



The Prison Camp as Pedagogy of Place: A Research-Based Primer for Educators

Cathlin Goulding

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cathlin Goulding

Cathlin Goulding, Ed.D., is a curriculum specialist and education researcher. Her research focuses on place-based learning, public pedagogy, and the teaching of historical violence. She co-directs the YURI Education Project, which develops educational resources and experiences for cultural institutions and PK-12 students. She has written educational materials for the Fred T. Korematsu Institute, WNET Group, WETA, Third World Media, Mikva Challenge, and Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery. In addition to her work as a curriculum consultant, she teaches pre-service teachers at the City University of New York and San José State University.

Keywords Japanese American incarceration, place-based learning, social studies education, curriculum studies, public pedagogy

PLACE AS PEDAGOGY

Place-based education typically refers to curricular work in PK-12 settings that mobilizes local contexts to teach subject matter content (Smith, 2002). Science teachers bring their students to a local creek to collect water samples and investigate their neighboring ecosystems. Or social science teachers plan a field trip to a historic site to bolster a unit of study. Before visiting the site, students watch a documentary or do a short reading. During the visit, they take a guided tour and absorb key facts about buildings or key historic figures.

But place is not merely an instrument to transmit disciplinary content to students. The cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) explains places are not merely locations on a map or abstract space. Places are “endowed with value” (Tuan, 1977, p. 6) by individual subjectivi-



Pages: 52-64

Distributed under
[Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International \(CC BY-NC 4.0\)](#).

Copyright: Ownership of this article's copyright remains with the author(s), subject to the [Creative Commons license](#).

OPEN ACCESS



ASSERT

Research for Teachers in a Hurry

ties. Place is a repository of our lived experience, one in which the mind and body are intertwined. Place-based learning involves the knowledge and affective attachments provisioned by architectural arrangements and designs. As educators, we might invite into our classrooms a curriculum of place that permits an intangible, not-easily-measured, ephemeral encounter.

Valuing place as a form of pedagogy in of itself slots such approaches in the category of out-of-school learning, what theorists call public pedagogy. [Sandlin et al. \(2011\)](#) assert that educators and researchers alike should study “specific spaces or forms of pedagogies and to more clearly articulate their ‘informal pedagogical process’—that is, to examine what makes them pedagogical” (p. 359, original italics). My own research and teaching practice seeks follow this charge: I explicitly articulate the design aspects of places as pedagogical. In doing so, places of historical violence and atrocity can serve as a template for educational endeavors in and out of the classroom.

As an education researcher, I study the built-environments of historic sites and museums, documenting the pathways and provocations for the learner. At the 9/11 Memorial & Museum, where I served as a postdoctoral research fellow, I was captivated by the museum’s ramps and stairwells. The museum is almost entirely subterranean: Museum visitors are led from ground level into an underground exhibition level. As visitors make their downward movements into ground level, they also are being led on a path not unlike one that many educators construct for their students.

Thoroughfares within the museum environment are often crafted with learners in mind—and these design moves are subtle and not readily discerned. The 9/11 Museum & Memorial’s architects and exhibition designers planned pathways of descent, giving thorough attention to the fabrication, lighting, and the gradual revelation of information on these routes ([2014](#)). The first exhibition for visitors is an introductory, context-building section on the attacks on the World Trade Center on 9/11. Then, visitors move through a dark passage, walking by photographs and listening to the voices of first person witnesses to the attacks. The museum’s design team marshaled theoretical concepts from John Dewey ([Hennes, 2002](#)), imagining the museum as constituted of learning pathways. Tom [Hennes \(2014\)](#), the museum’s design head, described them as “myriad paths [taken] according to the interest, inclination, and depth which each person in the museum sought—or could tolerate” (para 1). The museum offers a slowly descending passageway to an underworld ([Hillman, 1979](#)), an experience that cultivates learners’ receptivity to loss and death.

PLACE-BASED PEDAGOGY AND THE PRISON

A fourth-generation, mixed-race Japanese American, I have long been transfixed by my mother and grandparents’ experiences in World War II-era prison camps. In 1942, my grandparents—both born in the United States—were forcibly removed from their Los Angeles home under Executive Order 9066. For the duration of the war, they were incarcerated without due process at prisons in Jerome, Arkansas and Gila River, Arizona. Some of my

**ASSERT**

Research for Teachers in a Hurry

knowledge of the camps comes from overhearing stories as a child and teenager. However, most of my understanding of their experiences was acquired after the death of my grandparents and mother. To acquire knowledge required a conjuring of the dead. It meant a reconstruction of the past through historical accounts, family lore, and precious photos. It is little surprise, then, that my research and practice on place-based pedagogy originates in swamplands and desert dioramas. Inquiry emerged from the story of a scorpion that intrigued my toddler mother in Gila River, for example, or a photo of my grandfather flatly smiling during a break from slicing potatoes for the mess hall at Jerome.

Grounded in my family's experience as Japanese Americans incarcerated in World War II-era prison camps, I study historic concentration camps and former prisons that are re-designed to engage contemporary audiences. Many of these historic prisons are places in which populations deemed security threats to the state were targeted, stripped of certain rights and obligations, forcibly removed, and sequestered.

Within political and legal theory, the kind of climate that gives rise to these prisons is called a "state of exception," a concept originally developed by Carl Schmitt (1922). In a state of exception, the normal legal order that, in liberal democracies, ensures certain rights and curbs executive authority, is suspended. Heightened security is no longer a temporary state of affairs—it has become integrated into daily life (Agamben, 2005). Within a state of exception, concentration camps and other buildings play a central role in the exclusion and containment of a targeted population.

In these places of exception, grids of barracks and cells ensure constant surveillance. Guard towers and centralized police forces intend prisoners to live in perpetual fear. Such places often are located in remote areas and are impenetrable to adjacent communities. In the years after the material structures are broken down and removed, the traces of the camps remain. Eventually, some of these former prisons are transformed for public visitation and learning. There is a vividly described body of research on prisons that become places of public learning (Ross, 2012; Walby & Piché, 2015; Welch, 2015; Wilson et al., 2017). The idea of an "exceptional" place quickly resonates with educators. Many draw connections to places they have visited or historic sites they would like to more thoroughly interrogate with their students. They see connections in the plantation-turned-historic home, parallels with indigenous boarding schools and the recent uncovering of mass graves at these schools. They are interested in the histories of the dispossessed and how it came to be that these histories do not appear in the dominant historical narratives. Studying and immersing in a place is an inroad to rehabilitate these histories.

As a classroom teacher, I spent a summer on a professional learning trip to Cambodia through University of Hawaii's East West Center. One of our visits included the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, a Cambodian high school that was converted into an interrogation center from 1976-1979 during the Pol Pot regime. One of my co-authored articles (Goulding et al., 2013) analyzes prisons in Argentina, Cambodia, and Haiti that, at one time in their existence, operated as schools and museums. The article looks at these sites as "curricular palimpsests," or the overlapping and compatible tactics of prisons, schools, and museums as sites that shape learners through the representation of violence or the enactment of it. Later,



ASSERT

Research for Teachers in a Hurry

I would return to Tuol Sleng and the broader efforts to publish the first national curriculum on the Khmer Rouge era as “pedagogies of haunting,” or the educational interventions that mediate encounters with unresolved historical violence (Goulding, 2017).

Eventually, my research (Goulding, 2017) turned towards the pedagogical work of place-making (Relph, 1976) at the Tule Lake Unit, a former Japanese American prison camp now managed by the National Park Service. Through observing visitors and conducting long-form interviews, I studied the challenge of teaching visitors—who come from a range of social locations—a complicated history of wartime hysteria and the state-sponsored incarceration of a targeted racial group, a history to which most visitors might have had no previous exposure. I found that place-based pedagogy at Tule Lake involves preserving and teaching through the remnants of the camp. To teach through place requires cultivating an observational acuity among visitors—training them to see both presence and absence in the landscape, to awaken their curiosity, and stoke the desire to look and look closely.

While the examples so far have focused on prisons that can be visited in real-life, I also have been increasingly interested in documenting virtual prisons that live online, allowing avatars to traverse simulations of existing, still-operating prisons. A conference on virtual memory at the Yale Genocide Project solidified research (Goulding, 2020) on two digital Guantánamos: Gone GITMO and The Guantánamo Bay Museum of Art and History. The Guantánamo Bay Museum of Art and History is a fake museum website premised on an imagined closure of Guantánamo in 2010. Gone GITMO is a virtual re-creation of the Guantánamo on the e-simulated reality website Second Life. As avatars, visitors can experience the prison “first hand” and view lectures from scholars in a virtual classroom. Designers of these two digital Guantánamos experimented with the very notion of place, upending conceptions of place as concrete, material, or even bound to human memory and histories.

The visceral, felt encounter between the body and space is one of the key characteristics of place-based pedagogy. The cultural geographer Edward Casey (2009) notes, “My body continually takes me into place. It is at once agent and vehicle, articulator and witness of being-in-place” (p. 48). Through embodied, perceptual experience, places can lead us to uncover hidden memories and stage the telling of testimony. Bodily engagement in place and space shape the learner. Place-based pedagogy involves the structuring of these corporeal encounters.

INCORPORATING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

The research reviewed here so far sheds some light on the design processes of educators and others who are dealing with the problem of how to translate silenced, complex, and violent events into educational experiences. Because of the innovative design and multi-modal approaches of the historic prisons and virtual simulations, studying such sites has the potential to support curriculum work in schools and imagine possibilities beyond using lecture and texts to engage young people in their nation’s past.

As a teacher educator, I talk to preservice and in-service teachers about place-based pedagogies and the possibilities of integrating place in their curriculum. With students

**ASSERT**

Research for Teachers in a Hurry

enrolled in a social studies methods course, we consider the teaching of historical violence through place. We read works like Saidiya Hartman's (2008) *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. In Hartman's work, they read a first-person account of walking through a site of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. They investigate place-based learning through the Native Land mapping project and exhibitions at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. I review research methods in studying place, including using walking methodologies (Goulding, 2019; Springgay & Truman, 2017) and studying familial archives. I tell them walking places like the prison camp is to traverse boundaries and borders. It is notice the traces of prisoners on the walls. It means reading absences and presences. It means that we open ourselves up to ghosts (Gordon, 2008).

In constructing learning experiences around place, I balance concrete learning aims with murkier, less readily-measured effects. During an educator workshop on designing walking tours, for example, I ask teachers to start to consider what a simple walk might afford: What kind of walk do you want to do with students? An art walk? Historic walk? What stops do you want to make on your walk? What observational tools will you prepare? I give educators a template (see Appendix) to help them plan a structured walk—one that will also permit open-ended responses from learners and welcome possible digressions.

When learners study a place through the lens of haunting, or examining the social traces of violence in a place (Gordon, 2008), I lead them through a citizen design process (Cooper-Hewitt, 2016). I ask learners to select a place that they believe is haunted: places that disrupt linear temporalities, "feel" unsettled, or have figures yet to respond to the violence that has transpired there. At their selected place, they observe the unseen or lesser-known social forces at work (Hamilton, 2000). Ultimately, learners create a "haunting intervention" (see Appendix) to allow invisible, repressed histories to surface. Ultimately, I am less invested in the instrumentalization of place for learning purposes, such as extracting learning aims or naming criterion for assessment. Educators might instead focus on the interactive protocols and processes that can enhance learners immersion in and connection to a place.

In addition to these more pragmatic applications, place-based pedagogies can incite new inroads for conceiving curriculum and what we mean when we say "teaching" or "learning." Educators and educator researchers sometimes position learning as an intentional, structured interaction between a teacher and learner. In *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, Gert Biesta (2015) helps us consider the idea of a curriculum for which there are no guarantees. Places permit an open-endedness, a bodily experience for which there are no set aims and specific obtainments. The research sites here capture the "risky" (Biesta, 2015) education in places of learning: a patchwork of emotions, lessons and non-lessons, haphazard observations, and thoughtful analysis. Like any worthy learning venture, real or digitally rendered prison camps offer the learner an occasion to find new modes of thinking and feeling.



ASSERT

Research for Teachers in a Hurry

Q & A WITH CATHLIN GOULDING

Question #1

Teacher's Question:

What criteria should teachers keep in mind when fostering student connections between conceptual ideas and place-based learning? Is this a general criterion, or would it be division (i.e. Gr. 1-3 / 4-6 / 7-9 /10-12) specific?

Cathlin Goulding's Response:

Teachers should emphasize that learning in place is an act of continuous discovery. It means entering familiar spaces and places and seeing them anew. Place-based learning embraces uncertainty and surprise, as the learner is never sure of what they might encounter on their thoroughfares. It means that we let go of preconceived outcomes. Learning in place often involves aimless “straying.” The German philosopher Walter Benjamin wrote of the flâneur, or the walker who unhurriedly traversed the glass-roofed Paris Arcades. This walker took pleasure not in buying material goods but in the mere act of observing others. Knowledge comes from getting lost, from endless ambling in the peopled environment. I think teachers ought to be attentive the affective realm, too, and not just about extracting content knowledge from a site. Place-based curriculum engages through our senses. When we walk in a place, we are directly exposed to the conditions of the environment, which bolsters our observational capacity. In *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, Rebecca Solnit (2001) tells us that walking through a place “is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned” (p.5). The best criteria for place-based learning is keeping all of these modes and ways of being activated.

Question #2

Teacher's Question:

How would this type of learning be applicable to the legacy of assimilation that occurred in Canada’s residential schools or the U.S.’s Indian Boarding Schools in relation to Indigenous students?

Cathlin Goulding's Response:

Giorgio Agamben’s “state of exception” is a powerful conceptual tool for educators and learners. Exceptional places are sites where extra-legal abuses are possible. They are the places where there is little oversight, where most vulnerable become killable by the state. We can draw connections across these kinds of sites, from the residential schools in Canada and the U.S. to immigrant detention centers. Through witness testimony, investigative reporting, and forensic archeology, the broader public is only now learning the extent of the harms done to Native children. These places of exception, over time, become a critical part of the truth-telling process.

**ASSERT**

Research for Teachers in a Hurry

Question #3

Teacher's Question:

If place-based learning were to be incorporated into state or provincial curricula, what concepts would you like to see specifically named and addressed in these curricula?

Cathlin Goulding's Response:

Not surprisingly, I am less interested in instrumentalizing place-based learning or standardizing learning in or about place. Place-based learning is about the encounter between each person and the environment. This kind of pedagogy should be conceived by vested persons who want to explore a relationship to a place; therefore, the aims and conditions of learning are locally-derived. The learning is uniquely driven by these persons' needs and interests. It's tough, then, for me to draw out a standard set of concepts.

Question #4

Teacher's Question:

Can you provide an exemplar of what one of these activities might look like in practical terms, whether that is a handout or a detailed explanation?

Cathlin Goulding's Response:

In this article, you can see a template I created on designing a walking tour for children and youth. The template is teacher-facing, so it is meant for educators to use as they plan a walking tour. However, teachers might want to use it with students to co-create a tour. You can also see a couple of protocols from a project that I've done on unveiling hauntings in places where historical violence has occurred. These are meant to be tools to kickstart thinking, investigation, and designing critical encounters with place.

There are many organizations that offer terrific activities for learners interacting with neighborhood locales. One of my favorites is from the Philadelphia-based organization, Monument Lab. Learners are asked to sketch a monument of their choice. They unmask the monument's history and the power relations that underlie it. The American Society of Landscape Architects offers excellent activities to observe and sketch the features of gardens, parks, and other outdoor environments.

Question #5

Teacher's Question:

Can you give me some illustrative examples from your own practice that might help clarify the pedagogical process and student learning that takes place during this type of educational experience?



ASSERT

Research for Teachers in a Hurry

Cathlin Goulding's Response:

I like to create design protocols and practical, ready-to-implement processes for educators and learners. In this article, you can see some tools that help educators construct place-based experiences for their students. In *My Walking Tour*, I offer a process to create a basic walking tour for learners. I ask teachers to establish a purpose for their walk. I give some common categories for walks—such as an art walk, historic walk, architecture walk—but I'm also confident teachers will think outside the box and tailor for their own contexts. I encourage teachers to take time to make a list of possible areas for walking tours. I emphasize that a place-based learning experience doesn't have to be complicated! It can be as simple (and as enriching) as observing a road or block around your school.

REFERENCES

- Agamben, G. (2005). *State of exception*. University of Chicago Press.
- The Architects of the National 9/11 Memorial Museum*. (2014). The New School for Public Engagement - YouTube. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6iRRmAfhYM&t=0s&list=WL&index=4>
- Biesta, G. J. (2015). *Beautiful risk of education*. Routledge.
- Casey, E. S. (2009). *Getting back into place: Toward a renewed understanding of the place-world*. Indiana University Press.
- Cooper-Hewitt. (2016). *Process Lab: Citizen design*. Retrieved from <https://www.cooperhewitt.org/channel/citizen-design/>
- Gordon, A. F. (2008). *Ghostly matters: Haunting and the sociological imagination*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Goulding, C. (2017). Living with ghosts, living otherwise. In M. J. Bellino & J. H. Williams (Eds.), *(Re) constructing memory: education, identity, and conflict* (pp. 239–268). Springer.
- Goulding, C. (2019). Walking the places of exception: The Tule Lake National Monument. *Journal of Public Pedagogies*, 4.
- Goulding, C. (2020). Teaching and learning in virtual places of exception: Gone GITMO and the Guantánamo Bay Museum of Art and History. *Mass violence and memory in the digital age*, 141–173.
- Goulding, C., Walter, M., & Friedrich, D. (2013). Pedagogy, torture, and exhibition: A curricular palimpsest. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 10(2), 158–176.
- Hamilton, M. (2000). Expanding the new literacy studies: Using photographs to explore literacy as social practice. *Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context*, 16–34.
- Hartman, S. (2008). *Lose your mother: A journey along the Atlantic slave route*. Macmillan.
- Hennes, T. (2002). Rethinking the visitor experience: Transforming obstacle into purpose. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 45, 109–121.
- Hennes, T. (2014). *Reflections on the opening of the 9/11 Memorial Museum, from the lead exhibition designer*. Retrieved from <https://blog.ted.com/reflections-on-the-opening-of-the-911-memorial-museum-from-the-lead-exhibition-designer/>
- Hillman, J. (1979). *The dream and the underworld*. Harper Perennial.
- Rolph, E. (1976). *Place and placelessness*. Pion Limited.
- Ross, J. I. (2012). Touring imprisonment: A descriptive statistical analysis of prison museums. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 4, 113–118.
- Sandlin, J. A., Malley, M. P., & Burdick, J. (2011). *Mapping the complexity of public pedagogy*.

**ASSERT**

Research for Teachers in a Hurry

- Schmitt, C. (1922). *Political theology: Four chapters on the concept of sovereignty*. University of Chicago Press.
- Smith, G. A. (2002). Place-Based education: Learning to be where we are. *Review of Educational Research*, 83(8), 338–375.
- Solnit, R. (2001). *Wanderlust: A history of walking*. Penguin.
- Springgay, S., & Truman, S. E. (2017). *Walking methodologies in a more-than-human world: Walking Lab*. Routledge.
- Tuan, Y. (1977). *Space and place: The perspective of experience*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Walby, K., & Piché, J. (2015). Making meaning out of punishment: Penitentiary, prison, jail, and lock-up museums in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 57(4), 475–502.
- Welch, M. (2015). *Escape to prison: Penal tourism and the pull of punishment*. University of California Press.
- Wilson, J. Z., Hodgkinson, S., & Piché, J. (2017). *The Palgrave handbook of prison tourism* (Walby & K., Eds.). Springer.



ASSERT
Research for Teachers in a Hurry

APPENDIX



MY WALKING TOUR



A PLANNING WORKSHEET FOR YOUR WALKING TOUR

I'M GOING TO CREATE A:

- Historical Walk
- Casual Walk
- Environmental Walk
- Art Walk
- Other: _____



PLACES FOR THE WALK:

Make a list of possible streets, neighborhoods, or sights that you might want to include in your walk:



THE WALKING ELEMENTS THAT I'LL HIGHLIGHT ARE:

Encircle 4-5 items from the list:

- pathways
- surprises
- historical facts
- questions
- services
- place names
- architecture
- plants
- people
- street art
- shapes
- buildings
- functions
- animals
- activities
- contributions
- events
- transportation
- monuments/memorials



HERE'S AN INITIAL SKETCH OF MY WALK:

Draw a set of interconnected points that reflects your walk. How do you want your students to move from point to point?

Figure 1



ASSERT
Research for Teachers in a Hurry

Name _____ Date _____ Year _____ Teacher _____

OUR WALK

A GUIDEBOOK

Develop a series of 6-7 important places to "pause" during your walking tour. These might be a site with a **history** you'd like to discuss, **features** of a building or landscape, or **art or objects** you'd like to observe.

The diagram illustrates a walking tour path with seven stops. Each stop is represented by a yellow tag labeled 'STOP 1' through 'STOP 7' connected by blue lines to a large, empty rectangular box for notes. The path starts at STOP 1, goes to STOP 2, then STOP 3, STOP 4, STOP 5, STOP 6, and finally STOP 7.

Write a few sentences explaining your choice of "pauses" on your walk.

Figure 2



ASSERT

Research for Teachers in a Hurry

SPECTRAL ANALYSIS

Now, spend some time doing a spectral analysis of your site. Consider: What's visible or on the surface? Make lists of what is **empirically observable** at your site.

Next, get your hauntologist hat on! Look at the **invisible or less-visible** people, environments, objects, and uses. Looking at the invisible requires us to look at the social institutions, discourses, and historical forces that are shaping this site.

Visible Elements	Non-Visible Elements
Participants The people who can be seen to be interacting with the site	Who is not here who has been influential at this site?
Setting The immediate physical circumstances	What settings from the past or in other contexts have influenced this site?
Artifacts The materials, objects, and accessories within the site	What artifacts, texts, objects are not present but play a role at this site?
Activities The actions performed by visitors at the site	Why does this activity seem natural? How did it come to be natural ? Reveal some of the less-than-visible ways that the site came to be as it is today.

Figure 3



ASSERT
Research for Teachers in a Hurry

#NCPH2020

Welcoming the Ghost























































NAME OF YOUR SITE	PLACE OF YOUR SITE	GHOSTS(S)																		
<p>CITIZEN DESIGN TACTICS</p> <p>Circle some of the design tactics that appeal to you the most. Feel free to insert other ideas!</p>	<table border="0"> <tr> <td> BUILDING</td> <td> PERFORMANCE</td> <td> DIALOGUE</td> <td> STATUE</td> <td> SOCIAL MEDIA</td> <td> SPELL</td> </tr> <tr> <td> WALK</td> <td> FOOD</td> <td> GARDEN</td> <td> PROTEST</td> <td> PHOTO</td> <td> CAMPAIGN</td> </tr> <tr> <td> CLASSROOM</td> <td> MUSIC</td> <td> TEXT</td> <td> FILM</td> <td> OTHER IDEA?</td> <td> OTHER IDEA?</td> </tr> </table>	 BUILDING	 PERFORMANCE	 DIALOGUE	 STATUE	 SOCIAL MEDIA	 SPELL	 WALK	 FOOD	 GARDEN	 PROTEST	 PHOTO	 CAMPAIGN	 CLASSROOM	 MUSIC	 TEXT	 FILM	 OTHER IDEA?	 OTHER IDEA?	
 BUILDING	 PERFORMANCE	 DIALOGUE	 STATUE	 SOCIAL MEDIA	 SPELL															
 WALK	 FOOD	 GARDEN	 PROTEST	 PHOTO	 CAMPAIGN															
 CLASSROOM	 MUSIC	 TEXT	 FILM	 OTHER IDEA?	 OTHER IDEA?															

Figure 4