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### Placemaking and the Child Reader: Toward a Place-Conscious Framework for Reader Response Research and Pedagogy

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**Abstract:** All children are placemakers (Chawla, 1992). While we know that a child's sense of place is linked to a sense of belonging (Brillante & Mankiw, 2015), the implications of placemaking in the lived experiences of child readers, specifically, has not been widely explored. The primary purpose of this literature review is to aid reader response researchers and educators in developing a conceptual and methodological framework that prioritizes the fundamentality of placemaking in the lives of child readers. Torracó's (2005) framework for an integrative literature review and conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) were used to select and analyze seventy-eight sources for this review. The findings suggest that within a place-conscious framework for reader response, researchers can explore (1) how child readers engage in placemaking as reader response at various developmental stages, (2) the ways texts function as both artifacts of place(s) and as vehicles for developing readers' place-consciousness, and (3) how the sociocultural contexts of reading experiences can be situated within broader place experiences. To operationalize a place-conscious framework for future reader response work that builds upon the scholarship presented in this review, the author recommends that traditional schematic representations of reader response theory be expanded or modified.

**Keywords:** *placemaking, place-based education, readers as placemakers, reader response*



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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

All children are placemakers; from birth or even before, children act on needs (for survival) and desires (for belonging) to understand the various dimensions of place. These elements include the layers of both pragmatic and sociocultural meanings ascribed to objects and locations, through embodied, multisensory phenomenal engagement with their physical environment (Chawla, 1992; Tuan, 2002). As children's autonomy and independent accessibility of immediate environments expand from the home in early childhood to larger geographic areas in middle childhood (e.g., the backyard or neighborhood), placemaking practices evolve as well (Hart, 1979; Sobel, 2005). Some theorists and educators have described placemaking as the universal developmental phenomenon of children creating their own physical spaces (e.g., fashioning a house out of sofa cushions, constructing a bush fort, exercising proprietorship over a corner of a room, etc.) (Sobel, 1993). However, Derr, Chawla, and Mintzer (2018) promoted a degree of explicit facilitation in their definition that can be read as a challenge for educators: the "participatory act of imagining and creating places with other people. It cultivates a sense of hope and possibility" (p. 2).

As a literacy educator who believes reading can change us and nurture a sense of belonging, I inquire into the following questions, assuming the primacy of placemaking in the lived experiences of children: (1) *How do reading experiences or experiences of enacting one's reader identity contribute to placemaking or a developing sense of place in childhood?* and (2) *How might placemaking nurture, challenge, and extend reader identity, agency, and response in childhood?* Although the

foundational assumptions of reader response theory are consistent with a place-conscious pedagogy that acknowledges the lived experiences of the child reader, there has been a lack of research and theory development in this area. If explored further, this rich, child-centered pedagogical landscape could expand the field's conceptualizations of reader response that often come to bear on literacy curricula and methods in school contexts.

The primary purpose of this literature review is to aid researchers and educators whose work aligns with reader response theory in developing a conceptual and methodological framework that prioritizes the fundamentality of placemaking in the lives of child readers in and beyond the school building. I established this goal at the onset of my research, and it was integral to my analysis of the literature. My expectation is *not* that the body of scholarship presented here serves as an interdependent, comprehensive vernacular for place-conscious reader response work, but that this resource will allow researchers and educators to situate their work within a broader body of scholarship while emphasizing the concepts that are most integral to their research questions or teaching philosophy.

A secondary aim of this article is to continue to expand the ways the field conceptualizes and employs *context* in reader response work in order to more fully explore transactions between readers and place as a mode of reader response. This goal emerged during my research as I worked to build connections and relationships between concepts across disciplines (i.e., literacy education, reader response, and place-based education). Although reader response's construction of "context" and place-based pedagogy's construction of "place" are

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<sup>1</sup> I acknowledge that there is a gender spectrum and that myriad pronouns exist that people can use when referring to individuals in their writing. Throughout this article I

use pronouns to refer to individuals that correspond with the pronouns that they use to refer to themselves.

theoretically compatible concepts, they represent different approaches to considering readers' interactions with their environments. My synthesis of the literature required me to reconcile these terms in a hierarchal manner, which I will discuss in the conclusion to this paper.

## Background

### Reader Response in Schools

With roots in Rosenblatt's (1978) conception of reader-driven reading, modern reader response theory was developed during the 1960s out of the theoretical and pedagogical limitations of New Criticism that dominated literary theory in the mid-twentieth century (Connell, 2000). Unlike New Criticism, which conceptualized texts as stable, self-contained aesthetic objects with inherent meanings, reader response theory acknowledged the role of the reader's lived experiences in constructing the meaning of texts. As theorized by Rosenblatt (1978), meaning is not constructed unidirectionally during a reader's engagement with a text (from text to reader), but rather reading experiences are a transaction between a *reader* and a *text* within a particular *context*. Rosenblatt proposed that every reader draws from their own unique personal histories and prior knowledge while reading, and therefore a text will take on new meaning each time it is read and with each new reader.

Another pedagogical contribution of Rosenblatt's theoretical work was that it distinguished between different purposes for reading. Readers engage in *effere*nt reading when they read to elicit information or facts from a text, while they engage in *aesthetic* reading for the experience of reading itself. Rosenblatt (1978) concluded that a reader's purpose for reading is an important factor in a text's meaning construction.

Since these foundations of modern reader-response criticism were laid, trends in reader response studies

have shifted back and forth from an emphasis on literary theory to educational inquiry "almost decade by decade" (Benton, 2009, p. 88). Literacy teachers have been challenged to examine and articulate their own theoretical perspectives, because the discipline of reader response is made up of "an extremely wide range of attitudes toward, and assumptions about, the roles of the reader, the text, and the social/cultural context shaping the transaction between reader and text" (Beach, 1993, p. 2) that are often inconsistent with the methods of New Criticism.

Additionally, Eppley (2015) and Eppley and Shannon (2017) argued that these observable shifts in literacy instruction are symptomatic of a market fundamentalist perspective of education embodied by the current standardization-era education policies. Rather than enabling literacy classrooms to prepare students to take part in their communities, both large and small, as invested and engaged citizens who experience both an individual and communal sense of belonging, current educational policies promote an individualistic mindset that defines success primarily in economic terms and neglects ways of knowing and responding to texts beyond prescribed cognitive processes (Noddings, 1992; Orr, 2004). Agreeing with this perspective, Gilbert (2014) concluded that "to subvert this reality, teachers must practice subterfuge by foregrounding Personal Standards as the primary drivers of instruction" (p. 27).

By the time Richard Beach published *A Teacher's Introduction to Reader-Response Theories* in 1993, reader response theories had already begun to take root in educational discourse, not only at the broader policy level, but in terms of what constitutes good practice (Benton, 2009). Teachers were encouraged to use trade books to teach reading strategies within authentic reading contexts (Tunnell & Jacobs, 1989), integrate multimodal

methods of personally responding to texts (Probst, 1994), create early literacy learning environments that mimic optimal home environments (Holdaway, 1982), devote instructional time to independent reading (Sanden, 2012), and provide explicit instruction in developing readerly habits (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). More recently, iterations of reader response theory in literacy classrooms have afforded educators the pedagogical space to integrate social justice-oriented methodologies and philosophical convictions, such as critical literacy (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004), culturally-sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), and trauma-informed teaching (Crosby, 2015). Although reader response theory has had a significant, reader-centric influence on literacy instruction over the last several decades, the trajectory of state and federal education policy—most notably, the fruition of the corporate-supported Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and accompanying high-stakes assessments—has brought about a paradigmatic resurgence of New Criticism rhetoric to PK-12 classrooms.

Constructing exclusionary conceptualizations of what it means and looks like to be a reader, maintaining a limited scope of the purposes of reading, and promoting a narrow description of response, the Common Core’s emphasis on “close reading” fundamentally requires readers to ignore their lived experiences and reader identity narratives in order to take part in “an exercise in understanding text independent of prior knowledge” (Eppley, 2015, p. 209).

### The Timeliness of Place-Conscious Pedagogy

Among the philosophical alternatives to the current push for standardization and privatization in educational policy in the United States is the movement for *place-based*, or *place-conscious education*. Although it is often erroneously conflated

with environmental education, place-conscious pedagogies assume that individual and collective identities are complexly tied to the perceptual, sociological, ideological, political, and ecological dimensions of the local places we dwell (Greenwood, formerly Gruenewald, 2003). Seamon (2014) described place as “any environmental locus in and through which individual or group actions, experiences, intentions, and meanings are drawn together spatially” (p. 11). Whereas *space* is often regarded as location in the abstract that exists outside socioculturally-ascribed meanings, *place* is theorized as a physical environment in which boundaries are defined by “worlds of meaning and experience” (Cresswell, 2004, p. 11).

Because all lived experiences are made meaningful in our immediate, sensorial environments, local thinking, rather than precluding participation in a global society, is actually a site of it (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Vanclay, 2008). Therefore, the loss of vernacular knowledge in the push for standardized, place-generic curricula is detrimental to children’s sense of belonging and wellbeing. Altman, Stires, and Weseen (2015) pressed educators to see the urgency of this dilemma and proposed that a connection to place should be seen as a teachers’ and students’ rights issue. In other words, literacy instruction that fails to nurture children’s developing place identity risks more than irrelevancy. Place-conscious pedagogy “concerns the critical dimension of consciousness in literacy classrooms that positions children as active agents who transform social, material, and ecological places” (Hall, Cremin, Comber, & Moll, 2013, p. 415).

Because our experiences are so integrally rooted in place, place-conscious pedagogy must be, to some degree, explicit (Chawla, 1992). Place-conscious educators view children’s experiences of place as,

**“...literacy instruction that fails to nurture children’s developing place identity risks more than irrelevancy.”**

not only legitimate, but central to the classroom curriculum. Brillante and Mankiw (2015) have concluded, “A developing sense of place is linked to a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging contributes to children’s overall social and emotional development and is an essential aspect of school readiness” (n. p.). Additionally, a positive *sense of place* that is developed in childhood—the awareness of and appreciation for a place’s distinctive qualities (Ryden, 1993)—influences people’s affection for and the ways in which they engage with the places they dwell in into adulthood (Sobel, 1993). Exploring the interdependency of developing a sense of place and the role of story, both those created through direct experience and the narratives acquired through literary experiences, has important implications for formal literacy instruction, particularly formal literacy instruction that seeks to validate children’s authentic, rooted responses to texts (Findlay, 2008; Lane-Zucker, 2005) and nurture a sense of belonging through a place-conscious culture of reading.

### Methods

Soja (2011) pointed out that over the last several decades, “attention to the spatial aspects of human life and social relations have spread in unprecedented ways into nearly every academic discourse” (p. ix). Although several researchers have contributed valuable reviews of scholarship related to children and theories of place (Elfer, 2011; Morgan, 2010), this work does not look specifically at the *child as reader*. This literature review specifically brings together scholarship that engages place and place identity in childhood as it intersects with the components of reader response theory, albeit to varying degrees of explicitness, from three broad academic fields: literacy education, children’s literature, and place-based education.

### Literature Identification

The selection of materials for this review was guided by Torroco’s (2005) recommendations for carrying out an integrative literature review of “emerging topics” (p. 357). I used academic search engines specific to the field of education, several interdisciplinary academic search engines, and academic library catalogues to identify materials for potential inclusions in this review. With my research questions as a guide, I combined numerous variations of the search terms *literacy*, *readers*, *text*, *reading*, *reader response*, *reader identity*, and *literature*, with the terms *place*, *environment*, *sense of place*, *materiality*, *place identity*, *landscapes*, *place-based education*, *place-consciousness*, *theories of place*, and *place pedagogy*. My search was narrowed to scholarship specifically concerned with children aged fourteen or younger (Bergen & Fromberg, 2010) and those that discussed research methods or pedagogy with implications for school-aged children more generally. Furthermore, the foundational tenets and methods of both place-based education and reader response pedagogy most commonly employed today were established in the early 1990s, so I also narrowed my search to materials published from 1990 onward. I reviewed material abstracts and summaries, and included those that were within the scope of this project in the review.

Although several articles and books about place-based education (Bai, Elza, Kovacs, & Romanycia, 2010; Payne, 2010; Sobel, 1993, 1998, 2005; Wason-Ellam, 2010) included explorations of the relationship between children’s reading experiences and developing affection for place, the vast majority of materials identified were from the fields of literacy education and reader response. Therefore, I conducted another round of database searches using expanded inclusion criteria that included materials that discussed children’s aesthetic activities more broadly and their relationship to the development of

place-consciousness. Several more materials were added to the review during this round, including Chawla (1992) and Unt (2009). As a result of these database searches, seventy-eight peer-reviewed materials representative of several different disciplines were identified for review, including journal articles, books and book chapters, doctoral dissertations, and conference papers.

### Analysis

The first phase of analysis was to determine a guiding theory for my synthesis (Torraco, 2005). Based on the purpose of this review, reader response theory served as the structure for my analysis. Although the literature included in this review approaches the intersections of reader experience/identity and place experience/identity from a wide variety of theoretical perspectives and methodologies, I organized my materials into the three main components of reader response theory—readers, texts, and contexts— by analyzing material abstracts and summaries to determine which reader response component was being foregrounded or emphasized. During this preliminary analysis, I was able to further qualify the themes emerging in each of these three areas. The resulting three main themes of my analysis and the number of materials reviewed in each are (1) *Young Readers as Placemakers*-23, (2) *The Rootedness and Rootability of Children’s Texts*-39, and (3) *Context within Broader Phenomenal Landscapes*-16.

Benton (2009) pointed out that the breadth of studies that have come out of the basic assumptions of reader response theory has been tremendous, each foregrounding and backgrounding the three components (reader, text, context) to varying degrees and applying a wide range of theoretical lenses, emphases, and conceptualizations. For this reason, it was especially important to develop subthemes that would adequately highlight the variety of conceptual and methodological

approaches to exploring the intersection of reader response and place represented in these sources. Therefore, I conducted a second round of analysis using conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), an inductive approach, to further delineate the three main themes into subthemes representative of these nuances within the literature. This method of analysis allowed me to pursue my research questions while also organizing the review in a way that would serve its intended purpose: to aid educators and researchers in developing a place-conscious conceptual and methodological framework for reader response research and pedagogy.

### Limitations

This review has several limitations that must be regarded. First, I have chosen to omit an explicit discussion of the implications of digital texts to this work. Although many of the materials synthesized conceptualize “text” from a New Literacy Studies perspective (Street, 2003) in which digital forms of communication are validated as texts, I do not attempt to differentiate readers’ engagement with these various multimodal formats of texts from their engagement with more traditional conceptualizations of text like books. As theory is further developed in this area of reader response, this framework may need to be expanded.

Second, the literature used in this review was limited to academic database searches. Therefore, potentially important primary sources are not represented here. Websites, blogs, newsletters, and curriculum guides created by teachers, parents, educational non-profits and other stakeholders may provide additional qualitative data that could be explored in future research.

Finally, at the beginning of this paper, I introduced the theoretical notion that all children engage in placemaking to both survive in their environments

and realize desires. The aspect of placemaking inherent in my research questions is children's manipulation of place(s) to pursue desires and engage in aesthetic experiences. Consequently, the scholarship included in this review largely represents places and childhoods that assume children's basic needs for survival and well-being have been met, that they have access to texts, and that they have the luxury of recreational reading time. Therefore, it is critical that this review be read with this limitation in mind so that we do not unintentionally diminish the experiences and voices of child readers whose places and childhoods would not be characterized from such a position of privilege. Such children have been absent from the research base, and might provide a very different portrait of place than do the more affluent children studied to this point.

### Review of Literature

#### Young Readers as Placemakers

For a place-conscious educator, reader response's most useful quality as a theory and methodology is its validation of readers' agency in constructing texts' meaning. Interestingly, though, reader response research studying real readers has overwhelmingly explored the cognitive meaning making processes that take place when a reader reads, thus minimizing the multimodal, multisensory dimensions of experience characteristic of place theory. The scholarship included in this section, work foregrounding the experiences of actual child readers, integrates these two emphases by working from a developmental understanding of how children, at various stages, engage in placemaking.

#### Studying readers as placemakers in early childhood.

Studying reader response in early

childhood, defined here as birth until around age eight (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020), presents unique challenges because children have often not yet mastered the conventions of oral and/or written language at this developmental stage. However, many aspects of their meaning-making processes can be observed. In early childhood, readers' autonomy as placemakers, their independent geographic accessibility, is usually limited to small spaces in the home environment like a bedroom or a corner of a communal living space (Chawla, 1992). Having proprietorship over small spaces has consequences for young readers as placemakers, because early childhood is a critical time for place identity development and attachment (Green, 2013; Rainbird & Rowsell, 2011) when children seek out places associated with positive feelings (Langhout, 2003) that are characterized by

**“Independent geographic accessibility increases at the same time that reading independence often develops.”**

“security, social affiliation, and creative expression and exploration” (Chawla, 1992, p. 68). To the extent that adults nurture, tolerate, or plan for this kind of reader autonomy and accessibility, Green (2013)

has observed that even preschool-aged readers can begin to identify or create favorite places to read that embody these desired place characteristics.

Before they have mastered oral language, we can observe readers' responses to texts oscillating between inner cognitive processes and outer embodied engagement with the immediate physical environment. Throughout early childhood, children test the permeability of real and fictional landscapes in observable ways (Fischer, 2017b; Green, 2013; Spitz, 2006; Sharon & Woolley, 2004), such as matching real-life objects to objects in a picturebook illustration or scribbling on characters in a picturebook while talking to them. Because children's identities are not compartmentalized in early childhood, these responses are often

transmedial and transmodal as they extend beyond reading experiences to permeate interactions with media, imaginative play, drawing, etc. (Spitz, 2006; Spencer, 2003; Nilsson, 2009; Wohlwend, 2011). Multisensory engagement with story across all of these various aesthetic activities can nurture place attachment, so gatekeepers to young children's experiences with texts need to recognize these placemaking behaviors as valid modes of reader response in early childhood.

**Studying readers as placemakers in middle childhood.** Perhaps the developmental stage most warranting an exploration of the intersections between placemaking and reader response is middle childhood, defined here as approximately the ages of eight to fourteen (Bergen & Fromberg, 2010). Independent geographic accessibility increases at the same time that reading independence often develops. This expansion of possibilities means readers are exposed to a myriad of new ideas, concepts, perspectives, and phenomenological experiences of place at once.

Here we see the importance of proprietorship carrying on from early childhood. Throughout middle childhood, children participate in a phenomenon of constructing their own private places, such as forts and clubhouses as caregivers grant them more freedom and autonomy (Sobel, 1993). The developmental purposes of placemaking in middle childhood parallel intrinsic motivations to read and become a reader: to practice new social roles, further develop and exercise personal aesthetic tastes, take over or extend existing social systems, and explore realms of hopeful possibility for the real world (Bergen & Fromberg, 2009; Ellis, 2005; Leander & Boldt, 2012).

It is important for us to see beyond readers' cognitive processes to observable placemaking behaviors, because Unt (2009) concludes that aesthetic experiences like reading can incite

children's manipulation of their physical environment, add narrative layers of meaning to objects and places, and contribute to a positive sense of place. When children engage in placemaking as a form of reader response, it can promote readers' affection for both the text and the place the reading experience occurred. Through cognitive *immersion*, readers have the sense of being transported to and immersed in a literary landscape while reading (Blackford, 2004; Esrock, 1994; Ryan, 2001). These aesthetic experiences can leave readers with lasting memories similar to visiting "real" places (Unt, 2009). Response can also be tied to artifacts, such as when readers often collect or create physical objects, "souvenirs" (Cassidy, 2008; Tatar, 2009) reminiscent of literary experiences (Goodenough, 2003; Nilsson, 2009; Tatar, 2009). In my own research building from Unt's (2009) work, I explored placemaking as reader response in middle childhood explicitly and concluded that these behaviors can be categorized as *Transportation* (being cognitively immersed in a literary landscape while reading), *Repositioning* (seeing oneself differently as a result of interacting with a text), *Nesting* (aesthetically manipulating the environment to create a place to read), and *Layering* (imaginatively manifesting a literary landscape in the immediate physical environment) (Fischer, 2017a). All of these placemaking behaviors can begin even before a reader starts reading a text and can continue long after as readers recollect past reading experiences.

In summary, place-conscious reader response research and pedagogy concerned with the meaning-making processes of real readers must take children's development as readers and placemakers into consideration. As is evident from the literature reviewed in this section, these phenomena often parallel one another in observable ways. Readers, even those who have not mastered conventional language, engage in placemaking as a way of

responding to texts. These behaviors are characterized by multimodality and multisensory engagement, and as with much of children's narrative play, they extend beyond the boundaries of specific reader-text transactions.

This body of scholarship provides us with direct insights into my first research question, how reading experiences or experiences of enacting one's reader identity contribute to placemaking or a developing sense of place in childhood. However, there is less research that can help explain how placemaking might nurture, challenge, and extend reader identity, agency, and response in childhood. Filling in this gap is particularly important for work with children who do not see themselves as readers.

Through this framework, researchers can begin to ask important questions, such as *How does providing children with opportunities for placemaking as a mode of reader response in classrooms influence readers with low self-efficacy?* This area deserves further attention in the future.

**“Ecocriticism has exercised a wide range of approaches and perspectives in exploring the relationship between children’s texts and place.”**

### **The Rootedness and Rootability of Children’s Texts**

Almost half of the materials reviewed in this study foregrounded or analyzed the role of the text in the meaning-making processes. Although a place-conscious theoretical perspective privileges the experiences of real children/readers, texts in and of themselves are also worth examination. Engagement with literature can be young children's very first exposure to the world beyond their immediate lived experiences (Kiefer & Tyson, 2018), and the literature discussed above suggests that child readers sometimes take up these narratives in their placemaking. Therefore, exploring their implied messages can shed light on, and sometimes challenge, a text's rootedness, the ontological and

epistemological assumptions it represents as an artifact constructed within a particular place (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010), how texts work as aesthetic objects that promote a sense of place, and how texts can function as historical records of readers' engagement with their immediate physical environment. This area of place-conscious reader response work is not only relevant for scholars engaged in literary criticism, but for place-conscious educators, as well, as they select texts for instruction and aim to validate the material aesthetics of children's reading experiences.

### **Highlighting texts’ ideological assumptions about place(s).**

Reader response criticism assumes that texts, having been created in particular milieu, can be studied as sociocultural artifacts imbued with

ideological assumptions about the various dimensions of place(s) and the relationships between people and place. By critiquing, or “reading against” (West, 1994), texts through a place-conscious lens, critics can highlight these assumptions, draw

conclusions about cultural values, and weigh their potential influence on the responses of theoretical readers.

Although all literary criticism can be helpful in peoples' efforts to understand the underlying ideologies at work in their place(s), the most explicitly place-conscious area of literary criticism is *ecocriticism*, which examines the relationship between literature and the environment (Dobrin & Kidd, 2004). Ecocriticism has exercised a wide range of approaches and perspectives in exploring the relationship between children's texts and place, but has a rich history overall of challenging an anthropocentric worldview and promoting an environmental ethic through critically examining what ideals and attitudes texts teach children about

nature. Through an ecocritical lens, imaginative texts can be explored by considering topics such as an author's own place identity or environmental imagination (Copeland, 2004; DuPlessis, 2004; Slater, 2015; Wake, 2004), comparing depictions of nature across children's media and over time (Holton & Rogers, 2004), reading nature as metaphor (Noda, 2018), and discussing the effect that anthropomorphism has on the message in both imaginative literature and narrative nonfiction (Harju, 2006).

The history of ecocriticism is largely grounded in conservationist, environmental ideologies, but broader conceptualizations of "place" have also been a subject of literary criticism. Children's texts are problematic representations of the lived place experiences of actual children, but studying the ways children's geographies are depicted in literature can highlight the spatial politics of people's own places. This approach has also allowed for the critique of idealized, exclusionary constructions of those childhood place experiences, such as pastoral biases or power dynamics between child and adult characters (Alston, 2007; Bavidge, 2006; Doughty & Thompson, 2011).

The materials represented in this subtheme largely represent an approach to literary criticism built upon adult-oriented definitions of, perceptions of, and engagements with the multiple dimensions of place. This work is very important in bringing to light the qualities that people take for granted in their places, as well as the place narratives people construct for their children. It can even contribute to adults' agency as placemakers as they work toward constructing a sense of place in their classrooms and communities. However, literary criticism has not yet considered texts through the theoretical lens of the child reader as placemaker, an important distinction to make and perhaps an area of criticism that can continue to be developed as

reading educators gain more insights into children's placemaking.

**Exploring writer's craft and the construction of literary landscapes.** What qualities of texts make them evocative and compelling fodder for children's placemaking? In addition to reading against texts as ideological representations of places, literary criticism can also be used to explore the aesthetic qualities of texts as imaginative, self-contained literary landscapes made up of geographical, cultural, and socio-political concerns similar to those that affect material territories (Carroll, 2011). To the degree that authors are able to evoke a sense of place through their writing, a text's literary landscape can heighten child readers' sensitivity toward place in more general terms, introducing them to the idea that places can change/be changed, that places can provide pleasure and intrigue, and that places connect to who they are.

Because different genres of children's texts engage readers in place in different ways, some emphasizing differences between real and fictional landscapes and others emphasizing similarities, an author's appropriation of genre conventions, particularly with regard to world-building in imaginative literature, is an important facet of this work. The genre of fantasy, for example, makes an appeal to readers as placemakers to contrast storyworlds with their own place, often demonstrating that although they are rooted in reality to support believability, they differ drastically with regard to power structures, geographic accessibility, and the function of objects and spaces (Dewan, 2010; Hudson, 2018). On the other hand, the conventions of world-building in realistic fiction emphasize sameness between the reader's world and literary landscapes (Kiefer & Tyson, 2018), but as works of imaginative literature, a stories' representation of realistic places (or even real places as in the case of regional literature) still requires a reader to contrast places. Slater (2015) argued that a translocal lens for

interpreting realistic fiction provides one way to develop a robust and dynamic examination of place in literature, as it “requires us to reorient our concept of scale, not as a system of bounded, discrete, and hierarchical units, but as a mutually constitutive network where local place forms through both everyday, low-range practices *and* global exchanges” (p. 5).

Illustrations, maps, and other visual representations of real and/or imagined places in children’s texts can contribute to a reader’s spatial understanding of place and appeal to their affect. For instance, the media an illustrator uses can evoke the mood or atmosphere of a text’s setting. An illustrator’s use of artistic principles, such as proportion, line, color, perspective and shape also emphasize particular nuanced details about setting and offer readers a particular point-of-view or way of seeing place (Kiefer & Tyson, 2018; Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). Additionally, the inclusion of familiar or recognizable objects within illustrations, though often taken for granted, can serve as “transitional objects,” especially for very young readers, that connect their inner and outer worlds (Jones, 1996; Wilkie-Stibbs, 2005). Again, we see an opportunity here for young readers’ exploration of these aesthetic elements of text to invite comparison between real and fictional landscapes. As discussed above, these prompts can feed into children’s fantasies that are bound up in their aesthetic engagement with their immediate environments (Spitz, 2006).

Through literary criticism, maps can be explored for both content and implied function in the reading experience (e.g., aesthetic, ideological, or pedagogical) (Pavlik & Bird, 2017). As a tool fundamentally intended to support autonomy in a place, literary maps appeal to the theoretical reader as placemaker. A unique and interesting approach to immersing readers in the phenomenological experiences of characters in place, some

picturebooks combine the form and function of traditional illustrations and maps to provide readers with a “mobile cartography” of literary landscapes by focusing the plot, told through both text and illustration, on a character walking through a place with a particular point-of-view (Cantavella, 2017). All of these visual components of texts model a range of vantage points or perspectives in which readers could situate themselves within places.

Several studies of postmodern literary devices in children’s picturebooks have taken the study of literary landscapes in a compelling direction for place-conscious reader response theorists. Postmodern literary devices are intended to blur readers’ perception of the boundaries between literary landscapes and the “real” world. They encourage readers to see possibilities in their places. For example, metafictional texts, or intrusion fantasies, promote a distinct way for readers to see their own immediate physical environment through a lens of story. By addressing readers directly or referencing the “real world,” these stories invite children to immerse themselves in a pleasurable fictional landscape while suggesting that the setting of the book can penetrate readers’ real world lived experiences in place (Bhadury, 2013; Nelson, 2006). In metafictional texts, illustrators can also break the fourth wall by manipulating borders and perspective to play with the permeability between two fictional worlds (Mackey, 2003) or to suggest that “fictional characters have agency beyond what the original author or illustrator may have intended” (Nelson, 2006, p. 224).

Peritextual features of texts, such as the dust jacket, book cover, endpapers, copyright page, dedication page, title page, author biography, etc., can also create the perception of a permeable literary landscape. Fictional or metafictional peritexts, specifically, encourage young readers’ imaginations as placemakers. Magnusson (2012) notes,

Though often overlooked in textual analysis, paratexts structure a work's presentation and reception. Gérard Genette describes the paratext as a "threshold" or "fringe of a printed text" which controls the reading experience: a "zone not only of transition" between text and off-text, "but also of transaction" between text and audience. (p. 87)

In the field of place-based education, literary analysis has often stopped short of exploring these post-modern literary devices as criteria for inclusion in curricula even though they support the developmental needs of child readers as placemakers.

**Investigating texts' place-conscious curricular potential.** Another subtheme of research highlighting the role of the text in the meaning-making process is concerned with analyzing a text for its potential to meet *curricular goals* while nurturing students' sense of place. This scholarship employs a rhetoric of reader as student and primarily focuses on the use of texts in formal learning settings.

Text selection is a key component in this literature, and the same evaluative criteria are often used for choosing both fiction and nonfiction texts. To begin, curricular goals must be articulated, distinguishing between whether the intended goal or outcome for children's engagement with a text is to nurture readers' affection for a particular place or for a type of place (e.g., forests, city neighborhoods, etc.) or to promote place-conscious habits of mind and perspectives more broadly (Sobel, 1998; Wason-Ellam, 2010; Wells & Zeece, 2007). More often than not, a text's topic is used as the main criterion for

text selection, but there are other important characteristics that should be considered, such as whether or not the text positions readers as having agency (Bigger & Webb, 2010) and the ease with which the text might be integrated with other content areas (Murphey, 2002; Wells & Zeece, 2007).

The underlying assumption in the aforementioned scholarship on text selection is that the content or topic of a text elicits a somewhat predictable response in readers. Cognitive reasoning is emphasized as the primary way readers make sense of texts and engage in placemaking. However, because all literature is experienced in the immediate, local environment, imaginative literature that evokes themes of "secrecy, intrigue,

and adventure" (Sobel, 1998, p. 92) should be valued as highly as literature with an explicit environmental or place-conscious theme during text selection (Fischer, 2015; Payne, 2010).

The instructional activities designed to accompany place-conscious texts in school

settings often focus on cognitive meaning-making processes, such as inviting readers to connect text content to real world places or studying authors' hometowns (Cahalan, 2008). These approaches to analyzing and using texts are effective at developing readers' interest in and knowledge of place, but other methods described by Burke and Cutter-Mackenzie (2010), Heard and McDonough (2009), Payne (2010), and Wason-Ellam (2010) incorporate the role of the body in absorbing and engaging with story. By determining a text's potential to be paired with the visual arts, mapmaking, or immersive experiences in nature, educators can mediate the kinds of embodied, sensorial experiences with literature that appeal to readers' developmental

**"...educators can mediate the kinds of embodied, sensorial experiences with literature that appeal to readers developmental needs as placemakers and contribute to a positive sense of place."**

needs as placemakers and contribute to a positive sense of place.

Payne (2010) has made a persuasive case for the design of instructional activities that bridge texts and children's embodied engagement with the physical environment:

In education, we are too often confronted with the teaching and telling of a particular state-sanctioned curriculum story, or document. Children's literature, potentially, and the arts, potentially, retain the possibility of being different, other or wild....That opportunity, potentially, is the source of a revitalized means of promoting the sensual, perceptual and conceptual dimensions of an aesthetic education, in this instance an ecoaesthetic opening in 'experiencing', 'living', *being* the story and *becoming* other than what we currently are. Their confluence might well be the remarkable. (pp. 305-306; emphasis in original)

The benefits of pairing embodied learning experiences with place-conscious texts in formal learning settings not only includes academic and curricular advantages, it also facilitates children's intrinsic motivation and engagement (Wason-Ellam, 2010).

**Examining the materiality of texts as artifacts of reader-place transactions.** Finally, within a place-conscious framework for reader response, texts can be studied, not just for their content or literary merit, but as a historical record of children's material engagement or play with texts in place(s). Although this area of the research represents the smallest portion of the scholarship reviewed, it is an area for future research that can provide the field with new and interesting ways to observe and document children's placemaking as a method of

reader response. The work of children's book historians intersects with concepts of place in unique ways as they aim to study books as representational objects of places in time and as artifacts documenting children's lived experiences in places. Grenby (2011) notes,

This reminder of the materiality of reading, its embeddedness in its location and occasion, and its social functions, seems especially germane to children's reading. After all, children's "book use"- a more inclusive, and frequently more accurate, term than "reading"- has very often been more physical and interactive than cerebral and solitary. (p. 194)

Children's marginalia--their writing and drawing on and in books--has been well documented by book historians as occurring for centuries. These historical records suggest conclusions about readership and engagement (Grenby, 2011; Jackson, 2001; Lerer, 2012). Although many of these inscriptions annotate the text, some are seemingly extra-textual and have more to tell about the social dimension of the place in which the child was reading than their actual experience of reading, such as proprietary claims and book plate inscriptions. Other examples of book markings suggest the book being used over and over by the same child or within the same family over time (Grenby, 2011). The existence of this *artifactual memory* (Reid-Walsh, 2013) in a book's materiality support the notion that a book has served as an important artifact within a child's material landscape and within the social and aesthetic dimensions of a child's placemaking (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010).

### **Context within the Broader Landscapes of Place Experience**

Within reader response work, context is usually defined as the sociocultural dimensions that

influence meaning-making within a reading experience. However, the literature included in this subtheme--those that emphasized the role of the context or setting in readers' meaning making processes, and to some degree, connected to a theoretical construct of place--represents broader conceptualizations of context. Not only do the methodologies presented here expand notions of context to include the physical environments of reading experiences, they challenge the very spatiotemporal boundaries that make up traditionally-defined reading events.

**Highlighting the spatial politics of reading experience and accessibility.** The physical spaces in which people access, read, and respond to texts are influenced by the various dimensions of place: perceptual, sociological, ideological, political, and ecological (Gruenewald, 2003). Building from the assumption that a sense of place is connected to a sense of belonging, a *semiotics of place* is central to discussions of reader autonomy and self-efficacy (Murray, Fujishima, & Uzuka, 2014). This approach highlights and critiques the spatial politics that influence children's reading experiences in order to dismantle power structures that promote singular constructions of literacy and create barriers to accessibility (Nichols, 2011; Nichols, Nixon & Rowsell, 2011; Nixon, 2011; Pahl & Allan, 2011).

Although traditional conceptualizations of context are made up of the social, cultural, and political dimensions of places, a *semiotics of place* additionally privileges the materiality of environments. Nichols (2011) described the methods of a *semiotics of place* as aimed at exploring "how space is 'read' and takes into account materiality, lighting, the built environment, the natural environment and the overall aesthetic" (pp. 169-170). A *semiotics of place* provides unique opportunities to better understand what consequences children's agency as placemakers might have on reader identity.

**Exploring a sense of place in children's in-school reading spaces.** Because the design of a physical space has been linked to behavior, the design of schools and classrooms should be linked to purpose (Roskos & Neuman, 2011). Spaces designated for reading in school either encourage or inhibit the kinds of responses parents, educators, and children value (Clark, 2010; Curtis & Carter, 2003; Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012; Hille, 2011; O'Donnell, Wicklund, Pigozzi, Peterson, & Mau, 2010; Tarr, 2004). Literacy educators have long discussed the relation between the physical classroom space and a classroom culture of reading. Chambers (1996) wrote about designing classroom reading nooks to mimic the intimacy of home reading environments. Though this work did not explicitly align with a concept of place (which was just gaining traction in academia), it highlighted the importance of children's earliest placemaking experiences to their developing identities as readers.

A helpful facet of the scholarship on school reading spaces considers characteristics of place that might be detrimental to reader identity development. Because the walls in classroom reading spaces influence how children respond and interact in the space, Tarr (2004) urged teachers to be critical of the materials they bring into the classroom space and avoid cluttering the walls with commercialized literacy materials that carry little meaning to children. Effective teachers view the walls as texts with the potential to add to collective classroom narratives and permeate identity discourses, such as intersections of reader identity and place identity, so long as they remain uncluttered, appealing, and purposeful (Roskos & Neuman, 2011).

When considering the function and aesthetics of reading spaces, children's purposes for using designated reading spaces often differ from teachers' expectations. Here, again, it is important to consider the ways adults' perceptions and experiences of place differ from those of children. Clark (2010)

found that some children feel that the reading corner is a place to go for solitude or rest while others see it as an imaginative space holding the potential for play. Contemporary school architects have been responsive to these developmental needs as placemakers by integrating soft textures and elements intended to promote imaginative play into school reading areas (Curtis & Carter, 2003; O'Donnell et al., 2010), making recreational reading areas a central focus of school spaces. Libraries may open up to an outdoor courtyard or greenspace, promoting a connection between aesthetic engagement with nature and recreational reading (Hille, 2011). Considered apart from a theoretical perspective of readers as placemakers, these play- and sensory-based reading spaces might seem disconnected from reader identity development.

However, a place-conscious lens focuses on reading spaces as tangible sites where reader and place identity intersect and readers make meaning of texts.

Although the social aspects of reader and place identity are not explicitly discussed in this work, attempts to develop a communal sense of place around reading spaces through design is reminiscent of Derr, Chawla, and Mintzer's (2018) definition of placemaking provided at the beginning of this paper. An architectural and design perspective on classroom and school reading spaces should be empowering to reader response practitioners because this approach encourages educators to be thoughtful placemakers themselves in ways that are evolving and responsive to the readers under their care.

**Studying placemaking within children's literacy life-worlds.** Although a design perspective of reading spaces affords a view of the influences of place on readers, the theoretical concept of the

*literacy life-world* emphasizes reader perception and experience. A child reader's literacy life-world is a phenomenological landscape made up of "the acts of reading or literary affinity...that one takes for granted as one does them" (Robison, 2011, p. 2), of literacy events enacted across various sociocultural contexts and discourses. Leander (2011) and Robison (2011) challenged the traditionally-held conceptualization of "reading event" that has become so integral to the constructions of *reading*, *reader*, and *response* employed in school settings: "a specific reader and a specific text at a specific time and place" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p.14). Robison, advocating for the study of readers' life-worlds in literacy research, defined a *literacy event* as "any activity in which literacy plays a role" (Robison, 2011, p. 6). This broader, more inclusive conceptualization

**“Although it may seem a bit abstract, the literacy life-world is a promising concept for place-conscious reader response work.”**

of literacy events allows various reader experiences to be studied collectively as sites of response and meaning negotiation (Kendall, 2008) that extend beyond singular spatiotemporal transactions with texts and intersect with

young readers' lived experiences as placemakers over time.

Although it may seem a bit abstract, the literacy life-world is a promising concept for place-conscious reader response work. A variety of very concrete methods have been used to document literacy events within a reader's life-world, such as having readers map reader life-worlds and create visual literacy narratives (Kajder, 2006). Visual literacy narratives invite readers to represent and reflect on their reader history through the visual arts (e.g., film, photography, painting, etc.) in order to break down contextual boundaries between in-school and out-of-school reading experiences. Using these methods to inquire into children's lived experiences as readers and placemakers can help us challenge

our own assumptions and limitations regarding what reader response could look like and break down the barriers between out-of-school literacy practices and those contrived within formal school settings.

### Concluding Discussion

The primary goal of this literature review was to aid reader response researchers and practitioners in developing a conceptual and methodological framework that prioritizes the fundamentality of placemaking in the lives of child readers in and beyond the school building. By synthesizing scholarship that intersected, to varying degrees of explicitness, reader response and place concepts, I have found that there are a myriad of approaches and perspectives that reading educators can take as they further explore readers, texts, and contexts through a place-conscious perspective. As discussed above, there are certainly gaps throughout this body of research. However, the scholarship included here has provided a solid foundation to move in this fresh, hopeful direction in reader response research and pedagogy much more explicitly than before.

A secondary goal that emerged from my synthesis was to continue to expand the ways the field conceptualizes and employs *context* in reader response work in order to more fully explore interactions between readers and place as a mode of reader response. To operationalize a place-conscious framework for future reader response work that builds upon the scholarship presented in this review, traditional schematic representations of reader-text transactions (see Figures 1 and 2) may need to be expanded or modified, particularly to move beyond traditional conceptualizations of *context*.

For more than half a century, *context* has been predominantly defined throughout reader response scholarship as the sociocultural factors influencing a reader's meaning-making processes (Beach, 1993;

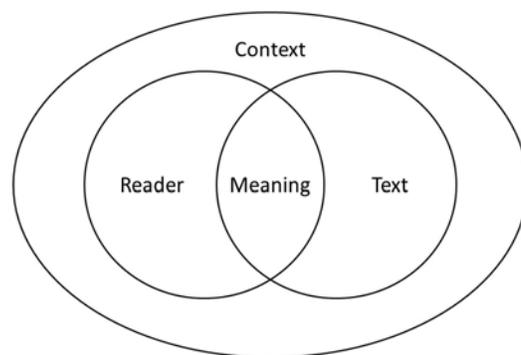


Figure 1. Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory of reader response as represented by the Reading Framework for the National Assessment of Educational Progress. (National Assessment Governing Board, 1992)

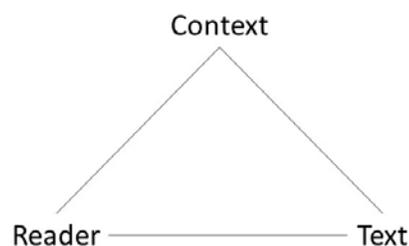


Figure 2. Reader/text/context transactions as represented in Beach (1993).

Benton, 2009; Grossberg, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1978; Sipe, 1999; Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1995). At the intersections of literary theory and literacy pedagogy, context has primarily been emphasized as a force outside the reader that influences the reading process, rather than also considering how the interaction between the text and reader, the meaning-making process, can also have an influence on context. This conceptualization has limited our ability to explore readers' responses within a broader scope of intersecting identities, such as reader identity and place identity, in several ways.

First, it confines reading educators to the spatiotemporal constraints of particular, traditionally-defined reading events. A narrow view of context limits the field's ability to explore the ways response might be iterated across a variety of permeable contexts and at various points in time throughout readers' personal reader narratives (before, during, and after reading) (Leander, 2011). Second, sociocultural context alone neglects child readers' developmental and experiential motivations and purposes for reading. At its genesis, reader response was theorized with fluent readers in mind. The youngest readers construct meaning of texts and of the world with very different sets of priorities, conceptions of time, cultural influences, and multisensory perceptions. Smagorinsky and Coppock (1995) start to get at this inconsistency when they point out that children's authentic, observable responses to texts often appear "illogical to teachers" (p. 273).

The limitations of context extend to pedagogical implications, too. One unintended consequence of neglecting the permeability of contexts is that it establishes exclusionary parameters for what it means to be a reader and reinforces a hierarchy of literacies. Without seeing response within a broader narrative of readers' lived experiences over time and across contexts, educators miss opportunities to validate out-of-school literacy practices, many of which are unobservable (Robison, 2011). Therefore, focusing solely on the sociocultural influences on readers' experiences has narrowed the purposes, modalities, authenticity, and relevancy of the classroom literacy experiences we design. Finally, these limitations make it easy to see child readers as acted upon by contextual constraints/affordances rather than as agents of change with their own motivations, capable of shaping their own places.

The intersections of place and reader response theory presented through the three main themes of this literature review might be better understood

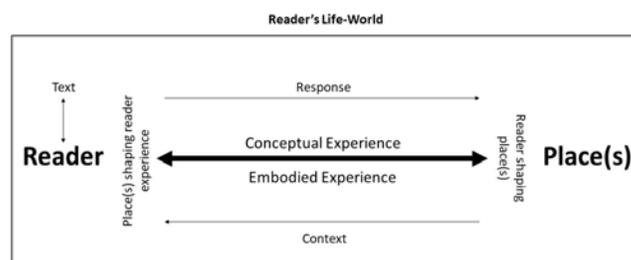


Figure 3. Schematic representation of a place-conscious framework for reader response.

and used holistically and relationally if they were conceptualized within a framework like that depicted in Figure 3. This representation foregrounds placemaking and the development/influence of place identity in the lived experiences of the child reader. It acknowledges reader response as one way in which readers transform their places through both cognitive and embodied experiences with texts, broadly defined. It

also accounts for sociocultural context as an influential component in reader-text transactions, but as just one dimension of the place(s) in which a reader engages with a text. Situating these transactions within a reader's broader life-world requires a consideration of literacy events in relation to one another and as they intersect with placemaking.

Today, educational policy in the United States casts a vision for education based primarily on economic outcomes and individuality. However, place-conscious pedagogies can supplement these market economy ideologies by providing an inclusive, community-oriented context and purpose for literacy instruction that validates the affective lived experiences of all children and positions them as agents of change in their local places. Reader response theory is still a useful and dynamic means to designing child-centered literacy instruction that privileges identity work alongside academic standards. From the perspective of children as

placemakers, reading does not just change children's perception of themselves within a stagnant world. It alters the world, the ways children see, experience, and act upon the various dimensions of place. By further exploring this rich landscape of reader-text-place transactions and building upon the scholarship presented in this review, reading

educators can continue to ask and answer new kinds of questions about how readers construct meaning, and furthermore, how these meanings are taken up by readers as placemakers to pursue a sense of belonging and hopeful possibilities in the places they dwell.

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