

## Rural Education in Wisconsin

Daniel R. Paulson

*There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,  
The earth, and every common sight,  
To me did seem  
Apparell'd in celestial light,  
The glory and the freshness of a dream,  
It is not now as it hath been of yore;-  
Turn wheresoe'er I may,  
By night or day,  
Things which I have seen I now can see no more.*

*Intimations of Immortality from Recollection of Early Childhood*

*William Wordsworth*

### **Our Place**

Northwestern Wisconsin is a beautiful, region rich in natural resources, wildlife, and vast woodlands, prairies and abundant waters. Driving to school I pass through one of a number of a woods and wetlands area which is a state owned public hunting area with no hiking trails or cross country trails here- just woods and wetlands with “logging” roads. I, like so many others, have encountered deer here, one of which bolted onto the road and put its shoulder into the front

fender of my car then trotted off into the woods as if to say “stay out of my place.” This keeps local body shops in business.

During Thanksgiving week this road is a parking zone and sounds like a “war zone” when deer hunters quest for the “trophy deer” out at their “shacks” with lots of blaze orange, ammunition and liquor. At school the “hunting teachers,” have their hunters’ preseason breakfast. School boards debate whether to close the school during deer hunting because a large percentage of the students and teachers will be absent, out in their deer shacks for the week. The hunters’ organizations are powerful in Wisconsin forcing the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to maintain a herd of trophy deer for hunters; other recreational, wild life and environmental issues are secondary. Governor Scott Walker signed Senate Bill 338, which protects hunters from being disturbed, into law at the Wisconsin Bear Hunters’ Association 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention (Walker, 2016).

Guns are a significant part of the culture in rural Wisconsin and communities have hugely popular gun shows which can be held at the schools on a weekend because it’s the largest indoor space in the community. Gun raffles are quite commonly held to raise money for the local organizations such as the volunteer fire departments and even high school trap shooting teams. Most households and all farms have guns, usually at least three: a shotgun, a small caliber rifle for shooting varmints and a large caliber deer hunting rifle.

The newest high school sport in Wisconsin is Clay Target shooting. The Wisconsin High School Clay Target League (WSHSCTL), claims to be the fastest growing high school sport in Wisconsin with an anticipated 1200 participants in grades 6-12 and 50 teams in the spring 2016 league (Wisconsin State High School Clay Target League 2016). Unlike most sports, there are two seasons for this sport: one each in the fall and spring with competitions between schools and

a state championship tournament. The sport is patterned after the Olympic trap shooting competition and all competitions are held at gun ranges which have a trapshooting field with shooting stations and a trap house (WSHSCTL, 2016). According to the organization's website:

“The purpose of the Wisconsin State High School Clay Target League is to attract students to participate in shooting sports ... This is accomplished by providing a safe, comfortable, positive team environment that enhances a student athlete's character and personal growth through safe, educational and socially acceptable involvement in shooting sports” (WSHSCTL, 2016).

Students are very enthusiastic about the “sport” but must have their own guns and ammunition which can be quite costly. The league has no trouble gaining sponsors from gun manufacturers and retailer: Cabela, Winchester, Browning, Benelli Armi SpA and SKB. With the guns costing anywhere from \$500 to \$1500, it is estimated that in 2015 trap teams will be spending over \$5 million. The gun manufactures and the NRA are excited about this new group of youth who will spend a lot of money over their lifetimes and become gun rights advocates. Deprez (2015) described a 16-year-old shooter, who wore a T-shirt with a falsely ascribed Thomas Jefferson quote, “Free men do not ask permission to bear arms,” as being not interested in guns or the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment until the league came to his school and recruited a team. Deprez (2015) quotes Dennis Taylor, a NRA member and manager with the Wisconsin Trapshooting Association, “These kids are going to be future legislators, and they're going to get in there and know the truth about weapons.” To date, no injuries or deaths have been reported during trap shooting league events. Range safety is paramount for these groups; educating students about the gun violence epidemic is not.

Gun tragedies do happen. One Sunday in early November, a teenage boy was cleaning his deer rifle in preparation for deer hunting when it discharged. The bullet went through the bedroom wall into another bedroom and struck one of our 1<sup>st</sup> grade girls, killing her. In Wisconsin there are often two or three deaths each year from guns during hunting season.

As I continue along my drive to school I pass farms, some of which are small family farms and a few are large corporate farms. Even with the economic problems and the decreasing numbers of small farms, farming is an iconic part of every rural community. It is very difficult to be a dairy farmer with the fluctuation in prices, and it is very difficult to find people who will work long hard hours for minimal pay and no benefits. In class one day a girl Google Mapped her farm for me which showed massive barns and pens where over 300 head of cows are in a milking cycle that goes on around the clock. She said that she sometimes works in the barns with the “Mexicans.” Even though we think of farms as being iconic of rural life, the number of students who live on farms is a small percentage of the student population even in rural schools.

Every farm needs laborers to do the hard work with the long hours needed to tend the animals, to do the field work and maintain the buildings and machinery. The pay is low with no benefits because many small farmers are just getting by financially and cannot afford to provide health insurance for their help. Farmers often are able to provide housing on the farm, usually an old trailer house or the old farm house which helps the farmer with worker reliability. As a consequence, increasingly, even in Northwestern Wisconsin, you will find farm laborers that are undocumented immigrants, mostly Mexican. The children in these families attend the schools and often need special attention with English as a Second Language (ESL) or with handicapping conditions. ESL programs are rare in small rural schools. Their numbers are not large in most rural school districts but they generally are welcomed into the schools. Many teachers give these

children the special attention they need without special programming on the part of the schools. Parents often do not have driver's licenses and in the current atmosphere wish to keep as low of a profile as possible, yet it is common for the teachers of these children often reach out to the families. The children of these undocumented laborers who are born in the United States are in need of a passport in the event that they are deported. There are many teachers helping these families with these processes and connecting them to county social workers to provide for their needs. Wrap around services often happen informally and through the extraordinary efforts of teachers in small rural schools. This is a manifestation of the sense of community found in these small rural schools. Though the efforts of these teachers is not unique to rural schools, it is more significant given the isolation of these families in rural areas. A number of Agriculture Education teachers have begun teaching Spanish agriculture vocabulary to their students so that they are better able to communicate with these Hispanic farm laborers (E. Bartz personal communication, February, 8, 2016).

### **Native American Students**

Native Americans students are struggling in public schools with high drop-out rates and under achievement. In Wisconsin the relationships between Native American communities and the dominant Non-Native culture has been strained at times over treaty rights and has contributed to this problematic situation. In 1983 the 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals (Voigt Decision, 1983) affirmed that "Chippewa Indian" tribes had the rights granted to them in the 1837 and 1842 treaties which give them the right to practice their traditional spring spear fishing of walleyes to the great consternation of non-Native anglers feeling that this would destroy the fisheries. Fish counts have disproven this accusation but walleye are considered a "trophy" fish in Wisconsin and Minnesota and are highly, and sometimes exclusively, sought by many anglers.

As a result, there were protests and racial taunting. Over the 30 some years since the Voight Decision the protests at the boat landings are fading into history but sometimes one can hear a few individuals attribute their fishing woes to tribal spearing.

In 1989, the Wisconsin Legislature passed Act 31, as a result of the controversy over the Voigt Decision, which mandated instruction in the history, culture and tribal sovereignty in both K-12 schools and in teacher education programs. Schools are required to create curriculum for students in grades 4 through 12 in giving students an understanding of different value systems, cultures and human relations particularly in regard to African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans. They are also required to teach Native American studies at least 3 times throughout a student's K-12 career and must maintain instructional materials which appropriately reflect diverse cultures (Bird Bear, 2016).

Northwestern Wisconsin is home of the Lake Superior Chippewa Indians with sub nations consisting of the St. Croix Band, the Lac Courte Oreilles Band, Lac du Flambeau Band, Red Cliff Band, Lac Vieux Desert Band and the Bad River Band. Their educational efforts involve Head-Start programs and a tribal school run by the Lac Courte Oreille Band (LCO). They also help provide a school liaison or coordinator in school districts that have tribal communities. Not all of the school age youth on the LCO Reservation attend the tribal schools as 555 of them attend two neighboring schools. It does have 330 students in the LCO K-12 School with another 28 in a K-5 Ojibwe Language Immersion school (Waadookodaadin). The LCO Reservation does have a community college with an enrollment of 250 (Wisconsin State Government, Wisconsin Tribes, 2016).

The St. Croix Band's 11 tribal communities are spread out in 4 counties whose children attend local school districts which have a tribal liaison staff member who works to provide

communication between the school and the parents of the community, as well as to provide assistance to the students. The main Native American cultural activity at school is an annual pow-wow where the Native American students from the school dance in traditional native attire depending upon the style of dances they do. For example, I had students who were Grass Dancers and Jingle Dancers.

The literature and personal experience have found that barriers to educational success for Native American students are racism and oppression, and difficulty in identity formation (Trujillo and Alston, 2005) (Welsh, 2008). While overt racism is rare, it nonetheless is perceived and remembered from a not too distant past. It is easy to see at times an alienation paradigm at work where a Native American student will have difficulty negotiating the Native American culture and the dominant Anglo culture in the schools. It has long been known that a key to breaking the alienation paradigm is to build a bridge between the cultures. The work of the Native American school-community coordinators in these schools has focused on bridging this gap. I spent a lot of time in their office listening to their suggestions and insight about how to help the students I worked with and how to involve the parents and grandparents of my students. One thing they taught me was that Native American students' learning styles are more group oriented with experiential and cooperative learning projects being more effective and attuned to their culture.

They were teaching me about culturally responsive teaching (Pewewardy and Hammer, 2003) (Gilbert, 2008) (Kea, Campbell-Whatley, and Richards, 2006) which is a set of dispositions towards the learners rather than a set of lessons in Native American culture and history. Pewewardy and Hammer (2003) state, "Native studies courses can help, overcoming ethnocentric outlooks is hard work and must be viewed as an ongoing process. Teachers must

learn to be reflective practitioners and develop observational, empirical, and analytical skills necessary to monitor, evaluate, and revise continually their respective teaching styles.”

Bergstom, Cleary, and Peacock (2003) interviewed 120 Native American students who gave some examples of the qualities teachers had that helped them: having cultural knowledge, using encouragement, having high expectations, being flexible, being interested in students, listening and understanding, being open minded, being respectful, using multiple approaches to teach, and having patience. To this end, the teaching of Paulo Freire is compelling. Engaging Freire’s mode of teaching creates a dialogue between cultures that validates the lived experiences of Native American students and counters the alienation that many Native American students feel in a “banking” model of teaching where they are lectured and given verbally abstract immediate attempts at new skill acquisition (Shimek, 2003, p.32). Because of the culture and community life of the Native American students, they will often find education alien to their existence, such as when the “teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized and predictable (Freire, 1984, p. 57). “Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on ‘authority’ are no longer valid; in order to function authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it” (Freire, 1984 p. 67).

Native American culture and heritage are a part of Northern Wisconsin and offer unique understandings of the woods, prairies and waters of our region. Within the region there are teachers who demonstrate a passion and commitment to learning about and understanding this



culture and heritage. One such teacher, a science teacher who is a regionally recognized naturalist and birder, has taken it upon himself to learn the very difficult Ojibwe language to the level of conversational fluency. It is important to recognize and celebrate within the education community when a teacher does have passion for understanding and learning of the Ojibwe culture. This teacher's passion and compassion for the culture is remarkable but, it does not signify a commitment by the school district as a whole to validate the culture and traditions of the Native American Students who are a part of the school's community.

Teachers' attitudes and dispositions are crucial but they need not be experts in Native culture to provide an inclusive atmosphere in their classrooms. When a Native American student can walk down the halls of the school and see, on its walls and in a number of its classrooms, anything that acknowledges or honors Native American culture or heritage it sends a powerful signal to all that this is a respected element in our community. As one Native student commented in the Bergstrom, A., Cleary, L., & Peacock, T. (2003) study, "Last year, I had . . . a history teacher, and I usually don't like my history teachers 'cause they never teach anything about Native Americans. I walked into the room and all I saw on his walls were pictures of Native American people. And I think, "Okay, I'm going to like this guy" (Bergstrom et al., 2003, p. 162).

### **Agriculture Education**

In the land of woods, prairies and waters, the Agriculture Technology program has a powerful place in connecting students to the land and community. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) classifies technology education with a set of academic standards that includes "courses of high-quality academic content and technical competencies which focus on programs of study to prepare students for successful college and career readiness (Wisconsin

Standards for Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, 2013, p. 8). At the middle and high school levels the program includes “three distinct and crucial elements – rigorous academic and technical skill attainment, work-based learning and Career and Technical Student Organizations” (DPI 2013, p. 15.) In the case of Agriculture Education, the Career and Technical Student Organization is the Future Farmers of America (FFA), which is different from the after school 4H programs that often evoke an image of young boys or girls raising a cow or pig taken to the county fair to be judged and then sold.

FFA tells us that it “makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education” (FFA, 2016). Their vision statement is: “Students whose lives are impacted by FFA and agricultural education will achieve academic and personal growth, strengthen American agriculture and provide leadership to build healthy local communities, a strong nation and a sustainable world” (FFA, 2016). The organization prides itself on some of its most notable participants such as President Jimmy Carter, Willie Nelson and Rick Perry.

Putting students on a tractor is in most schools a thing of the past. Interest in traditional production agriculture is declining just as the number of farms is declining, but FFA is strong with 19,000 students in 255 chapters in Wisconsin where students are showing interest in alternative forms of agriculture that “you wouldn’t typically associate with farming – law, public policy, entrepreneurship and bookkeeping” (Runyon, 2014). Runyon (2014) reported “A greater number of students are interested in organic farming methods, grass-fed beef and cage-free eggs.”

Each year the FFA holds a National Convention, which the New Jersey Department of Agriculture claims is the “world’s largest youth convention” (New Jersey Department of

Agriculture, 2016). The tensions and conflicts within the agriculture community are reflected in their convention. The 2015 National FFA Convention and Expo, held in Louisville, Kentucky, was described in various ways depending on one's view point. Ward (2015), a Wisconsin farmer and former FFA member, noted that the "National FFA Convention introduction looks more like an MTV video, the First Lady makes reference to the importance of agriculture by 'planting a garden,' and the USDA Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden is moved to tears by an inner city FFA chapter in 'Philly.' I begin to wonder what direction is the nation's largest youth agriculture organization heading?" Another perspective on FFA conventions described the "Feed the World" convention slogan was presented by "flashy, digital, draconian and utterly Orwellian interactive displays and mountains of corporate schwag" (Greenhorn, 2014). According to Greenhorns (2014), and other organic farm groups, the convention shows the "FFA is turning these next-in-line farmers, agriscientists, ag teachers and farm sympathizers into successful leaders, fierce entrepreneurs, and good Samaritans...for Big Ag."

FFA and 4H have ties to large agribusiness corporations like Monsanto, Zoetis, Cargill, Dow, Syngenta, and Elanco (Greenhorns, 2014). Monsanto provides scholarships and grants to participants of 4H and FFA. Monsanto's America's Farmers Grow Ag Leaders, is administered by the National FFA Scholarship Program, but FFA membership is not required (Monsanto Fund, 2016).

An alternative perspective that is not often considered by FFA curriculum, if at all, is presented by Eggert (2015) when he states that "I dream of a day when parents, politicians, economists, CEO's bankers, mining and logging companies and others make their decisions based upon an authentic ecological consciousness, including an understanding and full appreciation of a broad spectrum of environmental values that allow ecosystems to be

sustainable, healthy and whole” (Eggert, 2015, p. 16). He calls this approach “Meadowlark Economics” to highlight and contrast the effects of efficient agricultural haylage practices. At one time farmers were told to plant wind breaks and to have smaller fields that would resist the ravages of wind erosion so common in the droughts of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Current agriculture technology, such as no-till or chisel plow soil preparation, have mitigated the erosion problems, so farmers are now advised that it is more efficient to cut down those trees and have larger, open fields and to plant fence to fence. Farmers green cut hay rather than let it mature and dry in the fields so now hay is cut earlier in the season and fed green to their animals or stored that way. This practice has been devastating to meadow nesting birds because the earlier harvesting does not allow the newly hatched birds to mature enough to leave the nests before the choppers come across the fields. Eggert (2015) states, “Despite their sweet song, these birds have no voice economically or politically. They represent a ‘zero’ within our conventional economic accounting system. We don’t even buy birdseed or build birdhouses for Meadowlarks. Their disappearance would not create even the tiniest ripple in the Commerce Department’s spreadsheets that are supposed to measure our standard of living” (p. 4).

In the FFA’s efficiency-technology-entrepreneur model, a student might learn about the following set of concepts about the management of the school forest (Eggert, 2015, p. 17):

- The monetary value of wood products (including export earnings), incomes for loggers, truckers, and sawmill workers.
- Logging will lead to increased sales for equipment, including manufacturing jobs.
- Logging will increase in each of these companies’ short term profits.

- Logging will create short-term increase in corporate stock prices, adding value to stockholder portfolios.

In contrast to this model, the Meadowlark Economics model as applied to forestry, which is practiced by the Menomonee Indian Reservation in Wisconsin (Johnson and Johnson, 2012), would teach the students the following concepts about a school's forest (Eggert, 2015, p. 18):

- It is a habitat for endangered plants and animals.
- It needs to be maintained as a "living classroom" enabling students and scientists to study a healthy ecosystem.
- It is a source of beauty, inspiration, and spiritual sustenance.
- Old-growth forests protect and create new topsoil, prevent excessive run-off of rainwater and help recycle nutrients more efficiently than clear-cut forests.
- Old-growth forests sequester atmospheric carbon which helps stabilize Earth's climate.

In one very small school district the Ag teacher, who with her husband farm and milk 40 cows, offers a wide variety of 15 different courses in grades 6 through 12. These include courses in wildlife and natural resources, plant horticulture, veterinary science, equine science, ag science, food science, leadership and ATV and snowmobile safety as well as introductory survey courses for middle school students. The program has numerous field trips to fish farms, meat processors, farms, sawmills, and agribusinesses. The school has a school forest that is awaiting a selective cutting of trees after which they will rebuild the trails. They also have a prairie that they burn, as it happened naturally keeping the trees and brush from growing in it. The teacher collaborates with the science teacher working with students on projects for the school science fair.

## **One Room Schools**

It is well documented that schools play a central role in rural communities. Salamon (2003) studied community change in six rural farm towns in Illinois in 1995. Economic and population changes had created a new social fabric in these towns located in productive agricultural areas that lacked social and economic attachments to the areas. In addition, Salamon (2003) argues this new social fabric causes agrarian communities to become post-modern in nature, where lives are fragmented, attachment to land is seen as personal property or as an investment, and where the agrarian social fabric and values are being transformed. A large wooded area across the road from my house is owned by people from out of the state who use it as a private hunting area. This is not uncommon.

On my journey to school I pass three buildings that were once one or two room schools. In 1912 Grant County, Wisconsin, for example, had 15 high schools, five first-class-graded schools, five second-class-graded schools and 201 one-room schoolhouses (Wisconsin Historical Society). Each township had its own school for about 15 elementary students. The rural one room school is still a psychological and mystical presence in our area.

I have a friend who attended a one room school house for the first 9 years of her schooling during the 1960s. Her school was a small rural neighborhood school serving about 21 children in grades K – 8 who were in walking distance to the school. The building consisted of one large classroom, a small library room with shelves on both sides and a window at the end which was always cold in the winter. The school had no running water and was heated by an oil stove. The restrooms were out back. Water was brought to the school each morning by the

closest neighbor and was put into a galvanized metal keg with a spigot at the bottom for drinking. To wash their hands, one student would ladle water from the keg onto another student's hands over a waste water pail. The desks were the kind with an ink-well and were arranged in three sections throughout the room. The smallest desks were on the right side of the room, the middle sized desks in the middle, and the large desks, for the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students were on the left side of the room. It was a very big deal for the students when they were old enough to move from one size desk to the next.

The area where these schools were located is in the bluffs and coulees region along the Mississippi River, an area of high ridges and valleys that lead down to the river. The towns are located on the river. The students who attended the school were all within walking distance and they all lived on farms on a "ridge." There were other small schools in the district; one a few miles away in a valley had two rooms, another ridge school was exactly the same as the one my friend attended. Although the community was tight knit, it was very open and welcoming to new students, who were few and far between. There was a "school board" but their duties appeared to be mainly concerned with the maintenance and day to day functioning of the school. Once in a while the "Superintendent" from the town would visit the school. He is remembered as a big man who smelled of onions, who would walk the rows of desks looking at the students' work and occasionally ask a student to read to him.

This school was the focus of the community. Parent teacher conferences were not individual meetings between a student's parents and the teacher, but rather a social event. The parents would come to the school and view the students' work which was displayed around the room, after which the parents would sit down and play cards and eat. The Christmas production was also a community gathering. The fathers would build a raised platform for a stage and run

wires for the curtains and backdrops. They even had homemade spotlights. The children would put on the Christmas play and at the end Santa would come in the back door with a bag of candy and an apple for each child. Then the parents would play cards. For days after these community events the school smelled of tobacco smoke.

The teacher was an older woman who drove to the school from town. She was there all of the 9 years my friend was at the school and was considered strict and assigned home work every night. To my friend, it seemed as if there were a law that required that mathematics be taught before 10:30 each day. If you were in trouble you might find yourself under teacher's desk. If you had difficulties learning or if the teacher had an issue with you, there was little help or recourse. Once, when the regular teacher broke her hip, a younger substitute teacher stepped in for a few weeks. This woman had young children of her own and lived on a farm so she understood the lives for her students. She did not assign homework since she knew that they all had chores to do when they got home each afternoon. The students felt like they were on a vacation.

The teacher worked with the younger students first and then the older students in succession for each subject except for music and art. Thus, everyone heard and saw the teacher's lessons for each group. It gave the younger students exposure to the concepts and vocabulary of the advanced material while also giving the older students a review of things they had been taught in the past. It was an informal looping of the curriculum for all of the students. The older students tutored the younger students, especially in reading. Tutoring sometimes became an escape from a lesson or subject the older students didn't like. Each student had a clear understanding of what they needed to learn because they saw the total curriculum. They all knew that they had to have mastery of multiplication by the end of the third grade. The curriculum



seemed to be very traditional with a lot of grammar, phonics, and diagramming of sentences. The school had a piano and the teacher used it every day to teach the children songs. There were big maps on rollers, a picture of George Washington and all of the traditional iconic one room school things that are in local museums today. “Weekly Readers” on Fridays were their current events lessons. The library was stocked by the teacher with books, with Laura Ingalls-Wilder’s “Little House on the Prairie” series being one of the most well-worn. Once in a while old books were given to students which became prized possessions.

The community and the children were very close knit. There were no cliques or subgroups. Competition was almost shunned. The students were mostly Catholic and they prayed before lunch. They played hard and spirited games on the playground but without much rivalry or bluster. My friend said that she did not even notice the clothes of her classmates until she entered the high school where clothes mattered. The farm, school, church, and 4H was the focus of their lives. They all participated in 4H. They all worked on their family’s farm. They all went to the same church.

### **The New Rural Education**

Prior to 1963, rural school districts were under the supervision of County Superintendents. Then the school bus made it possible to transport children to the graded town schools efficiently. As the transition from the country one room schools to the town school districts progressed, role of the County Superintendent became unnecessary and the Wisconsin Legislature decided to replace the county superintendent with Cooperative Educational Service Agencies. Wisconsin is divided up into 12 Cooperative Service Agencies with 8 CESAs having the majority of the rural school districts. The legislature intended the CESA’s to provide a service unit between the State Superintendent and individual school districts to provide

leadership services and coordination of services for school districts, including such programs as curriculum development assistance; school district management development; coordination of vocational education; and exceptional education, research, special student classes, human growth and development, data collection processing and dissemination, and in-service programs (CESA 7, 2016).

Wisconsin adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) under authority of Article X of the Wisconsin State Constitution (State of Wisconsin, 2010). CCSS have been very controversial under Governor Scott Walker. In Wisconsin, opponents to the Common Core have been aligned with the “Tea Party Republicans” in the state (Richards, 2014) who have rallied grass roots support at events like the one sponsored by the Republican Women of Waukesha County in 2014. The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (Laasby, 2014) described the rally where, “a University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh professor, Duke Pesta outlined what he considered the ‘dangers and threats’ that the Common Core standards pose on the educational system, liberties and Christian values. Pesta called the Common Core standards ‘socialism’ funded by leftist lobbyists, including Bill Gates.” In July of 2014, Governor Scott Walker asked the Wisconsin State Legislature to repeal Common Core and replace it with “standards set by people in Wisconsin” (Richards and Marley, 2014) but no action was taken.

When the State adopted the Core Curriculum Standards the CESAs were thrown in action to help school districts implement the new standards and align their curriculum to the assessments that would measure the academic achievement on those standards. For example, CESA 9 states that their work with the CCSS “creates and organizes educator resources through the lenses of innovation, effectiveness and equity. We do this to promote...standards-based

teaching and learning. In essence, we create, curate and communicate the CCSS to Wisconsin” (CESA 9, 2016).

In conjunction with the adoption and development of the CCSS, the State Superintendent of Instruction began work on an Educator Effectiveness System (Department of Public Instruction, 2016). This system was piloted and implemented state wide with legislative authority (WI ACT 166) in the 2014 -15 school year. CESAs again became the focus of implementation with CESA 6 developing a model that is replicated throughout most of the state. This model is a “turnkey” teacher evaluation that has “research based standards, with rubrics and indicators” The program has professional development for “deep understanding of accountability concerns and research-based strategies”. It provides information at the individual, school, district and regional levels so that there can be “data-driven, standards based professional development” (CESA 6, 2016).

The CESAs serving most rural districts in Wisconsin provide support and services to rural school districts that is centered on a standardized approach to developing curriculum, instruction and teacher evaluation. Rural school districts that wish to develop curriculum and instruction specific to their place and community are not going to find much support or resources from their CESAs. Individual districts are always free to develop their own curriculum and do not have to follow or purchase the curriculum and instruction services from their CESAs.

### Tree-Stands in the Woods

Often one finds that individual teachers, with a vision and a passion, will do great things to bring together the school, the community and its environment. It is difficult to find a whole school district that has this focus and passion on their community and sense of place. One school

district appears to exemplify this community-environment-school relationship. It is a very small school district with 382 students and covers 85 miles of rivers, rolling farmland and forest. The elementary, middle and high school are under one roof with 37 professional staff and 21 support staff. The school boasts that it has a computer to student ratio of 1 to 1 with many classrooms having SMARTBoards. The school is also able to provide classes in Agriculture, Family and Consumer Sciences, Band, Choir, Spanish, Business and Technology Education. The school has a school forest and a school garden. One long time teacher describes the school as:

” The school is one of main attractions in the town, and we get a lot of open enrolled students because we are 'small', and truly get to know the students and families. Many classes visit the local bank, store, sheet metal plant and nursing home for learning opportunities, and to learn from others. Our elementary students walk to the nursing home with their costumes on to 'parade' for the residents, and they are given a candy treat. We also walk over to sing Christmas songs for the residents. It is a great way for the young and the old to interact with each other.

The community comes together to support projects and events at the school. A few years ago it was a dream to have a nice baseball field, so a group of parents got together and started fundraising to earn money for the project. We now have a beautiful baseball field within walking distance from the school. Improvements are still being made to it and it is being maintained.

Our latest project has been a community fitness center. The school had some money that needed to be spent on something that would benefit the community, so it was decided to build an addition onto the school, move our weight room equipment up out of the

lower level in the high school, and re-locate it to the fitness center. We also have some cardio machines, along with space in the room to hold our 'overflow' after school activities, such as dance class for younger students, or wrestling practice. Community members are able to purchase a one-year membership for a very small fee.

Our third grade students have an annual craft fair, which is wonderful to see. The students make craft items to sell, and people can also donate gently used Christmas/winter items. The third grade students run most of the sale themselves with some adult supervision. The project is worked into many curriculum areas, and they need to apply for their jobs they wish to have as well as interview for them. Some jobs are greeters, security, shopping helpers, wrapping station, cashiers and stockers. They take their jobs very seriously! The items are priced from a quarter to five dollars. Students bring their money to school and shop at their assigned class time.

The money that is raised is counted carefully, and the students work together to decide where to donate it. Most years they give some to the town food pantry, but other causes have been the town park and a children's hospital in a nearby city. They keep a portion of the money to help pay for their trip to the science museum in the spring, but most is donated after they discuss and vote in their classroom" (L. Hamernick, personal communication, February 3, 2016).

In the land of water, woods and prairies, the school's connections to its waters, woods and prairies should be a major influence in the curriculum and identity. Lieberman and Hoody (1998) studied a number of outdoor education programs and presented ways of integrating the environment as context for learning. In Northwest Wisconsin, a number of rural districts have

school forests that enjoy a large variation in utilization. To help schools develop outdoor education programs and better utilize school forests, prairies and waters, the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point has the LEAF program which has registered over 25,000 acres of school forest land, and is integrating learning in and about Wisconsin's forests into K-12 schools. Its mission is to provide the knowledge, skills, and ways of thinking necessary to sustain our forests and communities (LEAF, 2016). Research on outdoor education indicates it creates a sense of place and attitudes, increases academic performance and child development, and is healthy and fun. The program tries to promote the core values of dependence and connection to the Earth, forests systems support all life, forests can be managed sustainably, and healthy communities are dependent on engaged and informed citizens (LEAF, 2016). DON'T UNDERSTAND THAT SENTENCE

A number of schools have developed school forest programs, but one school district has demonstrated what is possible in developing and utilizing a school forest (Amery School District, 2016). This school district has a school forest program that features a lake, prairie, and woods. The students have constructed trails, a picnic shelter, a floating dock, planted hundreds of trees, replanted 18 acres of native prairie, relocated an Osprey nest and installed a remote camera for viewing from the middle school. They also have a school forest logo and mascot named "Bandit the Raccoon". Trail head and trail markers were constructed and put in place by the Boy Scout Troop. They have raise thousands of dollars through student activities and grants for the development of this total school program. The outdoor learning activities are found in all of the curricular areas in the school.

McDonaldized Schools

The prevailing, dominant forces in rural education tend to create small rural schools that are indistinct, examples of some generic core curriculum, test defined effective schools with test defined teaching excellence. The state report cards for schools in Wisconsin does not give any distinctive information about the schools - only tables of test scores that glorify a “McDonaldized” rural educational system. School athletics do little to differentiate one school from another other than a school’s “colors,” a team logo and a nickname.

When I walk into a small town school that has a sense of community it is readily apparent immediately inside the doorway. In the wall I see a big built in aquarium with fish that came from the river that runs by the school with informational displays telling me the name of the fish and information about the fish as well as the names that the kids have given them. Further on down the hall I see a television on the wall with a live feed from a local farm that is showing a barn with calves asleep in their pen. A sign tells me the name of the calves, how old they are and other information about them. Further on down the hall I see students gathered around a computer monitor that is showing some deer in the school forest. One of the students tells me that they have a camera on a deer trail that they have been studying for some time identifying specific deer and noting their frequency and direction of travel. They have mapped the deer trail and are studying their habitat, movement and eating patterns. They click an icon that changes the television view to an eagle’s nest in a tree by the river. I see on another wall a display that features the local business of the month with information about this business’s economics (products, sales, resources, wages paid, taxes, etc.) kinds of jobs and skills utilized by the employer and a web link for more information that was put together by the 6<sup>th</sup> grade class and the high school social studies/economics class. There is a local history display put up by the middle school history class which features information about a logging railroad that was in this

area from 1880 to 1912. In the library they have a diorama depicting the town in the 1930s with a model railroad showing connections to neighboring towns that are long gone. I see a mural that depicts a local farm from the early 1900s on one wall. On the wall near the high school science class is a display about counting frogs with charts and graphs explaining the results of years of counting and data collection. Another wall mural depicts Native Americans who inhabited the area before the settlers, spear fishing on the river.

The school training room has not only student athletes but also senior citizens on the treadmills and bikes with student trainers assisting them with their fitness program. At lunch senior citizens eat in their own area of the cafeteria but once in a while a student will join them for conversation or to get information about a report where the teacher requires not only literature research but also personal interviews with non-family members. The middle school students also have to create a website for a community family or business that is available only on the school's network. They often visit the local nursing home to chat with their friends who they also build a website depicting the lives and community history of these special people. POOR SENTENCE The school forest has an outdoor classroom that is busy year round with science projects, art projects, writing projects and even music in the woods. The mathematics classes have studied probability and data analysis of data from hundreds of samples and studies from the woods and waters around the school as well as the geometry and mapping of the land. They do math problems submitted by parents and community members from the farms and businesses in the community as well. Some high school students are helping some small businesses with their accounting.

I also see a large trophy case with awards and trophies from not only the athletic teams, bands, dance teams but also from academically oriented awards for robotics, mathematics,



science, writing, geography, history and the proverbial spelling bees. The athletics are very important for this community and the school but they do not dominate the school and community relationship. The student athletes do well and are highly supported in all sports regardless of the win-loss statistics by the school and the community. In the fall the school sent the cross country team to the State Championship Meet with a rousing pep rally. Currently the school's basketball team has not had a "winning" season but nobody is discouraged and attendance is still high for their games. Some students have to compete in multiple school teams in both boys' and girls' sports such as hockey, softball, lacrosse, swimming. The community support for the athletic programs is reflected in the local newspapers and attendance at athletic events.

### Conclusion

Place-based pedagogies have been alluded to and present throughout history. Elfer (2005) traced the place-based pedagogies from Aristotle to Dewey. Dewey's emphasis on educating the "whole child" in the context of the child's "lived experience" is credited with the philosophical foundation for current place-based pedagogy. Dewey states (1938) "One consideration stands out clearly when education is conceived in terms of experience. Anything which can be called a study, whether arithmetic, history, geography, or of the natural sciences, must be derived from materials which at the onset fall within the scope of ordinary life-experience". Woodhouse tells us (2015, p.30)

An educational process that helps the learner to understand the ecological and cultural dynamics of a specific place, its people, and the community those people share in that place as well as to understand how to participate in maintaining community will be an education for sustainability imbedded in a place-based pedagogy. An education that is place-based can accommodate the diversity that various contexts present. A place-based

pedagogy allows for content and process that is explicit to the ecological and cultural dynamics of that place, the people, and the ecological and sociological processes that created and sustain that community.

In this discussion of rural education in Wisconsin it has been noted that in certain schools and classrooms teachers are taking the lived-experiences of their students in the family, community and environment into a curriculum and pedagogy of place. Dewey (1938) tells us “A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Above all, they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worthwhile.” Dewey goes on to say that this is work above and beyond the effort need to teach from a set standardized curriculum. Teachers who intuitively understand that students are more engaged and curious when presented a place-based pedagogy have taken it upon themselves in most cases to provide this to their students. They do so most often with little or no support from educational systems that are focused on standards based learning and assessment. Some schools have begun to embrace the communities and the environments but they are islands in the “MacDonald” like sea of rural education



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