

A review of *in situ* measurement techniques for investigating suspended sediment dynamics in lakes

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ABSTRACT: Lakes can function as important sinks of catchment-derived material, offering a valuable data resource for geomorphologists investigating soil erosion, sediment yields or particulate contamination, for example. The complex internal dynamics of lakes necessitates careful consideration of data collection techniques, however. This contribution outlines the four classes of device used for *in situ* measurements of suspended sediment concentration (SSC) and potentially tracking of river-borne sediment plume dispersal (pressure differential, bulk optic, acoustic backscatter and laser optic) and highlights potential pitfalls and limitations of their use in lacustrine settings. Considerations when designing and installing sediment traps are provided in detail, with a particular focus on appropriate trap dimensions, mooring setup and deployment protocol. The relative merits of employing SSC sensors versus sediment traps are considered and, in general, method selection will be guided by the research question(s). The contribution to process understanding that can be made by comparing *in situ* measurements with lake sediment cores is also highlighted.

KEYWORDS: Limnology, suspended sediment, sediment traps, thermal regime, river plume

Introduction

Lakes represent a critical component of watersheds, acting as effective sinks for particles eroded from catchment slopes and floodplains and subsequently transported through the fluvial system (Mackereth, 1966). As a result, exploring the internal dynamics of lakes, especially the controls on fluxes and fates of catchment-derived particles, may be of interest to geomorphologists investigating catchment erosion rates (Dearing, 1991), sediment yields (Foster *et al.*, 2011), responses to soil-vegetation destabilisation (Foster *et al.*, 2003) or potential hydrometeorological drivers of extreme sediment delivery events (Cockburn and Lamoureux, 2008) or those evaluating risks to aquatic ecosystems from excessive fine particulates (Wood and Armitage, 1997) or trace metal contamination (Douglas and Rippey, 2000).

However, the internal complexity of lakes (see Lerman *et al.*, 1995) means adequately

capturing spatial and temporal variability within direct measurements of water and particulates is challenging. This chapter aims to present an overview of *in situ* measurement techniques for some principle physical limnological processes that influence suspended sediment dynamics, including the dispersion of riverine plumes and thermal stratification regimes, as well as reviewing procedures for acquiring high-quality data from sediment traps. The rationale for selecting certain sensors is subsequently considered and, lastly, the value of integrating present-day measurements with sediment cores is emphasised.

Suspended sediment monitoring

Measurement techniques

Traditional methods for monitoring suspended sediment concentrations (SSC) required bottle sampling at discrete intervals; these have been widely superseded by devices capable of near-real time *in situ*

measurements (Felix *et al.*, 2013). Instruments developed in fluvial (Gray and Gartner, 2009) or marine (Agrawal and Pottsmith, 2000) settings are also deployable in lakes and tend to be classified based on their underpinning physical principle: pressure differential, bulk optic, acoustic backscatter or laser optic (Figure 1; Wren *et al.*, 2000; Gray and Gartner, 2009; Hubbart *et al.*, 2014). Measuring SSC from a fluvial perspective is covered by Perks (2014) so only brief technical descriptions will be provided here; their respective suitability and methodological limitations when deployed in lakes are emphasised.

- i) The pressure differential technique infers SSC from estimations of water density that are based on paired, simultaneous measurements of water pressure from transducers fixed at two known depths and corrected for water temperature (Gray and Gartner, 2009; Lewis and Rasmussen, 1999).
- ii) Bulk optic turbidimeters employ either transmissometry (a measure of the visible light fraction reaching a detector from a directly-aligned source) or nephelometry (the optical backscatter of incident light at $\geq 90^\circ$ within a chamber). In both cases, the amount of light reaching the detector will reflect the clarity or turbidity of the water. These values are calibrated against

empirical measurements that should be performed on a site-specific basis (Wren *et al.*, 2000; Gray and Gartner, 2009).

- iii) Acoustic backscatter techniques provide non-intrusive insight into the movement of suspended material within a lake across considerable vertical distances, typically using a Doppler current profiler (Guerrero *et al.*, 2011, 2012). Acoustic backscatter and Doppler shift mathematical principles are described in Kostaschuk *et al.* (2005) and Sassi *et al.* (2012); essentially, high frequency sound pulses emitted sequentially from instrument transducers rebound at strengths that reflect the concentration of suspended particles in the water column (Wren *et al.*, 2000).
- iv) Laser optical devices (often labelled 'laser *in situ* scattering and transmissiometry' (LISST); Agrawal and Pottsmith, 2000; Agrawal *et al.*, 2008) are underpinned by laser diffraction theory, whereby the angle of scatter (diffraction) of a laser beam upon hitting a spherical particle is a function of its diameter (Loizeau *et al.*, 1994). Suspended sediment concentrations and the spectrum of particle sizes are calculated from the scattering pattern detected by a ring sensor as a laser beam is emitted into a mass of particles held in suspension (Mikkelsen and Pejrup, 2001).

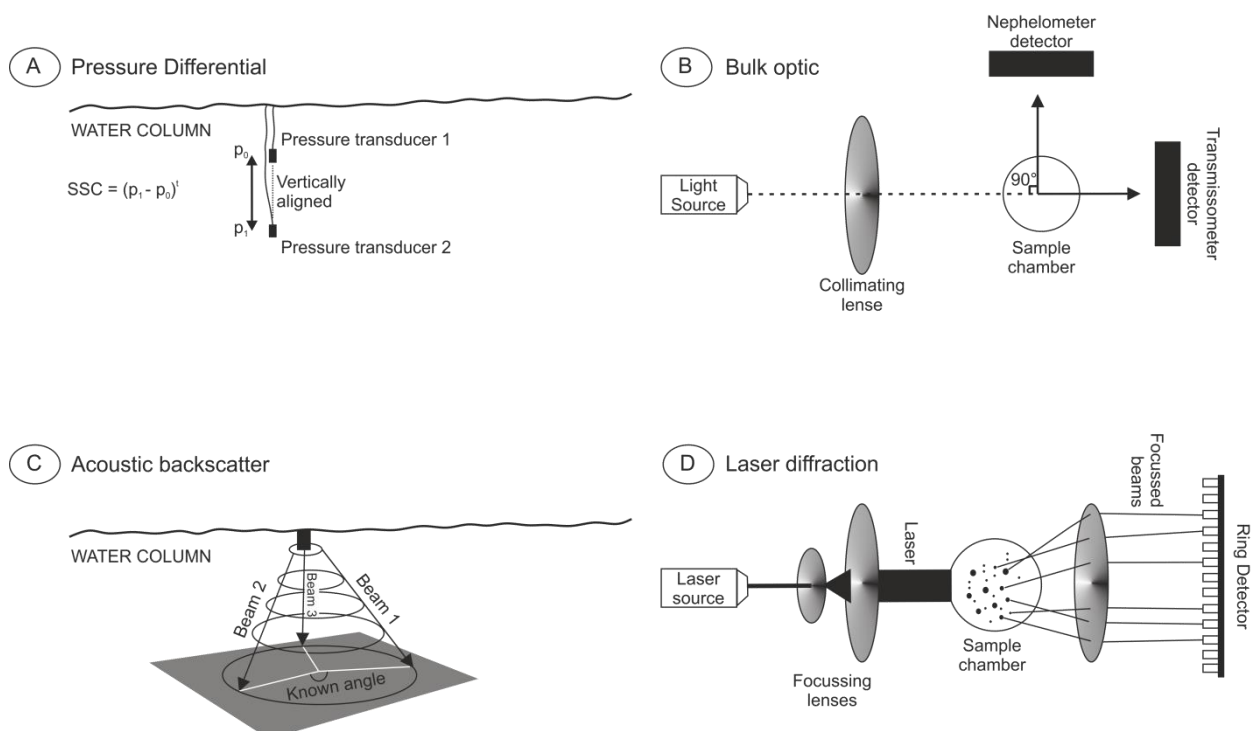


Figure 1. Schematic diagrams of the a) pressure differential; b) bulk optic; c) acoustic backscatter (re-drawn from Kostachuk *et al.* 2005) and d) laser diffraction techniques.

Suitability and limitations in lakes

Attempting to account for internal movements of suspended material, variable SSC as well as calm or turbulent subsurface flows may prevent certain SSC sensors from operating at maximum capability.

Concurrent temperature measurements at both depths are critical when employing the pressure differential technique (Gray and Gartner, 2009), rendering it potentially unsuitable for thermally stratified lakes. Likewise, tracking the dispersion of a sediment-rich plume as an interflow confined at the thermocline (see Figure 2) will require the precise suspension of both transducers within the plume itself.

The performance of optic instruments can be affected at certain SSC: transmissometers are more sensitive at low SSC, nephelometric sensors in turbid waters (Gray and Gartner, 2009), but both are hampered by exceptionally high particle concentrations (Wren *et al.*, 2000), potentially limiting their effectiveness when measuring infrequent, high-magnitude sediment delivery events.

Optic and acoustic techniques struggle to reconcile accurate SSC readings in the presence of variable particle sizes (Agrawal and Pottsmith, 2000), especially across the silt domain (Ludwig and Hanes, 1990) commonly deposited in lakes. Laser diffraction instruments (LISST-type) are capable of estimating concentrations and size distribution of sediments loads composed of widely distributed particle sizes (Agrawal and

Pottsmith, 2000), although a high proportion of particles finer than instrument operating limits (listed in Table 1) may skew SSC values (Andrews *et al.*, 2011).

Catchment geology or the lake-watershed configuration can influence LISST readings. Sediment loads dominated by freshly eroded, angular and/or flaky particles may cause LISSTs to overestimate SSC by 1.5 and 8 fold, respectively (Felix *et al.*, 2013). Similarly in granitic regions where discoid mica particles are a substantial contributor to sediment load, the assumption that particles are spherical when using a LISST-type device may not hold (Agrawal *et al.*, 2008). Highly turbid water (optical transmission $\tau < 0.3$; Felix *et al.*, 2013) may also preclude the use of LISST devices due to excessive lens obscuration (Cockburn and Lamoureux, 2008) or the possibility of multiple scattering (Agrawal and Pottsmith, 2000).

Lamoureux (2005) provides schematics for a LISST-type device deployed on a permanent mooring that contains sensors that detect light emitted from a column of LEDs on the opposite side of the unit. Sediment entering the central tube of the device will systematically impede the emitted light from reaching the adjacent sensors (Lamoureux, 2005). When used in conjunction with a data logger, the sensor can be deployed for multiple months with data acquired at minutely intervals.

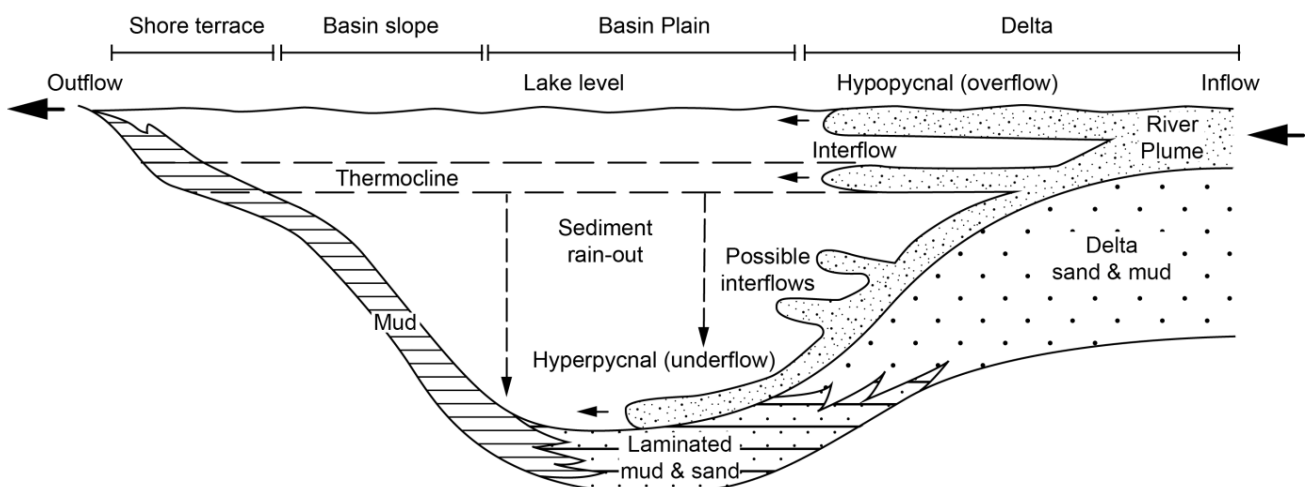


Figure 2: Processes of clastic sediment dispersal within a lake basin. Lake dimensions and sediment thicknesses are not to scale. From Schillereff *et al.* (2014).

Table 1. Technical details for different suspended sediment concentration sensors discussed in the text.

Operating principle (device name)	Minimum SSC (mg L ⁻¹)	Maximum SSC (mg L ⁻¹)	Particle size (µm)	References
Pressure differential	10000-20000	-----	-----	Lewis and Rasmussen, 1999 Gray and Gartner, 2009
Nephelometry (Optical Backscatterance Sensor; OBS)	-----	2000 ¹ 10000 ²	Inaccurate SSC values if <100, ideally 200-400	Ludwig and Hanes, 1990 Gray and Gartner, 2009
Transmissometry	-----	50	-----	Gray and Gartner, 2009
Laser diffraction (Sequoia LISST-100X Type C)	1	800 25 000 ³	2.5 – 500 ⁴ 1.9 – 381 ⁵	Gray and Gartner, 2009 Felix <i>et al.</i> , 2013
Acoustic backscatter (aDCP)	100	10000		Gray and Gartner, 2009

¹if sediment load is predominantly clay and silt

²if sediment load is predominantly sand-sized grains

³if optical pathway is narrowed

⁴if predominantly spherical grains are being measured

⁵if random-shaped grains are being measured

Information on both particulate concentration and size distribution can be gathered from acoustic Doppler current profiler (aDCP) measurements, although variable particle sizes pose problems when estimating total SSC from the backscatter profile (Reichel, 1998). Dual or multi-frequency deployments help address this issue (1500 and 500 kHz are common; Kostaschuk *et al.*, 2005). Optimum sensitivity lies in the coarse sand range that is rarely delivered to lakes, whereas fine-grained, cohesive material that dominates lacustrine sediment loads can hamper acoustic backscatter measurements, and higher frequency beams are required to detect silt-sized material (Kostaschuk *et al.*, 2005).

DCP surveys can be a powerful tool for investigating the internal behaviour and short-term pulses of turbulent flows, such as sediment-laden underflow plumes (Figure 2; Best *et al.*, 2005; Kostaschuk *et al.*, 2005). Surveying from both a moored position and along a delta-proximal to distal transect can

determine the flow regime of individual flood-generated underflows (Best *et al.*, 2005).

Laboratory testing should be used to develop calibration curves for calculating more accurate SSC values (Gray and Gartner, 2009; Felix *et al.*, 2013). Alternatively, employing multiple techniques in parallel may overcome issues posed by variable sediment load characteristics, but will introduce logistical and financial burdens. A thorough understanding of the lake-catchment system and clear research objectives will also help guide SSC instrument selection.

Sediment traps

Sediment traps have been used extensively in limnological research for a wide range of purposes, and detailed reviews of sediment trap theory and applications have been conducted by Bloesch and Burns (1980), Blomqvist and Håkanson (1981), Håkanson *et al.* (1989) and Bloesch (1996).

Sediment trap design

Sediment traps are simple instruments constructed from cylindrical, funnel or bottle-shaped tubes with a removable vessel attached at the base for capturing sediment (Figure 3). Traps with upward-facing openings installed at water depths of choice intercept the rainout of particles in suspension (Eadie, 1997) that settle vertically at rates determined by their diameters (Stokes, 1851). The often-stronger horizontal forces exerted within lakes (up to ten times the vertical component; Håkanson and Jansson, 1983) diminish as the particle enters the sediment trap opening, enabling it to sink vertically into the capturing vessel.

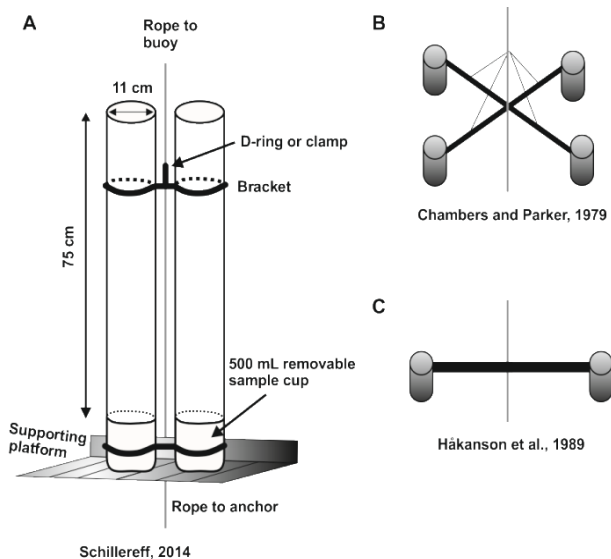


Figure 3. Illustrations of the sediment trap arrays used by a) Schillereff, 2015; b) Chambers and Parker, 1979 and c) Håkanson et al., 1989.

Trap shape determines whether its capture potential is representative of the actual vertical sediment flux within the lake and may vary under calm or turbulent flow conditions (See Figure 3.17, Håkanson and Jansson, 1983). Laboratory and field investigations conclude that cylinders are the preferable shape to avoid over or under-trapping of suspended sediment flux (95-100% of real sedimentation rate; Bloesch and Burns, 1980; Gardner, 1980). This applies in both calm and turbulent flow conditions for particles most likely to be trapped in lake: particles with diameters $<500 \mu\text{m}$ and low Reynolds number ($Re < 0.5$) or organic-rich particles (low density).

The cylinder height to diameter ratio (the aspect ratio) is also critical in trap design (Bloesch and Burns, 1980). Openings with a diameter $<40 \text{ mm}$ should be avoided to minimise under-sampling and aspect ratios greater than 15:1 may induce the development of anoxic conditions within the vessel (Håkanson and Jansson, 1983). The general recommendation to ensure particles are held at the base of the vessel is a minimum aspect ratio of 5:1 in calm conditions and 10:1 where more turbulent flow may occur (Hargrave and Burns, 1979; Blomqvist and Kofoed, 1981; Bloesch and Burns, 1980; Bloesch, 1996). The dimensions of some published trap designs are summarised in Table 2.

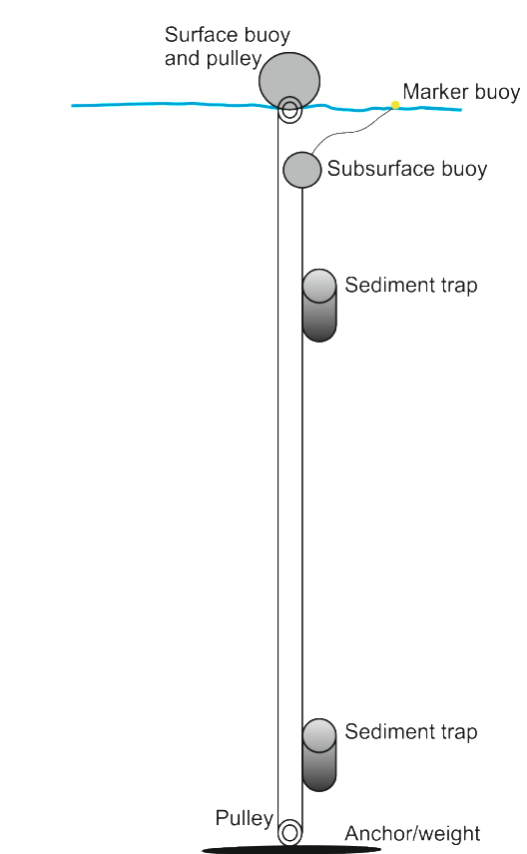


Figure 4. Idealised mooring setup for a sediment trapping programme. Modified from Ohlendorf and Sturm (2001)

The cylindrical body is most commonly constructed from transparent or non-transparent PVC or plexi-glass tubes. Field tests indicate that attaching collars or mesh at the opening should be avoided and lids that close during recovery are not required (Bloesch and Burns, 1980). Ohlendorf and Sturm (2001) installed a stopper at the base of the cylinder to release supernatant water

without disturbing the accumulated sediments but this is not required if the basal, removable vessel is sufficiently deep to prevent re-suspension when detaching from the tube during collection (Schillereff, 2015). Attach traps to a mooring cable or pre-stretched plastic rope held taught between an anchor at the lake bed and a surface buoy (Figure 4). Installing the upper buoy below the water surface (Håkanson *et al.* (1989) recommend 0.5 m) ensures the cabling and traps are kept

vertical during turbulent wave action or lake level fall (Douglas and Rippey, 2000). Ohlendorf and Sturm (2001) recommend the use of a pulley system between anchor and buoy to minimise re-suspension and a D-ring clasp (Schillereff, 2015) or clamp (Ohlendorf and Sturm, 2001) helps avoid trap tilt (Gardner, 1985). For further details, Sturm (2001) and Schillereff (2015) describe the deployment procedures at Lake Baikal and Brotherswater (Cumbria), respectively.

Table 2. Design parameters and deployment intervals used in published sediment trapping research.

Height (cm)	Diameter (cm)	Aspect Ratio	# of joined tubes (distance apart)	Sampling Interval	Reference
75	11	6.8:1	2	Variable	Schillereff, 2015
160	20	8:1	1	1.5-3.5 d	Waples and Klump, 2013
45.6	7.6	6		Weekly	Gelda, 2012
65	6	10.8:1	4	Monthly ¹	Tylmann <i>et al.</i> , 2011
50.8	10.1	5:1		Annual	McDonald <i>et al.</i> , 2010
91.4	8.9	10.3:1	4	7-10 d	Fortino <i>et al.</i> , 2009
45.6	7.6	6:1	3	Weekly	Effler <i>et al.</i> , 2006
36.4	5.2	7:1	3	Annual	Rose and Monteith, 2005
25.5	5.08	5:1	1	Before and after runoff events	Matisoff <i>et al.</i> , 2005
32.4	5.4	6:1	5	14 d	Horppila and Nurminen, 2005
78	15	5.2:1	3	Monthly during ice-free conditions	Chu <i>et al.</i> , 2005
80	11	7.3	6	20-41 d	Foster <i>et al.</i> , 2003
100	9.1	11:1	2	11 d ¹	Ohlendorf and Sturm, 2001
100	10	10:1	2 (40 cm)		Douglas and Rippey, 2000
100	10	10:1	2	14 d	Raubitschek <i>et al.</i> , 1999
50	10	5:1	1		Eadie, 1997
160	20	8:1			Eadie, 1997
60	5.1	11.8:1	4	One year	Flower, 1990
15	9 (12 at collar)		4 (30 cm)	4 m	Chambers and Parker, 1979

¹During ice-free conditions. d = day; m = month

Sediment trap deployment

Depending on the research question being asked and the lake configuration, traps may be installed at one or multiple water depths and at one or more mooring sites. For example, river-borne sediment plumes diffusing across the lake as either over-, inter- or underflows (Figure 2) may be detected by installing arrays at the sediment surface, near the thermocline and in the upper water column. Paired, replicate traps (Figure 3a) yield insignificant variability in terms of dry weight of collected sediment ($\pm 10\%$; Bloesch and Burns, 1980); their deployment in small lakes or zones of low sedimentation is useful to ensure adequate sample size for further laboratory-based analyses (Chambers and Parker, 1979). Sediment trap arrays can be deployed to great depth (e.g., ~1390 m in Lake Baikal; Sturm, 2001; Ryves *et al.*, 2003).

The research question will most likely guide the frequency of trap collection. Palaeoecological studies may only require annual sampling (e.g., Woodbridge and Roberts, 2010). Systems dominated by low-frequency, intense sediment delivery events (e.g., Arctic lakes with nival hydrological regimes) may require daily (Cockburn and Lamoureux, 2008) or near-daily (Dugan *et al.*, 2009) trap replacement. Investigating internal sedimentation processes will necessitate multiple moorings positioned with regard to the inflow position and basin configuration. Douglas and Rippey (2000) installed paired traps at five locations in Lough Neagh while Lewis *et al.* (2002) employed 33 traps at twelve mooring locations in Bear Lake (arctic Canada).

Other considerations include the risk of contamination from algae growing on external trap casings or the mooring rope (Chu *et al.*, 2005) and the addition of a preserving agent. Bloesch and Burns (1980) and Håkanson *et al.* (1989) concluded that the potential biological effects of added chemicals are significantly negative, yet some researchers continue to add chloroform (Eadie, 1997) or sodium azide (NaN_3 ; Chang *et al.*, 2013) to avoid sediment decomposition. Injecting oasis foam or a similar reagent to the capturing vessel upon retrieval may enable the stratigraphy to be preserved (Woodbridge and Roberts, 2010).

Mass accumulation rates (MAR; $\text{mg cm}^{-2} \text{d}^{-1}$) per sampling interval can be calculated from Equation 1 using dried sediment weights, where m is the total dry mass (mg) in each container, d is the number of days during the sampling interval and r is the radius of the trapping vessel (cm^2).

$$MAR = \frac{m}{d} / \pi r^2 \quad (\text{Equation 1})$$

Sequencing sediment traps

Computer-controlled traps offer increased temporal resolution and can shed light on short-lived hydrometeorological controls on sedimentation behaviour as multiple bottles housed within an internal carousel rotate under the cylindrical tube at pre-programmed intervals (Eadie, 1997; Muzzi and Eadie, 2002). Trap and circuit board schematics are published from Baker and Milburn (1983) and Muzzi and Eadie (2002).

Summary and recommendations

Method selection

Choosing to deploy SSC sensors or sediment traps will largely be guided by the research question(s). Sediment traps provide a time-averaged signal, whereas SSC devices can measure at sufficiently high temporal resolution to investigate sub-daily interactions between hydrometeorological events, such as wind, and SS dynamics (e.g., Gilbert and Lamoureux, 2004). Sediment traps are appropriate for monitoring nival flood events (Gilbert and Butler, 2004) that may be logistically challenging to monitor in real-time and may offer opportunities to inspect the internal sedimentology of a flood deposit if sufficient material accumulates in a trapping vessel. Furthermore, captured material can be returned to a laboratory where desk-based instruments with more sensitive detection limits may be available. Conversely, sediment traps do not provide information on the relationship between turbidity and suspended sediment concentrations and SSC sensors alongside current meters should be used instead (e.g., Schiefer and Gilbert, 2008). SSC sensors may also be able to detect particles flocculating in the water column (e.g., Droppo *et al.*, 1997) and may be more appropriate when investigating the influence of short-lived events such as internal waves or turbidity currents on SS dynamics.

Sediment traps stationed at different heights may detect differences in the sediment regime under thermal stratification or evidence that a turbidity current has occurred (e.g., Schillereff, 2015) but SSC techniques will be more effective at discerning their duration, spatial extent across the basin floor and the critical SS threshold at which they are triggered in individual lakes (Gilbert and Butler, 2004; Schiefer and Gilbert, 2008).

Long-term process monitoring

Although case studies are rare, a detailed perspective on depositional mechanisms and the implications for the accumulated basal sediments can be acquired through integrating *in situ* measurements of SSC, turbidity, thermal stratification and other lake processes with sediment trapping and comparisons to adjacent sediment core records (e.g., Gilbert and Butler, 2004; Gilbert *et al.*, 2006). Such an approach can yield unprecedented information on sediment dynamics during discrete floods and the potential for a palaeoflood sedimentary signature to be preserved (Gilbert *et al.*, 2006) and foster greater confidence in palaeoenvironmental reconstructions produced from long lake sediment cores.

Conclusions

A broad range of equipment is available to researchers investigating limnological processes and technological advances are continually being made to improve the temporal and spatial resolution of data collection. However, the complexity of internal lake dynamics necessitates careful consideration of appropriate methods when investigating suspended sediment dynamics. Each type of suspended sediment monitoring device has drawbacks, in particular related to variable particle sizes, and choice should be guided by knowledge of the field site. Implementing a programme of analysis that combines multiple methods of SSC monitoring is ideal but financially and logistically more demanding. Sediment trapping is a time and labour-intensive undertaking that potentially offers valuable insight into hydrometeorological controls on sediment flux, provided the design and deployment protocols are appropriate. The coupling of catchment sediment budget

calculations with lake-based sediment trapping could be a useful pathway for future geomorphological research.

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