as a variable to be studied and as a mechanism to facilitate identity development and, ultimately, healing.

This collective framework of healing through geography and employing spatial learning praxis allows for inquiry into mechanisms of learning theory. This invites one to explore how learning can support oppressed identities, specifically racialized identities associated with place and space. Understanding socio spatial relationships enables us to theorize how learning and

place are linked as well as how socio-cultural factors facilitate learning. Bearing in mind that trauma and chronic stress inhibit learning and that place-based stressors on the body can perpetuate trauma over time, it is also true that healing can occur through learning and developmental opportunities that build transformative agency over this stress and trauma (Carmen et al., 2015). Providing an ecological, socio-cultural analysis of learning illuminates how learners heal under certain conditions and resources, and coupled with a spatial learning analysis, a path emerges that resists the status quo and pushes for justice, liberation, and sustainable healing and resilience.

Author Note

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