

Categorization of Place-based, Postsecondary Learning Experiences for Rural Students

**Study Findings and Case Studies
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Introduction and Study Purpose

Place-based learning focuses on integrating local and regional cultures, history, and resources into school curricula.

These efforts can make learning more active, practical, and meaningful for students and, at the same time, support traditional curriculum standards and goals. Taken together, learning environments infused with place-based learning can be richer with tangible opportunities for intellectual and academic growth. At the K-12 level, place-based learning programs have been associated with higher levels of student engagement and achievement while supporting community efforts to solve problems and enrich given locales. Often these locales are rural and low-income contexts. Supporting such efforts to increase student engagement and achievement among these groups should generate higher education goals and attainment.

Extending on the existing K-12 research, it can be reasoned that place-based learning efforts would increase post-secondary engagement within the institution at large, increase sense of place and self, and provide a path for students to make more meaning out of their post-secondary experiences. Each of these, it is expected, would improve student attainment. Despite the suggested efficacy of such curricula, little work and effort, at least in a research sense, has been devoted to post-secondary settings. The aim of our study was to characterize and categorize existing place-based curriculum efforts in higher education being mindful of both the sorts of programs/goals and the techniques/mechanisms employed by higher education institutions putting them into action. This work is both a logical extension and an application of existing research as well as a potential springboard for a number of follow-up intervention studies which would support rural students in higher education settings.

Place-based learning is an innovative and outside-the-box approach to curriculum design. It has a grounding in the research literature, but further work is needed to see how it translates to post-secondary settings. This is particularly true in rural areas and for rural institutions. Place-based learning is a potential tool for breaking down barriers to student success. Specifically, these programs can contribute to more

Acknowledgment

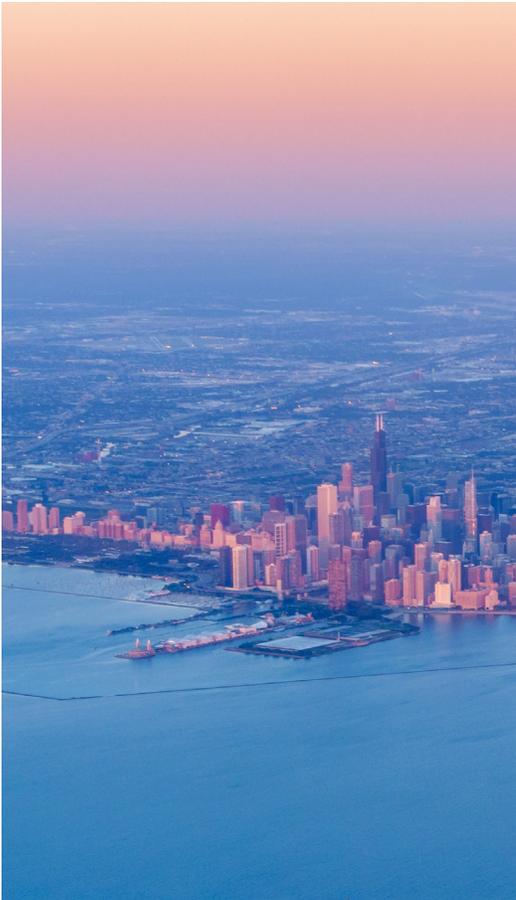
This work was made possible by funding from Ascendium Education Group.

Ascendium Education Group is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization committed to helping people reach the education and career goals that matter to them. Ascendium invests in initiatives designed to increase the number of students from low-income backgrounds who complete postsecondary degrees, certificates and workforce training programs, with an emphasis on first-generation students, incarcerated adults, rural community members, students of color and veterans.

Ascendium's work identifies, validates and expands best practices to promote large-scale change at the institutional, system and state levels, with the intention of elevating opportunity for all.

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students persisting and completing their chosen degree programs. By identifying types of programs and learning directly from institutions already carrying out place-based learning, this project aimed have a significant impact on both research and practice in education.

Study Process

Generating the sample of post-secondary institutions was an iterative, multi-step process. Based on referrals and web searches for institutions actively using place-based learning (PBL) and place-based education (PBE) practices, potential institutions were identified. If, after screening institution websites and related news for PBL/PBE-related information, it was determined that substantive programming was occurring, key personnel were contacted at the institutions requesting video interviews. In total, twelve individuals from eight institutions were interviewed. Each interview lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. Questions were focused in four areas: personnel background, conceptual foundations of PBL/PBE, connections between PBL/PBE and rural education, and the impact of PBE/PBL at the institution. Interviews were auto-transcribed from the video-playback and cleaned for accuracy. Some follow-up data collection about programs and institutional PBL/PBE was carried out when recommended by the interviewees.

Summary Table of Institutions

Case study profiles of each institution can be found later in the document.

Institution	Location	Key PBL/PBE programs
Antioch University New England	Keene, NH	MEd and graduate certificate in Place-Based Education; Center for Place-Based Education
Eastern Michigan University	Ypsilanti, MI	MA in Social Foundations and Community Education; Next Scholars Program
Bowling Green State University	Bowling Green, OH	Environment and Sustainability Programs; Experiential Learning
University of Nebraska	Lincoln, NE	Nebraska Writing Project; Center for Transformative Teaching
Illinois Valley Community College	Oglesby, IL	Earth Educators Rendezvous; Teach the Earth
University of Michigan-Flint	Flint, MI	Discovering Place; Office of Engaged Learning; Great Lake Stewardship Initiative
University of Vermont	Burlington, VT	PLACE program; Certificates in Place-Based Education and Sustainability
Appalachian State University	Boone, NC	Center for Appalachian Studies; MA and graduate certificate

Findings and Themes

PBL/PBE programs are diverse in terms of content-basis

Place-based learning as typically observed has its roots in environmental education and the science of sustainability. There were three significant findings related to this idea across the cases studies. First, while indeed many of the programs carried out PBL/PBE work in the environmental sciences, that work itself was diverse. Sometimes it was purely environmental sustainability-related. Sometimes it was more about forestry conservation. Sometimes it was geology-focused. Taken together it's important to realize that even a typical subject implementation of PBL/PBE most likely has nuance.

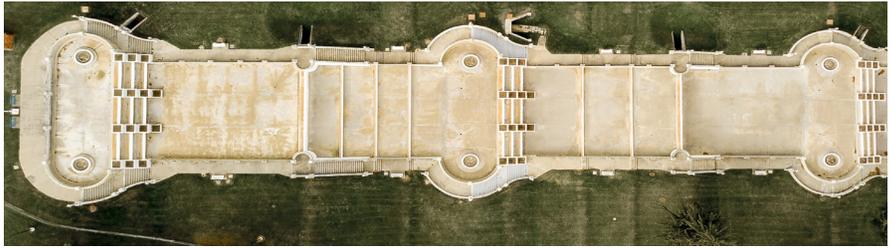
Second, the programs at University of Nebraska (writing-based) and Appalachian State University (based in Appalachian music and culture) demonstrated that the subject area can take unexpected forms. While the concept of “place” is central to all place-based education efforts, at these institutions it is a particularly driving force. Additionally, the importance of the power of communities and cultural artifacts as well as the people that the create(d) them, is never understated. They demonstrate that starting with the core tenets of PBL/PBE and working outward from that makes for effective programming, no matter the subjects under study.

Lastly, each program studied utilizes or partners with the education-training unit of the institution at least informally. Many institutions teach the PBL/PBE methods themselves as part of teacher education – either embedded or as stand-alone credentials. Direct partnerships with K-12 schools are common. These may take the form of community and/or research outreach, placement and/or supervision of teacher candidates, or professional learning opportunities for in-service teachers.

PBL/PBE programs grow out of many institutional departments

When seeking out participating institutions for this study, it was quickly discovered that simply seeking “place-based education” programs wasn't going to be sufficient. Unlike





“When I first started there was support for it (PBL/PBE) through the Office of Outreach and the Center for Civic Engagement, but over time what you saw was an expansion of that kind of support. Initially, it might have been around supporting faculty and developing partnerships, but what it means for us as a campus has evolved quite a bit. A lot of that was linked to the Carnegie classification process. It provided a framework for us to talk about it in a lot of different ways, because what community engagement and teaching means to an institution as a whole and what it means to your institution as a partner in a community may differ. There is also more support and evolution and thinking about the scholarship of engagement. What does that mean for faculty? How do you support faculty doing it?”

I think one of the reasons it’s persisted, though, is there is a sense of it within the identity of the institution that supersedes some of what comes from leadership priorities and direction. You have that commitment built within faculty, within staff and that has persisted in advocacy. It’s what keeps it going even with other priorities. There’s something about keeping the fire going. It might be different height at different times, but there’s some basic things to keep it alive.”

– Program Manager

the K-12 level, departments and offices are not as specialized as they are in higher education. To find PBL/PBE in K-12 you would seek out (most likely science) teachers and perhaps a science curriculum director. As the postsecondary level, we still saw education units as the main conduit for place-based learning, but throughout the study, we found that institutions make use of other specialized departments and their functions and interests to touch the PBL/PBE page. With place at the forefront of this type of education, it should not have been surprising to see so many community engagement and community outreach departments contributing to PBL/PBE. In some cases, the place-based methods have developed out of existing community partnerships such as the work between University of Vermont and Shelburne Farms. Sometimes the strong place-based core drives the community interactions such as litany of community-based writing programs associated with the University of Nebraska.

In some cases, such as the University of Michigan-Flint, place-based learning and education are vigorously supported at the broader, campus level. In the case of UM-Flint, the Office of Engaged Learning drives the support of place-based projects and faculty support across campus. PBL/PBE is viewed as one of many tools which faculty should be aware of as they design engaging learning experiences for students.

PBL/PBE may increase rural student engagement, but more purposeful assessment is needed

Educational methods which give voice to students and create authentic opportunities to make meaning routinely lead to increase student engagement. Place-based education provides a framework to value multiple perspectives and learn about global issues using local examples. This has been demonstrated with respect to PBL/PBE at the K-12 level for many years. As this study only collected information from faculty and staff, the data is second hand with respect to students. However, all indications are that personnel in higher education see the same benefits of PBL/PBE in postsecondary

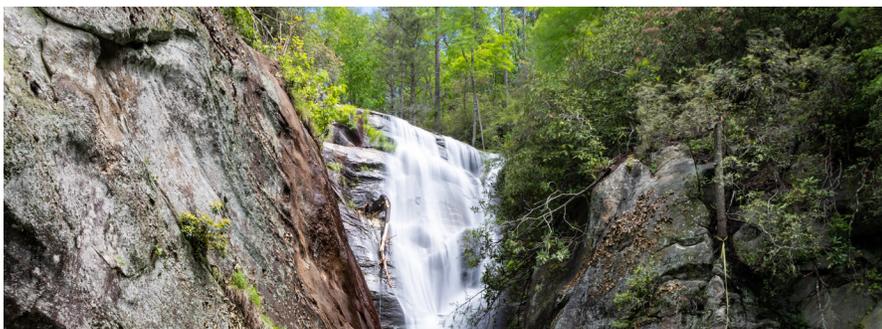
settings.

That said, this data is still largely anecdotal. Typical hard data collection discussed by faculty and staff tended to be limited to enrollments in place-based programs such as graduate degrees and certificates. To some extent, these numbers (in terms of trend) were further complicated by the study taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic. That is, many programs saw their ability to keep numbers level during this time as a victory and an indicator of student engagement. Multiple institutions suggested that one silver lining of remote learning during this time was an ability to get back to basics. Often local issues were at the forefront during COVID-19 and these concerns could be used to discuss broader social issues such as inequities.

Unfortunately, no institutions interviewed specifically assessed the direct impact that PBL/PBE has on the engagement of rural students. However, the potential is clearly there. The NEXT program at Eastern Michigan University targets students from traditionally underrepresented groups for potential future careers in teaching and the Appalachian Studies program at Appalachian State puts local/regional culture at the center of learning. These programs offer a path to engaged learning for students coming from rural and low-income environments.

PBL/PBE naturally overlaps with rural education

In discussions with the institutions, numerous overlaps in the conceptual foundations, practice, and key concerns of PBL/PBE and rural education were noted. People and communities lie at the heart of both. Genuine, authentic connections which generate a sense of individual and global purposes can be seen as goals. Direct appeals to culture such as the Appalachian State programs exemplify this thinking. Along with the



“I think the benefit that I’ve seen is it kind of validates rural students’ experiences. And I think when it works really well, it also engages students who might be disengaged or more or less inclined to engage. You know, the ones that will sit in the back and just pass the time. If there’s something that directly connects to their life experience they wake up and start to get active. I’m coming from a media and arts background and sometimes those techniques, just using more creative techniques in the classroom get students involved that maybe didn’t excel so much in the ‘sit still and do your reading and you’re writing.’ It’s more about kind of getting up and moving around and talking. I think that place-based education just gives you another tool to do that. It’s not the be all end all but it’s a powerful tool. And I see that happening in our higher education too.”

I’ve heard several students talk about how they had been ashamed of their background or not wanting to talk about being from a small town in the mountains, and shy about how they talked or that kind of thing and how they feel more validated and then you know more likely to participate in other classes and in classroom discussions, because they feel like they have something to say that their knowledge, their lived experience is valuable. I mean it’s about valuing lived experience versus just the more formal learning that happens with reading and writing and other ways.”

– Faculty Member



“Another quick example: Henderson Nebraska school consolidation. They couldn’t get enough kids to run the school anymore, so they consolidated with the next community over at Bradshaw. And my place-based teacher there, turned her students onto a project to go interview everybody in the community that had memory about the last consolidation when they formed Henderson Public Schools by collapsing all the evangelical schools that have been around the area. So the kids interview older elders they found out, you know some good things, and some people were still not talking with each other. And then they had an evening meeting with the school board in which the kids presented what they found and what their recommendations were doing the school consolidation.

This is powerful. We had a power in the community, and a voice. And the power that it would sort of build in the students and the teachers to realize, ‘wait if we’re really engaged in this and we really are putting ourselves into this, look what can be done.’ That’s a powerful message. It’s tough to do better at getting students engaged and having that sort of thing. It all just feeds back.”

– Faculty Member

sense of community, with both there is often a shared sense of necessary cohesiveness given community size, proximity to population centers, and a depressed level of human and physical resources.

As alluded to early, COVID-19 may have offered some silver linings in education. The potential of technology to transform educational opportunities was at the forefront during the pandemic. Small, isolated community may utilize technology to connect with more educational opportunities assuming broadband internet capabilities allow (not at all a forgone expectation). Additionally, connecting lessons of place in these small communities to issues beyond those communities can be facilitated through the use of technology.

Lastly, the due to size and resourcing, concerns about program sustainability and long-term viability are shared concerns across PBL/PBE and rural education programs. Many rural schools face routine threats of consolidation with neighboring districts as a matter of survival. A place-based education focus can provide a path for the understanding of communities no matter the future path of school structures and a highly-economical curriculum path to student engagement.

PBL/PBE programs routinely serve rural communities in diverse ways

Learning about local, rural communities, learning from local, rural communities, and supporting local, rural communities were nearly universal goals of the programs investigated in this study. Even if it was simply examining the local, geological landscapes (e.g. at Illinois Valley Community College), connections to place and rural communities were made. The University of Vermont connects their analysis of landscapes with direct community engagement projects via their PLACE program. They see a feedback loop of the support they offer these communities and enrollment at the institution over the long-term.

The University of Nebraska’s Rural Institute Program aims to revitalize rural communities, explicitly connect education to place, and generally improve the possibilities for livelihood

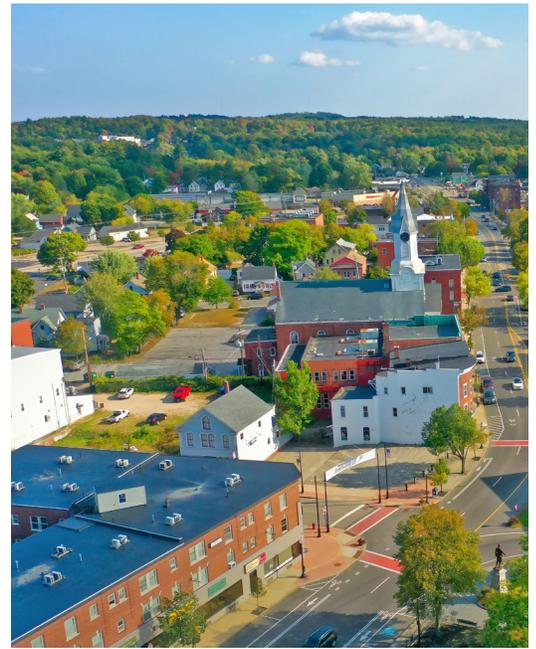
in rural areas. Antioch University New England's CO-SEED program provides grants which connect rural communities, school districts, and various nonprofits to build up local communities. Sometimes universities partner with state agencies to support rural communities economically as well.

They make meaning out of place by determining local needs and training student to meet these needs. University of Michigan-Flint supports the MiSTEM program that fosters and builds pipelines between STEM businesses and local communities. They focus on both STEM skills training and entrepreneurial development. Bowling Green State University specifically employs place-based education methods in conjunction with the Center for Regional Development in Ohio. Their Rural University Program focuses on the economic sustainability and resiliency of rural communities across the state.

K-12 partnerships aid in PBL/PBE program development and outcomes

When interviews inevitably circled back to discussions of teacher training and supporting local communities, institutional personnel repeatedly suggested the importance of K-12 partnerships and relationships to fostering thriving place-based programs. These relationships enrich the programs on each side of the partnership in terms of content and expertise. They provide mechanism for students to connect with higher education institutions if that's their chosen career trajectory. Finally, they provide a substantive way for postsecondary institutions to give back to local communities no matter the place – since K-12 exists everywhere in a reasonably similar manner.

The University of Vermont places many teacher candidates across rural areas as part of the field experience training. Often these are people that have come to the institution from remote areas and have had instilled in them a desire to give back. It is assumed this desire in no small regard comes from a sense of place built as part of their educator preparation programs. Two initiatives at Eastern Michigan University (NEXT Scholars, and Pathways for Future Educators) actively recruit students for educator preparation programs from typically underserved and under-resourced environments. Partnerships like these are mutually-sustaining for the university programs and local communities and provide a model for the effectiveness of PBL/PBE in postsecondary settings.



"It's interesting because all the initial stuff that we did was all in rural schools and the issue became clear pretty early on: this makes a lot of sense in rural schools. With rural schools, it was just that accessibility to the outdoors and the community institutions that made so much sense. When we started this CO-SEED program, we worked in rural schools, mostly in New Hampshire and Vermont, and then gradually and then into Maine and then eventually we moved into Boston with the work that we were doing.

It was the elaboration of what was conventional environmental education to something much broader including the arts and social studies as part of what made it connected to place. The CO-SEED model was that we partnered with Antioch New England and a school or a school district and a nonprofit organization. And in the beginning it was mostly environmental education organizations so Appalachian Mountain Club and New Audubon Society those kinds of partners."

- Former Program Director

“I’ve gone every semester and then somewhere along the way I started doing some other work for them. I’m not volunteering, but I don’t expect to get paid necessarily if that makes sense. I’ve been very aware of how much Shelburne Farms has done for me and my courses. And what I’ve been able to give in return. I’ve done your number of things where I’m just trying to sort of give back. And now next week co-instructing an education for sustainability workshop and again it’s sort of like to give back and really try to keep things sort of balanced reciprocity-wise.

We are quite aware that having an instructor, really a third instructor, for our foundations course was a significant investment of time on part of Shelburne Farms and they’re really investing in that course, in this particular program. And so, some of the summer instruction I’m doing for them this year this summer I’m feeling like I’m investing back and sort of trying to balance the scales.”

– Faculty Member



Postsecondary PBL/PBE often does what K-12 efforts cannot

Given that a goal of this study was to build on the research about place-based learning and education in K-12 settings, it felt fitting to speak with higher education personnel about what they saw as differences between how PBL/PBE played out in the two settings. Respondents were given the freedom to discuss philosophical or institutional differences. With so many of the participants walking the line of higher education and K-12 via teacher educator preparation, their perspectives felt particularly relevant and the conversations were fruitful. As one might have expected, there was a pervasive discussion of differences with respect to content and curriculum standards at the two levels. Really all the other tentacles of conversation somehow related to this core idea. The institutions suggested an ability to act locally while thinking globally as a benefit of higher education when not being so inundated with things like expectations brought by the Common Core Standards (CCS). There was, however, mention that this is a bit ironic since the K-12 schools are much more directly linked to the communities. They could be much more effective in utilizing place-based education if freed of some requirements. Others (all teacher education faculty) suggested that this sort of thing could still be done in a CCS framework as long as educators have the training and are willing to step-out from rote curriculum, even slightly.

Postsecondary institutions were seen as most capable of doing interdisciplinary work – particularly that which goes beyond mathematics and language arts. They were also seen as being safer spaces for discussions of complex and potentially controversial issues such as environmental and social justice. The importance of authentic community engagement in these areas are more supported by the structure of higher education institutions. If supporting the goals of validated personal perspectives, significant, meaningful action, and understanding of place are more supported in the higher education environment, it seems that they are more supportive environments for place-based education.

Conclusion

Place-based education, with its combination of openness to global issues and a lens of local understanding and action, provides a mechanism for more substantive engagement and learning for students. Based on this study, these principles and beliefs seem just as effective in postsecondary settings as in K-12 settings. Increased support for these sorts of programs would seem to be beneficial for all students.

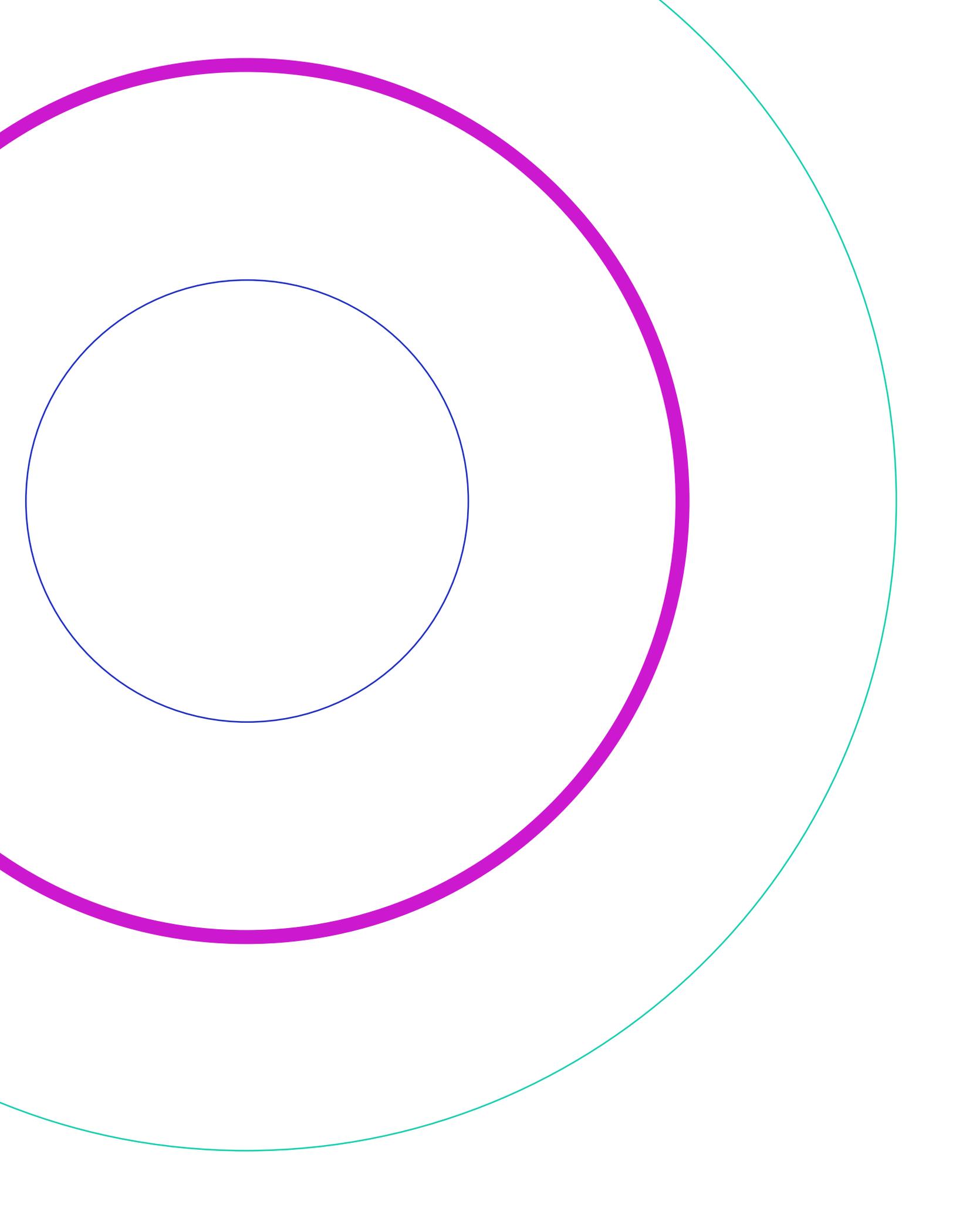
In particular, for students coming to postsecondary education from rural and low-income backgrounds and communities, place-based education and learning programs and methods are likely to provide an avenue for more persistence in postsecondary endeavors and more connections to long-term careers whether back in their home communities or in the wider world.



“Off the top of my head I’m just thinking about standards. One of the things that blows my mind about higher ed is there’s no standards but there’s just the amount of academic freedom. We’ve had to design our syllabus and design a program. And all the support we’ve had along the way to just like follow where we think it needs to go, and of course the assumption that it’s going to be academically sound and rigorous.”

Then in schools I’m sort of thinking is in some ways and effort I think push back against those academic standards and do things a little bit differently and so I’m not suggesting that. K-12 is really like crippled by standards. One of the best place-based educators that we’ve connected with is my son’s teacher both last year and next year. I know how much work based on standards is happening – how she’s sort of working it all together and still getting through the math curriculum and the literacy and then making room for the standardized tests at the end of the year. I think we’ve just in the design of our program have had such freedom to dream and do. It’s part of why I love higher ed.”

– Faculty Member



Case Studies

Case Studies

Antioch University - New England

Place-Based Initiatives at Institution

Antioch-New England (ANE) has been involved in place-based education efforts for over two decades. During the infancy of the field, David Sobel (<https://www.davidsobelauthor.com/>) established ANE as a leader in place-based education before the phrase was even in wider use. (“We didn’t call it a place-based education concentration, but that’s essentially what it was”). At the beginning, these programs were an outgrowth of science and environmental education programs that had a bent toward local conservation. Over time, with the integration of arts and social studies, the important thread of “place” was highlighted (e.g. in their place-based social studies course focused on local history). However, the focus of the programs hasn’t been only content-based material. There has been a broader, deeper integration of the place-based education philosophy – grounded in rich, constructivist practices of teacher education – which has driven and continue to drive program development at ANE.

Programs Include:

- Center for Place-Based Education (<https://www.antioch.edu/centers-institutes/center-place-based-education/>)
- Masters of Education with Place-Based concentration (<https://www.antioch.edu/academics/education/med-exed/place-based-education-med/>)
- Graduate Certificate in Place-Based Education (<https://www.antioch.edu/academics/education/certificates/place-based-education-cert-aune/>)
- Nature-based Early Childhood Education Certificate (<https://www.antioch.edu/academics/education/certificates/nature-based-early-childhood-education-cert-aune/>)
- Masters and PhD in Environmental Studies (<https://www.antioch.edu/departments/environmental-studies-department/>)

Connections to Serving Rural Students

The place-based education programs at ANE have always been rooted in community outreach and, given the setting of the university, naturally rural students and the concerns of rural areas in New Hampshire and Vermont have played an important role. The CO-SEED grant program served to connect Antioch, school districts, and various nonprofits in activities promoting development in rural areas.

CASE STUDY 1

Location

Keene, New Hampshire

Characteristics (NCES)

- 895 students
- Private
- Non-profit
- 4-year (graduate only)
- Town-distant setting

Leaders shared a belief that technology can make many things happen in rural education, but the connectedness that can be formed between schools and communities when place-based methods are implemented go above and beyond these benefits.

Student engagement and program success is assessed via materials from the Place Based Education Evaluation Collaborative (<https://promiseofplace.org/research-evaluation/research-and-evaluation/benefits-of-place-based-education>) as well as more traditional student course evaluations. There aren't specific assessments aimed at examining rural student engagement, but outcomes such as creating more active citizens and stewards of the environment are targeted. As part of a recent review of the broader teacher licensure program, there have been discussions of more explicit evaluation of the place-based elements of programs at Antioch New England – with an interest in how rural communities are affected.

Thoughts on Interaction of Place-Based and Rural Education

The sense of place via community connections is seen as a core element of place-based education, but not to the extent that place-based education and rural education are synonymous. That said, developing a sense of place is seen as a foundational to the development of equity and to addressing social justice issues that exist in rural communities.

Leaders shared a belief that technology can make many things happen in rural education, but the connectedness that can be formed between schools and communities when place-based methods are implemented go above and beyond these benefits. There is a sense that changes to the education system during the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted this potential. Place-based education leaders at Antioch-New England hope the trend toward appreciating outdoor education persists beyond the pandemic to become more mainstream/accepted. Additionally, there is a sense that this may require more of a fundamental shift in teacher perceptions and training regarding outdoor education and, more generally, constructivist education.

To the extent that rural schools often overlap with communities in financial need, there's also concern that foundational, core instruction will trump richer methods like project-based learning and place-based education until underlying inequities are addressed – especially when teachers and administrators don't necessarily or fully see the value of these methods.

Future Efforts and Other Notes

- The specific coursework leading to the place-based education concentration has seen exponential growth in the few years since its formal inception – even pressing through the overall decline in university attendance during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Antioch hopes to replicate the place-based and nature-based efforts from ANE to their other campuses across the country (e.g. in Santa Barbara, California) in the future.

Eastern Michigan University

Place-Based Initiatives at Institution

Eastern Michigan University (EMU) uses a place-based education approach grounded in three pedagogical anchors: student driven inquiry, a broad sense of community, and authentic civic engagement. First, in terms of inquiry, place-based education is seen as distinct from other constructivist practices (e.g. problem-based education) in that the connection to place provides unique opportunities for student voice and choice. Second, “community” refers not only to individual connections, but entails the broader interconnectedness and interdependence of individuals to the community and environment. Lastly, authentic civic engagement is seen as requiring genuine opportunities to connect with place and gain access to the levers that drive the community and society at-large. It is not enough to simply identify problems and find paths to action, but take those actions in tangible ways. Mindfulness of these anchors drives the place-based education programs at Eastern Michigan.

These philosophical anchors ground teacher education programs which weave place-based education throughout their efforts. Students take human development and educational foundations courses that provide place-based background through academic service learning. Methods practicum courses bring an expectation of incorporating this background into their field experiences. They’ve found that having this system in place keeps students from being overwhelmed with either the theoretical or practical side of things and leads to more authentic use of the best practices in place-based education.

The experiences of those involved with place-based education at EMU highlight the diversity of experiences from which this type of education emerges. Backgrounds such as education for social justice, Waldorf education, and community service learning all bring color to and inform the PBE programs at Eastern Michigan. The personal experiences of the team and their own connections to place inform the programs as well. The place-based education group at Eastern Michigan has strong connections to the Southeast Michigan Stewardship Coalition (SEMIS, <https://semiscoalition.org/>) which was established around 2010. This group works with in-service teachers on projects dealing with eco-justice approaches to place-based education which center on the Great Lakes region.

CASE STUDY 2

Location

Ypsilanti, Michigan

Characteristics (NCES)

- 16,294 students (13,572 undergraduates)
- Public
- 4-Year
- Large Suburb Setting

Authentic civic engagement is seen as requiring genuine opportunities to connect with place and gain access to the levers that drive the community and society at-large.

Programs Include

- EMU Next Scholars Program (<https://www.emunext.org/program/>) – focused teacher candidates from traditionally marginalized backgrounds
- Pathways for Future Educators (<https://www.emich.edu/coe/about/pathways.php>) – partnerships with K-12 providers to identify to and prepare underserved students for a career in the field of education
- MA in Social Foundations and Community Education (<https://www.emich.edu/coe/programs/master-teaching-social-foundations-community-education.php>)

Connections to Serving Rural Students

Eastern Michigan University draws a student body broadly from across the state of Michigan and the region so students who grew up in rural environments participate in their programs, but leaders say it is tough to tell just how much rural effect they have when looking at the student level. At the program level, however, their work with the SEMIS coalition has far-reaching environmental impacts across Michigan including rural areas. There is a belief at the institution that these connections will grow over time and be mutually reinforcing. That is, as SEMIS programs expand, the teacher education program will make more connections which lead more to want to complete PBE practicum coursework in these rural areas.

The place-based education programs at EMU include a cycle of recruitment, participation, and ongoing engagement through the recruitment of new students in the field (including K12 schools). Students cycle back through to their home communities. Students from rural backgrounds have opportunities to give back to these areas over time with the service and expertise. Rural

students go through this cycle and the PBE group at EMU is working to develop measures to assess student engagement and outcomes over the long term. They see the power of sustained mentorships from recruitment to job placement as critical to the sustainability of the programs and for breaking down systemic barriers in the education system. Their methods, with intentional effort, could be applied to most any rural education environment with some success.

Thoughts on Interaction of Place-Based and Rural Education

Given the setting of the university, this topic was not explicitly explored in the interviews.

Future Efforts and Other Notes

- EMU is seen as a leader for teacher preparation in their region with many other institutions looking to them as state standard for programs are ramped up.
- The EMU place-based group is seeking to expand their NEXT scholars program beyond a recruiting venture, but into an actual teacher education program that begins before the students reach EMU.
- Currently programs focus largely on elementary teaching and the group would like to expand their programs into more secondary avenues.

Bowling Green State University

Place-Based Initiatives at Institution

Bowling Green State University (BGSU) uses place-based education methods across a multitude of courses and programs. Traditionally, PBE is often an outgrowth of courses in environmental education. Things are no different at BGSU. Place-based education is incorporated specifically into the following undergraduate environmental studies courses: Introduction to Environmental Studies, Environmental Education, and Field Studies in Environmental Science. Sustainability courses across the campus (e.g. Sustainability: Place & Education, Sustainability (Hi)stories, and Re-imagining Sustainability) utilize these methods to various degrees as well. These programs have become well-established over the past two decades.

One unique feature of the emphasis on place-based education at Bowling Green is the way faculty members are encouraged to incorporate PBE into their courses and are offered specific training on how to do so (e.g. <https://www.bgsu.edu/center-for-faculty-excellence/find-a-workshop1/WorkshopYourCommunity-BasedLearningIdea>). The university library system also provides a reference materials hub for faculty related to supporting faculty in their curriculum development work (<https://libguides.bgsu.edu/kepteachingCBL/support>). Each of these initiatives are supported by the community-based learning department which is a division of broader experiential learning efforts supported via the Academic Affairs office.

Programs Include

- Experiential Learning at BGSU (<https://www.bgsu.edu/provost/academic-affairs/experiential-learning.html>)
- Environment and Sustainability Programs (<https://www.bgsu.edu/arts-and-sciences/earth-environment-and-society/environment-and-sustainability.html>)

CASE STUDY 3

Location

Ypsilanti, Michigan

Characteristics (NCES)

- 18,142 students (14,988 undergraduates)
- Public
- 4-year
- Town-fringe setting

One unique feature of the emphasis on place-based education at Bowling Green is the way faculty members are encouraged to incorporate PBE into their courses and are offered specific training on how to do so.

Connections to Serving Rural Students

While we were unable to identify course curriculum-based effort to support students from rural environmental and Bowling Green State University, preliminary study of the institution uncovered significant efforts to support these students. The Center for Regional Development at BGSU is a member in four-institution, Rural University Program (RUP, <https://www.bgsu.edu/research-economic-development/center-for-regional-development/about-crd/rural-university-program.html>). While place-based curriculum efforts at the school tend to focus on environmental sustainability, the RUP focuses on the economic sustainability and resiliency of rural environments. In many ways the assistance provided by The Rural University Program supports economic development in small, struggling communities across Ohio. The Center for Regional Development (CRD) has obtain multiple grants to provide this kind of support to rural communities. One recent such grant was awarded through the Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge (<https://www.rd.usda.gov/about-rd/initiatives/rural-placemaking-innovation-challenge>). The Reimagining Rural Regions (R3) Initiative will support the revitalization of three rural Ohio communities by focusing on sustainable industry and job growth (<https://www.bgsu.edu/news/2021/05/new-bgsu-initiative-hopes-to-help-rural-communities-attract-keep-talent.html>).

Thoughts on Interaction of Place-Based and Rural Education

Given the indication that there didn't seem to be significant, specific curriculum efforts in this area, this topic was not explored in-depth as part of the interviews.

Future Efforts and Other Notes

- Expansion and follow-up on the “Black Swamp Project” which incorporates place-based methods in sustainability courses (<https://www.bgsu.edu/news/2018/09/black-swamp-project-connects-humanities-to-sustainability.html>).
- BGSU has every intention to keep up its effort at community outreach and administrative-driven efforts to support rural communities. The goal of expanding curriculum efforts to these ends is unclear.

University of Nebraska

Place-Based Initiatives at Institution

The University of Nebraska has well-established, rich connections to the concept of place-based education. Such methods are seen as a foundation for and in-roads toward more culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy in campus courses. They generate student engagement through these practices which focus on local action, instill a sense of wonder for learning, and provide opportunities for authentic, real-world problem solving and research. Even when activities are not directly related to the sense of a particular place, they are place-conscious. This means that even when specific curriculum isn't focused on place being informed by the implications of place can have similar positive effects.

The Nebraska Writing Program (NeWP) is a prime example of place-based education efforts at the University of Nebraska. This program has been around in some form for nearly 50 years and has been focus on place-based education for nearly 30. Place-based education is at the core of the projects mission (<https://www.unl.edu/newp/policy-statement-place-based-education>). Over time, the NEWP has spawned a multitude of specific outreach and spin-off programs (e.g. Husker Writers Program, Rural Institute Program, Nebraska Warrior Writers). The place-based principles are also employed in a number of specific English courses at the university. For example, a sophomore course on writings and communities is highly place-conscious and fulfills a university general education requirement for writing.

Programs Include

- Nebraska Writing Project (<https://www.unl.edu/newp/>)
- The Plain State Podcast incorporates many themes in place-based and rural education (<https://www.unl.edu/english/plainstate-podcast>)
- Place-Based Learning and Outdoor Activities (<https://teaching.unl.edu/resources/introduction-place-based-learning/>)
- Center for Transformative Teaching (<https://teaching.unl.edu/>)
- Husker Writers Program (<https://www.unl.edu/english/get-involved/husker-writers>)
- Nebraska Warrior Writers (<https://humanitiesnebraska.org/programs/nebraska-warrior-writers/>)

CASE STUDY

4

Location

Lincoln, Nebraska

Characteristics (NCES)

- 25,108 students (20,286 undergraduates),
- Public
- 4-year
- City-large setting

They generate student engagement through these practices which focus on local action, instill a sense of wonder for learning, and provide opportunities for authentic, real-world problem solving and research.

Connections to Serving Rural Students

The University of Nebraska makes a concerted effort engage rural students and communities in the state. This is done largely through the lens of place-based education. The Nebraska Writing Project gave birth the Rural Institute Program with a three-pronged mission (<https://www.unl.edu/newp/rural-institutes>):

- Revitalizing rural communities through improved school/community links
- Connecting education to a sympathetic and critical understanding of rural place and heritage
- Improving the possibility for rural livelihood and career, especially for young people, through attention to economic issues in rural communities (housing, entrepreneurship, etc.)

These summer programs connect writers, teachers, students, and communities and the center “place” as the critical element both physically and philosophically. There as other programs at the University of Nebraska seek to generate genuine, reciprocal community partnerships so that all parties benefit. Youth Entrepreneurship Clinics work to build mindsets for business in rural areas using a place-based framework (<https://newsroom.unl.edu/announce/cehs-news/7460/42119>) with goal of more viable rural communities. Many of these viability efforts are facilitated by Rural Prosperity Nebraska (<https://ruralprosperityne.unl.edu/>) which carries on the work of a previous incarnation, the Rural Futures Institute, to provide rural development mechanisms at both the programmatic and personal level.

Thoughts on Interaction of Place-Based and Rural Education

When describing a three-legged stool of place-based education (education, environment, community), there is a sense that this overlaps largely with the key elements of rural education. To the extent that sustainability and viability are fundamental goals of each, the intersection is quite clear. This sustainability isn’t just about the goals of education programs themselves but extends the viability of the programs themselves. Well-grounded, “three-legged” place-based education is seen as a way to increase meaningfulness and engagement in rural communities.

Future Efforts and Other Notes

- They have routinely found that students who participate in the authentic writing programs tend to do better on school-based outcomes like the ACT writing test in addition to upticks in general student engagement
- Continued expansion of the writing projects into more diverse and communities across Nebraska – bringing in more teachers and community members. This network of individuals has to be nurtured over time for program sustainability.

Illinois Valley Community College

Place-Based Initiatives at Institution

As a smaller, two-year institution the scale of place-based programs at Illinois Valley Community College (IVCC) is not at the programmatic level one tends to see at a larger institution. That said, the efforts of key faculty in place-based education at IVCC (and beyond) are significant and show the power of the methods. The place-based education work at IVCC occurs in the geology department. Connecting the study of geology to the personal lives of students through the nearby environment is seen a critical. Whether studying floodplains, fossil records, or natural hazards, place-based education engages students and promotes lasting connections to both content and the community.

Programs Include

- Earth Educators Rendezvous (https://serc.carleton.edu/earth_rendezvous/index.html), started through a National Science Foundation grant IVCC helped create, is an annual conference of geoscience educators. Sessions often include topics centered on place-based education.
- The Interdisciplinary Teaching about Earth for a Sustainable Future program (<https://serc.carleton.edu/integrate/index.html>) established a repository of modules and courses related to geology, environmental justice, and sustainability. Many have place-based elements explicitly, but the nature of the subject matter implies the same goals.
- Teach the Earth (<https://serc.carleton.edu/teachearth/index.html>) is another collection of lessons and courses, many of which have place-based elements, to which IVCC has contributed.
- Various other contributions to work with the National Association of the Geoscience Teachers (<https://nagt.org/index.html>) and Geological Society of America (<https://www.geosociety.org/>)

CASE STUDY 5

Location
Oglesby, Illinois

- Characteristics (NCES)
- 2,413
(all undergraduates)
 - Public
 - 2-year
 - Rural-fringe setting

That said, the efforts of key faculty in place-based education at IVCC (and beyond) are significant and show the power of the methods.

Connections to Serving Rural Students

The Illinois Valley Community College campus lies about 60 miles from the outskirts of suburban Chicago, but the community is a world away and is seen as being in a rural community. Small towns are the norm in the area. The place-based geology work at IVCC takes advantage of the landscape and how students are used to driving across it going from place to place. Students from these smaller towns attend the college most often as a transition to a larger university so student engagement at this level is critical to long-term student success. Connections to place and community support this student success.

Thoughts on Interaction of Place-Based and Rural Education

The overlap between place-based and rural education is seen through using the physical landscape as a medium for geology education in the context of IVCC. Place-based education shows that things on one small scale can have far-reaching implications.

Future Efforts and Other Notes

- The geology PBE at Illinois Valley Community College takes care to recognize the contributions to understanding of landscapes which come through appreciation of indigenous perspectives of those landscapes. Among these is the critique of how European concepts of land usage separate people from the physical environment and thus fundamentally change the connection one can feel with place.
- Work has begun on efforts to revitalize a recently closed quarry so that it can be developed for field trips and fossil research. IVCC faculty have been a part of these efforts (<https://plotnick.medium.com/a-fossil-park-for-illinois-4c2cb44af2e9>) with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

University of Michigan Flint

Place-Based Initiatives at Institution

Place-based education efforts at University of Michigan-Flint are centered in the Office of Engaged Learning (<https://www.umflint.edu/engaged-learning-office/>) which is part of the Center for Global Engagement (<https://www.umflint.edu/cge/>). This setup has evolved over time as various units with the combination of multiple entities of over time (e.g. Center for Applied Environmental Research, Center for Civic Engagement, and a center devoted to entrepreneurship). The collapsing of these units was seen as a way to better leverage resources, personnel, and tools across campus that were all being employed for community engagement-related programs. Personnel at UM-Flint recognize that this has allowed them to foster a consistent message about the usefulness of PBE and community-engaged learning in ways that they wouldn't have been able to otherwise.

Civic engagement is seen as aligned with place-based education. When faculty integrate community-based teaching they are seen as integrating place-based methods. Inquiry and project-based learning are seen as conceptual overlaps with place-based education. All these frameworks for pedagogy are viewed as being more important than specific content. The hope is that faculty can instill an appreciation of “place” into the context of lessons, no matter the subject area. Students are not only exploring place, but having opportunity to have impact in their community. Faculty are expected to build reciprocal relationships with their community partnerships for sustained impact and potential for student growth and future opportunities.

With the Discovering Place program, University of Michigan-Flint serves as one of six hubs for the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative (<https://greatlakesstewardship.org/>). The GLSI supports the implementation of place-based education pedagogy in K-12 schools. As part of GLSI, UM-Flint utilizes evaluation protocols for their PBE programs so they can assess the student civic engagement and other 21st century skills. Alongside these efforts, UM-Flint integrates place-based and community-engaged education throughout their teacher certificate programs from early childhood through secondary certification. These programs are more tangible at the secondary level, but the vision and philosophy are threaded throughout the continuum.

CASE STUDY 6

Location
Flint, Michigan

Characteristics (NCES)

- 6,829 (5,424 undergraduates),
- Public
- 4-year
- City-small setting

Personnel at UM-Flint recognize that this has allowed them to foster a consistent message about the usefulness of PBE and community-engaged learning in ways that they wouldn't have been able to otherwise.

Programs Include

- Discovering Place (<https://sites.google.com/umich.edu/discoveringplace>) brings together UM-Flint faculty and staff with K-12 educators in the region and community member to support conversation efforts in the Great Lakes region
- The MiSTEM program (<https://www.stempipeline.com/glbr-mistem/>) works to support the STEM pipeline in Eastern Michigan with efforts targeted at strengthening STEM culture, providing resources to K-12 STEM teachers, and making connections between STEM educators and business partners in the community.

Connections to Serving Rural Students

While the UM-Flint campus is just outside the Detroit metropolitan area, just to the west, east, and north are rural, agriculture-based communities. Many students at the university come from these surrounding areas, so the campus is perhaps more diverse than expected. Serving students from rural backgrounds is viewed as a diversity, equity, and inclusion issue alongside services for students and faculty from urban environments.

As part of the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity work with MiSTEM, community partnerships between STEM businesses and communities provide opportunities to develop Employer Talent Pipelines in these fields. This, among other initiatives (<https://www.stempipeline.com/stem-in-the-glbr/regional-initiatives/>), can help support long-term economic security beyond what the typical agricultural communities in the Great Lakes Bay Region provide.

Thoughts on Interaction of Place-Based and Rural Education

Both as seen as related to an ability to build off of student's prior knowledge connected to community about which there are familiar – and giving them opportunities for meaningful agency within those spaces. As sustainability in communities is studied there are social, environmental, and economic interactions about with to examine and engage with students. Both can be framed as finding global impact in local issues. It's a matter of pushing past a perceived lack of connectedness that rural communities often feel.

Future Efforts and Other Notes

- Future updates to the general education learning outcomes UM-Flint will include references to place-based education and community-engaged learning. This work will be based on the process knowledge gained while integrating these ideas into the secondary education programs.
- There are hopes to scale-up past GLSI and Discovering Place programs to meet the needs of more students and communities in the local region and greater Michigan.

University of Vermont

Place-Based Initiatives at Institution

The University of Vermont (UVM) incorporates place-based education both as part of programs at the institution and through rich community partnerships nurtured over more than two decades. UVM takes an interdisciplinary approach to utilizing place-based education (PBE) pedagogy. Their place-based certificate program primarily brings together the College of Education and Social Services and Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources. In this way, it's a prototypical collaboration given that these two broad content areas are the most common fields from which place-based education springs. As part of the twelve-credit certificate (started in 2014), students take a course in the philosophical and practical foundations of PBE and capstone in PBE design. The two additional courses are student-interest driven from among courses in the colleges above as well as other departments on campus (e.g. Geography, Community Development and Applied Economics, and Parks, Recreation, and Tourism). This build-your-own approach gives students the opportunity to maximize personal meaning and community engagement – tenets of place-based education.

Efforts in the Burlington community and beyond are integral to the place-based education worked being carried out at the University of Vermont. Just as the institution has done well bringing campus programs under a coherent umbrella, so to, UVM organizes their community efforts in strategic ways. The PLACE program (Place-Based Landscape Analysis and Community Engagement) and an ongoing partnership with Shelburne Farms (<https://shelburnefarms.org/>) drive their efforts. PLACE fosters community-landscape connections through professional development with local schools, research-based landscape analysis, and working with communities on bringing their own vision of place into reality. To date, collaborations with fifteen towns, across Vermont, have been generated and sustained.

CASE STUDY 7

Location

Burlington, Vermont

Characteristics (NCES)

- 13,292 (11,136 undergraduates)
- Public
- 4-year
- City-small setting

This build-your-own approach gives students the opportunity to maximize personal meaning and community engagement – tenets of place-based education.

One such community partnership, with Shelburne, has been particularly fruitful. Shelburne Farms is arguably the most significant conduit for sustainability education in the state of Vermont. Over time, University of Vermont faculty interested in this area, and place-based education more broadly, have developed a symbiotic relationship with Shelburne Farms. UVM faculty offer their content/pedagogical expertise and time while Shelburne Farms provides an outlet in close proximity to campus to support student placements and educator development. The recently developed graduate certificate in sustainability at UVM is a prime example of the way the two entities have collaborated to support ongoing education in the community.

Programs Include

- Place-Based Education Certificate (<https://www.uvm.edu/cess/doe/place-based-education-certificate>)
- PLACE program (<https://www.uvm.edu/place/>)
- Graduate certificate in sustainability (<https://www.uvm.edu/cess/doe/education-sustainability-certificate-graduate-study>)

Connections to Serving Rural Students

The University of Vermont community of Burlington is only home to roughly 45,000 people. The surrounding area and state are dotted with small towns so there is a feel in the state that entire place is rural – the degree is the only issue. The state is rooted in a rural, agricultural history. Typically, each community has its own school. Through general outreach efforts by the university and the specific place-based efforts made via programs like PLACE,

the university is able to create connections with these communities and bring rural students into the fold at the institution. Students in teacher preparation programs often work in rural communities for student teaching which provides an opportunity to give back to these communities in addition to supporting their engagement and appreciation of the issues facing these communities.

Thoughts on Interaction of Place-Based and Rural Education

The study of natural landscapes and sustainability is seen as an important overlap between rural education and place-based education. Rural education – often small in scale – requires focused effort to sustain programs over time. Teaching teachers about the concepts of place-based education which they can live out in their field experiences across Vermont provides for this kind of sustainability. Both place-based education and rural education shine a light on the interface between social and ecological issues. This supports long-term sustainability as well.

Future Efforts and Other Notes

- Have goals to build up the offerings with the new graduate certificate to include things like more outdoor education opportunities and more related to leadership in things like wilderness education and conservation
- Building on existing connections with United Nations networks, the faculty have a desire to extend their network of communities across the United States and world. Being part of a larger regional and global network is seen as critical to sustained, impactful place-based education programs.

Appalachian State University

Place-Based Initiatives at Institution

The primary sources of the direct, place-based education work at Appalachian State University are the Appalachian Studies program and its associated faculty and staff. This work has developed over multiple decades. Some of the earliest work of the kind was supported by a group called Appalshop (<https://appalshop.org/>) which was founded in 1969 as part of federal war of poverty efforts in the region. Appalshop supports educational programs and community-based art projects that focus on Appalachian life and culture. Higher Ground (<https://www.highergroundinharlan.com/>) contributes similar sorts of work to the community. Support of the Appalachian Media Institute (<https://appalshop.org/what-we-do/youth>) by the university supports leadership development and media training programs for rural youth in the surrounding areas. The media programs are highly place-based.

The place-based education at Appalachian State is viewed through an interest lens they call comparative regional studies. Faculty want students to find meaning by examining issues in their local communities (sometimes referred to a “privileging the local”), but the broader goal is having them see connections to the wider world. By examining their own backyards and neighborhoods, students can better understand the larger forces which shape society and culture. These efforts also provide a grounds for challenging stereotypes of the region which permeate the news and popular media while threading concepts of environmental and economic justice into discussions of, for example, national energy policy and how it relates to the lived- experience of people in a region driven by the coal industry.

The Appalachian Studies program at the university began in 1978 and caters to around 20 graduate students at any given time through the masters degree and certificate program. Undergraduate courses in the area reach roughly 300 student per year. The program has two concentration areas: Sustainability in Appalachia and Appalachian Music and Culture.

CASE STUDY 8

Location

Boone, North Carolina

Characteristics (NCES)

- 20,023 (18,061 undergraduates)
- Public
- 4-year
- Town-distant setting

By examining their own backyards and neighborhoods, students can better understand the larger forces which shape society and culture.

Programs Include

- Center for Appalachian Studies (<https://appcenter.appstate.edu/>)
- Master of Arts in Appalachian Studies (<https://www.appstate.edu/academics/graduate/id/appalachian-studies-ma>)
- Appalachian Studies Graduate Certificate (<https://online.appstate.edu/programs/id/appalachian-studies-certificate>)

Connections to Serving Rural Students

Given the location of Appalachian State in a very rural county, there are ready-made, practical connections to serving students from rural and low-income environments. One example is work through the College of Education to serve students and faculty at a Cherokee School in the region with training workshops. These and other outreach efforts are an explicit attempt to reach and recruit students who might not otherwise have awareness of university programs. Additionally, these programs support understanding of local history, culture, and traditions. Place-based education is seen as validating rural students' lived experience. For example, students who typically may be ashamed of their background coming from small, mountain towns see themselves validated in the curriculum – boosting their engagement. Strategic planning work within the Center for Appalachian Studies provides evidence for both the student engagement and the success of community partnerships in general.

Thoughts on Interaction of Place-Based and Rural Education

People and community are at the heart of both. Through the evolution of a program based on studying and making meaning of traditional and contemporary Appalachian life, faculty at the university have embraced how local, rural learning has great significance. This learning cannot help but be grounded in place.

Future Efforts and Other Notes

- The university hopes to expand its national and international exchange of knowledge in the regional studies area while balancing that with maintaining support for the Appalachian Studies program and local communities. This effort is ongoing.
- While the programs have become more interdisciplinary over time, they are still relatively light on scientific programs. They hope to generate collaboration in this area in the coming years.