

To Know the Joy of Work Well Done

*Place-Based Learning and
Sustaining School Communities*



James Lewicki

www.coopecology.com

To Know the Joy of Work Well Done

Place-Based Learning and Sustaining School Communities

James Lewicki A.A., B.A., M.S., M.E.P.D.

www.coopecology.com

copyright@2010

This account of James Lewicki's work as a place-based educator will help us see, in the words of the poet Yeats, that "Education is not the filling of a bucket, but the lighting of a fire." In addition to the generative, community concepts Lewicki urges us to consider, his work is full of the voices of students he's taught and learned from--telling us the story of work well done."

Louis Martinelli: Poet, Playwright, Essayist and Educator.

In this wonderful little book, James Lewicki offers a clear account of the great potential inherent in place-based pedagogy. His passionate, even tenacious, commitment to invigorating the intellectual life of his students illuminates the poverty of our current system—one premised on teaching as telling, curriculum as textbook, and assessment as standardized testing. As we march headlong into ever more complex social and ecological dilemmas, the educational hope of the nation lies with educators like Lewicki who can help teachers in classrooms everywhere shift from the artificial to the real.

Paul Theobald
Woods-Beals Professor of Urban and Rural Education
Buffalo State College

Knowing the Joy of Work Well Done is an up-beat testament of joy and struggle, and of joy in struggle. Many teachers wonder how, given all-too-common threats, fears, and outright prohibitions, they might teach well under the ordinary conditions of schooling. *Knowing the Joy of Work Well Done* shows how. We do good work, Lewicki shows us, when we help connect kids and communities, and when we foster thoughtfulness and wonder in that connection. It will encourage fellow teachers that such connections exist at hand, and at every turn—most surprisingly, perhaps, in our own minds, and already.

Craig Howley
Associate Professor, Ohio University
Director of the Appalachian Collaborative Center

Dedication

A story of teaching springs from a world of friends, colleagues, and students who are too many to acknowledge individually. Yet, can be recognized together as taproots of my learning.

* To the score of YMCA campers, youth leaders, and camp counselors; you were my genesis for what works in community...without you, my work in education would have been much different...with you, I never wavered for what I knew to be true. Thank you.

* To the many students of the North Crawford school district where I taught for 17 years, I thank you for sharing the journey with me, and being the best teachers a student of learning, like myself, could ever have.

* To my many teacher colleagues, I thank you for bringing students to the world of learning through the arts of teaching. And, to those innovative, place-based educators around the country whom I have been honored to get to know and learn from as you create new schools; your work has enabled students to know themselves well, in a world of change.

* Families, and the love therein, remain like a lighthouse, strong and guiding --Aurian, Hana, Cora Rose, Jamie, and Sabrina; your zest for life and compassion for others – teach me, inspire me, and define what courage is all about – reaching for your dreams as you make a difference in the world around you. Renee, whose kindness, friendship and love is like a clear, blue Colorado sky. Mahalo nui.

Table of Contents

	Preface	5-8
Chapter 1	Origins	9-20
Chapter 2	Place-Based Learning	21-42
Chapter 3	Learning Community	43-56
Chapter 4	Respect	57-66
Chapter 5	Listening, Student Voice, Group work	67-80
Chapter 6	Attributes of Learning: Telling your Story:	81-88
Chapter 7	Measuring the Success of Place-based Learning	89-96
Chapter 8	Why Does Place-Based Learning Work for Today?	97-102
Chapter 9	Teaching Excellence and Place-Based Learning	101-122
Chapter 10	Seven Personal Discoveries	123-128
	Epilogue	129-130
	Bibliography	131-139

Preface

The great thing in the world is not so much where we stand,
as in what direction we are moving.
- Oliver Wendell Holmes

*Learning, to me, is where you are taught something and it stays with
you as you move on. - Jenny, 14, Iowa*

In the shifting sands of Canyonlands National Park, I led a dozen college students on a survival trip. With several layers of clothes, a wool blanket, poncho, and handfuls of food, each student trekked and ‘camped’ for five days through the remote regions of the park. It was their final exam: hands-on learning.

The first night we didn’t sleep. We huddled around a campfire talking, laughing, and occasionally shivering as the evening stars moved overhead. An early dawn saw us drift into sleep. Before our hazy dreams had time to take hold, the first rays of sun found us hiking along a sandy creek bed.

In the twilight of this desert day, after hiking many miles through meandering canyons and sudden sandstone escarpments, we searched for a campsite. With the sun beginning its desert descent, we spied a small rock shelter up a narrow canyon, just large enough for the twelve of us. Sunset peeled back to reveal a universe of twinkling stars. We built a fire and rested, sharing an assortment of blankets and patched together ponchos for a ground cover. Warmth and flames quickly deepened the red ocher of the rock ceiling above. Lying on our backs, we suddenly noticed handprints, petroglyphs from ancient Anasazi campers. Firelight revealed not only hands, but also animals and designs. For a brief moment we all breathed in awe. A timelessness had captured our hearts. Tired yet warm under the shelter, we gazed at the long-forgotten art, sharing an iconic moment defining our group’s experience forever.

* * * * *

A rural community located in Southwestern Wisconsin midway along the Kickapoo River. For many years and several generations, Soldiers Grove endured the flooding of the Kickapoo, waters lapping along the curbs of its downtown businesses; Barlow Brothers hardware, the Pontiac dealership, and movie theater – among others - had had enough. Bring in the Carter Administration with innovative federal funding around solar development. In 1979, the entire downtown was moved a half-mile away to a plateau with a view of the river rather than alongside it. The new downtown became America’s first complete solar village.

Ten years later, I was teaching 4th grade students a couple blocks from the old downtown, no hint of buildings anymore, simply large patches of cut grass and a handful of depression era trees extending enormous limbs over this bare space. Walking upon these empty city blocks, my young students noticed that the only trees in the entire 15-acre downtown area were these ancient survivors of the big move. An idea, maybe ambitious for fourth graders, but I as a new teacher, and the students - so full of life - didn't hesitate for a moment. We decided to replant the once thriving downtown, now a park without any trees less than sixty years old.

After mapping the park, planning with a forester, and presenting to the town council; these 4th grade students replanted the former downtown with over 50 seven-year-old white ash, burr oak, and soft maple trees. They also planted over 100 small shrubs for borders and wildlife. That summer, a dry one, you might drive through town and see several students carrying buckets of water from the river to their favorite sapling. From planning to planting to sustaining each tree; these kids made a difference in their hometown.

* * * * *

Such accumulated instances, from wilderness moments to civic engagement, make up my journey of life-long learning. These expeditions and projects have framed my work as an educator, work that illuminates a teaching pedagogy called place-based education. I write from thirty years of teaching young people in K-12 classrooms, place-based field studies, retreats, conferences, and wilderness settings. Many times I've been successful and many times I've stumbled, yet each experience inevitably creates new understanding of what works well in teaching and learning.

Since I love to learn, education has been the perfect fit for me. After working as a camp director for the YMCA in the 1980's, followed by 17 years in K-12 teaching, I became a school coach. Today I design and coach new schools, often with a place-based learning pedagogy. I am privileged to work with educators that create schools where powerful teamwork, generative learning, and unique partnerships take learning into the community to make a difference. Building and sustaining new schools requires art as well as science.

Heart is as important as mind. In offering what works best for me, I draw from my past and continuing experience as an educator; I move from intellect to compassion, theory to practice, objectives to outcomes, vision to reality, and from sixth sense to common sense.

Learning is always full of risk. Treading unknown territories and perceiving fresh patterns are part of this powerful process. Assimilating new knowledge that indeed changes behavior can be scary at times. Nevertheless, each teacher faces these challenges because they realize that what they do in today's schools will multiply many-fold, benefiting tomorrow's world. Whether you teach in the rolling hills of southern Virginia, the diverse neighborhoods of Chicago, the changing suburbs of Denver, or along the rural Oregon coast; this book aims to affirm your work, and, by exploring successful place-based pathways of teaching and learning, I intend to reveal clear patterns that will work for you, and your students, together.

Chapter 1

Origins

The significant problems we face
cannot be solved
at the same level of thinking
we were at
when we created them.
- Albert Einstein

*Learning, to me, is making mistakes and learning from them.
Learning is how to solve and answer questions and problems.*
- Israel, 15, Wisconsin

When I was growing up, I never thought I would one day be a teacher. I imagined being a Forester working in a Western National Forest, or playing 1st base for the Chicago Cubs after Billy Williams retired, or sailing into the setting sun of Melville's South Pacific. Now that I am a teacher, I cannot imagine anything in the world I would rather do.

How did that happen? Slowly, as I left adolescence and gained the experience of adulthood, I realized being a teacher wasn't about playing an authoritarian role, commanding the attention of a classroom, or being the fountain of absolute knowledge. As an adult, I discovered that being a teacher was about something I have always loved - learning.

I've always loved to read and write, thrived on travel, and enjoyed being in the midst of people. Upon graduating from college, I worked for seven years with the YMCA, a place providing vital experiences with youth that shaped my ability and became a fountain of ideas for my future years as a teacher. I created programs for youth, directed summer camps, and organized family activities the year round. These responsibilities asked the most of my emerging skills and gave me back a wellspring of experience tapped to this day. Periods of patience, moments of humor, and various episodes of creative initiative all came into play at the "Y". Moreover, the nature of developing programs at the YMCA insisted on the recipients of those programs often being critical planners. It wasn't unusual for a half-dozen teenagers to initiate a community service or youth leadership program, rather like it's not unusual - these days -- for a student to come up with an exciting place-based idea that quickly transforms into learning experience.

One particular attribute had a long taproot, remaining today as vital to my philosophy as it was back then. T.K.C.F. The Kids Come First. It was there on the YMCA bulletin boards, part of the 'Y' lexicon, and present in relationships between camp counselor and camper. In my early Y work, the TKCF mantra began a slow, though deeply rooted emergence, coming into my thoughts during both small and major decisions. I didn't realize it at the time but TKCF was a wonderful way to stay focused on the honor and integrity of the youth - understanding that the voice and choice of youth was critical to the

success of the mission; fully appreciating that the often conflicting, or at times, counterproductive issues of adults needed to be pushed aside. In effect, TKCF asked myself to attend to the development and pathways of the children and youth regardless of the competing adult issues. Moreover, as mentioned briefly, TKCF also became the disposition that I embraced a few years later as a teacher to ensure that learning projects and school events were student-driven at time rather than only teacher-driven. Therefore, TKCF became a foundational guiding means for my work in establish productive youth/adult partnering, whether in my early YMCA years, teaching years, or now as I support the work of new schools.

My YMCA work took me many places. Olympia, Washington; Newport, Rhode Island; Wausau, Wisconsin; and Maui, Hawaii. The year I worked for the Maui Family YMCA was the third time I lived in Hawaii. This time I returned with Renee and our two young children. Part of my responsibilities included directing a small camp/youth hostel on the Keanae peninsula situated along the famous Hana Highway. The Maui YMCA was a couple hours drive from the camp. I would try to get there several times a month. Jimmy, the Hawaiian caretaker, embodied the TKCF philosophy through his Aloha spirit. Whenever Renee and I arrived with our son and daughter -- Aurian and Hana -- or when I drove out with a vanload of campers or youth, Jimmie greeted us like long-lost relatives. Grabbing a long bamboo pole, he would reach up and select two or three ripe papayas or a bunch of bananas, lowering to the kid's outstretched hands as a gift. Laughing and gesturing, he would show us around the camp, pointing out the change nature had bestowed or share a humorous tale of recent Keanae news. My children, as well as the camp kids, loved Jimmy because they knew he was always there for them. Jimmy embodied the TKCF idea.

That generous YMCA acronym was the first principle I embraced in my work with children and youth. On reflection, it makes perfect sense to me; for the cornerstone of TKCF is based on listening and observation following by inclusion and empowerment activities, a package that is the heart of building a climate of mutual reciprocity; what most call these days a learning community. In short, the first step in teaching is listening; and the first step in working with children and youth is in placing your priorities in order, the children and youth must

come first, then afterwards and in its rightful proportion, the adult world that swirls around them can be attended to.

The second principle I learned from the YMCA, especially after years of directing day camps, residential summer camps, and youth leadership programs is how critical building consequential and compelling relationships are to an individual's learning. Relationships matter. Children, youth, and adults all need and want to be part of something greater than themselves. This need to belong – to be connected -- provides vital energy to schools, whereas the thwarting of that tendency is often the cause of hurtful alienation and tales of woe.

My work with the Y gave me countless opportunities to work with small or large groups of youngsters, often with the task of developing activities and programs. The 'curriculum' of a camp, for instance, frequently came from the campers themselves. Such decision-making shouldn't be confused with pandering and pampering. A camp runs well when campers take responsibility, along with the counselors and director, to create an outdoor community of peers and young adults caring for each other. Everyone is involved - everyone important.

This lesson was driven home in a unique manner one summer when I directed a wilderness camp in the Colorado Rockies. In between YMCA camps, this was my one and only experience at directing a private camp. I had spent the spring hiring camp counselors from parts of Washington and Colorado. In the meantime, the new owners had promised to have the lodge completed by June. When I showed up early on a crisp Rocky Mountain morning during the first week of June, this "camp" consisted of six tepees, folded layers of unassembled canvas, in the dusty loft of the barn. One delay led to another. We spent a good chunk of the staff training week cutting the poles, peeling them, and putting up a tepee camp on a small level promontory populated with Aspen trees, overlooking the 25 horses and corral below.

Teenage campers attended from Salt Lake and Denver with some from distant states as well. Just as I had been promised a bit more, the campers expected something a bit more civilized than cooking breakfast over a fire. After a few days, I sensed that we needed a break from the rigors of wilderness living. I decided we should take the bus to the closest town, twenty miles south, and spend

the day at the hot springs pool and water slide. I didn't anticipate that my great idea for an innocent pool trip would turn into camp mutiny.

The moment I opened the bus doors, several campers took off running down Main Street Steamboat Springs looking for the closest phone booth to call home. They were done with this wilderness character-building stuff! The rest of the day is a long story for another campfire. Needless to say, when I had gathered up all the stray campers and drove the silent bus back to camp, something had to change. These campers were mostly 13- to 16-year olds. We met together and I listened to them. It seemed they wanted a new schedule, an alternative way to approach the day, some different activities. So I told them to plan the last week of camp. I left them alone. When I came back they hadn't just redesigned the week, but they had done it in a manner where all voices had been heard. And in the end they came up with 75 percent of what the camp staff had originally planned. That remaining 25 percent, however, made all the difference in the world, as they claimed ownership for the successful remainder of their two-week camp session.

As an educator these last three decades, I have continued to follow that 25% maxim. Basically, if students are provided the latitude to design at least 25 percent of the lesson, unit, or project, they will move rapidly toward 100 percent ownership. Students have the capacity to drive their learning. In a science class, if the academic objectives ask for an understanding of energy flow through a habitat, why not the students determine if it is a forest, prairie, or wetlands? In an English class, if the academic objective asks for an understanding of adjective and adverb clauses interspersed with participial phrases, why not have the students decide if it will be practiced in informative, persuasive, or creative writing? In a social studies class, if the academic objectives ask for oral presentation skills regarding a local or state policy, why not have the students research the options and arrive at a short list of issues to debate?

I continually look for ways to involve my students, realizing the strength of reaching and surpassing that 25% threshold contributes to significant intrinsic motivation regarding the entire unit or project. Busy designing learning for our classrooms, we teachers often forget that students can help us construct a good share of the work that we typically construct for them. When this collaborative effort occurs,

motivation and follow-through carry a life of its own.

This is especially important in the identification of place-based learning areas in the community. Often there are several potential projects that can be worked to deliver the academic objectives. Enlisting the students in this identification process is often one of their frequently mentioned highlights, for they feel a real sense of power in designing a school experience.

But I am getting ahead of myself, let me summarize. Two interlocking principles stuck with me from YMCA professional to public school teacher, and need repeating. First, always hold the kids as the center of the organizational purpose - The Kids Come First. Second, students can assist as critical planners that drive the nuts and bolts of their own learning. If student's can design, plan, and implement at least 25%; then look for a vital ownership from them. These two ideas, really contrasting items in a common approach, set me up well to become a teacher and advocate of place-based learning, which I will define in depth soon, after I complete this narrative of influential origins.

Finally, guiding my work is the realization that every student's capacity for growth is boundless, the power of learning is transformative, and the nature of learning is energizing. Students, each day, prove to me through their open-mindedness, compassion, and caring -- a simple reality; over the far horizon, around the next corner, and up with the sun on the next day, possibilities reside that are endless.

This belief was kick started for me when I was a student, then later an instructor, at the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) based in Lander, Wyoming. My many experiences in the wilds - whether cross-country ski camping in Yellowstone during January's deep cold; hiking in the desert escarpments of Canyonlands National Park; or wilderness training and climbing in the Grand Tetons - created for me a vivid awareness. Beyond the complexity of cities, suburbs, and small towns, a great natural world existed with its own set of rules and regulations. Shifting from wilderness to school, or from wilderness to city life was an important understanding that learning possibilities are as endless as the many worlds that we inhabit.

In addition, these NOLS courses were my first significant foray into the power of small group dynamics. As a cohesive NOLS

expedition we had gathered a powerful momentum that a solitary person could never hope to equal. Overcoming physical challenges had buoyed our social capabilities as well. Leadership was pervasive and a servant of the group's needs. Though, at the time, hiking along the Continental Divide, I was still a half dozen years from entering the classroom; solving problems, learning from mistakes, listening to varied viewpoints, and caring for each other, all attributes of successful expeditions, emerged as standards of learning in my future classrooms, and are essential design features as I work with educators to create new schools.

At age 28, I chose to teach rather than continue down a YMCA administrative path that would have assigned me farther and farther away from the campers, leaders, and youth. It was a good career change. As a teacher for the next seventeen years, I was able to take the best of my YMCA years and bring it into the nine-month learning pathway called a school year. Working with students in self-contained classrooms, or departmentalized teaching, or leading a charter school, I have experienced the fullest range of instructional landscapes. While I have been fortunate to spend my time in a rural district as a public school teacher, I equally admire the fortitude of my public school colleagues in urban and suburban districts as well as the dedication of private school educators. Whichever teaching landscape, the principles of place-based learning will fit them all.

These last nine years I have been able to hold onto and expand my leadership experiences by moving into the arena of educational reform and innovation as a speaker, writer, workshop leader, school coach and educational consultant. I have helped design, implement, and coach over 100 new elementary and/or secondary schools in 15 different states.

Schools are not walled off institutions, but places of learning that seek to include as they expand the capacities of those they serve. The mission of public schools isn't public because of taxes; it is public because of the democratic principles of inclusiveness and constant attention to actualizing a powerful and productive learning place for all the students of a community. A place of diversity is implicit, yet a place of communication, respect, and acceptance is also sought, as each school works to define the experience of democracy for its members – young and old alike.

Changes in schools are incremental, with sparks of innovation occurring in a lesson, unit, or even a whole department. The overall climate for change is as slow as molasses in spring. Nevertheless, the caring displayed by the teaching profession is awesome, and it is this vital energy that day in and day out, constructs pathways of success. This growth is complex. I have witnessed that in some schools, there are as many different philosophies of education as there are teachers. In some districts the pedagogy is strictly directed by insular towers of budget-weary administrators, and in some states the common sense process of schooling has succumbed to a legislative one - forcing teachers to comply rather than to listen and learn. Whatever the local predicament or possibility, it is important to remember that teachers have a fundamental desire - to create the best learning for those students in front of them.

With this in mind, I have compiled a story of my work in education, especially productive ideas, student voices, and considerations for establishing place-based learning in your teaching career.

What can a new teacher look forward to in the years ahead? Furthermore, how can a veteran teacher answer the call of these changing and challenging times? I believe the front end of the twenty-first century is a fascinating time to be a teacher. Innovation and change are creating new contours of what learning is and how best to go about this business. I see place-based learning as a significant contour defining today's educational landscape; clearly, a best practice -- also a practice that brings out the best in all of us -- teachers and students alike, as we transform school academics into community realities.

Life is changing rapidly, with half the professions today's students will one day occupy yet to be created! An educated person is one who knows, first-hand, how to navigate this level of change and can successfully work with it. Moreover, society and those communities that make up its mosaic are challenged as well. Besides powerful and purposeful, place-based learning involves the students in the life of the community. This fits. Students are needed; each community has needs to be met; together and in partnership, the school, through place-based projects, can re-invigorate the life of its home community while its students master academics as well.

Innovations are expanding each year, pushing fresh ways to build a more dynamic structure to examine how we run schools, how students learn, and what it means for teachers to be learners. Schools are pulling hard on the corners of tradition which, when uncovered, will reveal what teachers have known for years: that students are full of passion and possess the capacity as learners to make a difference in their neighborhoods, towns, and community.

I also want to encourage new teachers to reach for their dreams. And, about those new teachers, the best way to prepare a teacher to teach is to encourage them as a learner to learn. Though culture sets deep channels often determining how teachers approach their job, increasingly schools that matter are defining teaching as this life-long commitment to learning.

During my NOLS instructor course, for instance, each candidate taught skills like map and compass, rappelling, cooking, or first aid and then received feedback from the students they had just taught. During my teacher training, my student teacher supervisor continuously built an analysis of my efforts. When I was a standards reviewer for the American Camping Association, we always visited camps with a partner so we had an opportunity to learn from each other. This emphasis on continual feedback, building learning as one gains experience is vital to sustaining a profession as ours; new teacher or veteran.

From 1988 until 2002, I taught in a special corner of rural Wisconsin in the North Crawford School district. I held different positions that, in many respects, are worlds apart. My first several years were in a self-contained 4th grade, where all the subjects made up the life of my class; many wonderful memories, a great place to start teaching. Next, for a handful of years, I taught 5th/6th grade social studies and reading. I benefited greatly from the excellent work of my teaching colleagues as we shared this exciting time of the intermediate school years.

As we moved into the mid-90's, my next stop was teaching English and Language Arts to seventh and eighth grade students. I'll never forget the year of school construction and building a new wing when I taught these students in the emptied out weight room! Then, I ventured into the world of a charter school that I designed, developed, and implemented as the lead teacher. With my bus license in hand,

two worthy aides, 22 students and a fully integrated place-based curriculum we spent over 100 days in the field, learning all subjects, and for that matter, all levels of problem-solving and group dynamics as well.

I was fortunate that my YMCA camp work and wilderness expeditions led me to see what might happen if we removed all the organizational barriers. Moreover, through the charter school, I was able to fully understand the deep learning that takes place when a school provides the climate to let teachers and students do what they do best: learning and collaborating together. The news is good from that educational Lake Wobegon! Students will teach, students will lead, and students will achieve academically, in ways that would reduce any high stakes test to a din of irrelevant ashes in its fiery wake. All students have tremendous power often awaiting a purposeful endeavor associated with tangible skill building.

For 17 years, I was able to teach with a group of distinguished teachers: Russ Gilbert, a Presidential Awardee in Math and Science, who showed me a passion for learning that filled his students with myriad moments of pure joy and years of significant learning; Eileen Robel, my neighbor and math teacher excellent, who demonstrated an untiring commitment to the teaching of mathematical understandings to all her students, tirelessly tutoring individual students during lunch and after school to ensure success; Joni Pederson, Wisconsin's 2001 Teacher of the Year; a joy and inspiration to watch as she inspired students, K-12, in Art; John Armbruster, a social studies master teacher, one day lecturing his class as Abraham Lincoln, in full attire; the next week, convening a two-day Civil War reenactment of Gettysburg with campfires, overnight, and local reenactors sharing in the event; Lauri King, a creative science teacher comfortable with energetic seventh graders in Life Science for one class, followed by a handful of Physics students the next period; Marsha Chestelson, a Phy. Ed. teacher who engaged students in a love of life sports whether ice skating, cross-country skiing, rollerblading, hiking, beach volleyball, mountain biking, or swimming; Karen Brandl, a fellow English teacher, with a magic touch, who transformed one of the hardest classes to teach, Applied Communications, into the most popular and productive class around; and John Lynch, a classroom neighbor when I taught 4th grade - his example of teaching reading continues to be the

best of the best practices.

Each of these professionals have shaped my role as a teacher, and therefore, framed much of my success in place-based teaching as well. I thank them, for any book on teaching and learning, is shaped profoundly by the community of teachers where the author has practiced. This is especially true for me regarding place-based pedagogy, since many projects have worked because of the self-less teamwork of these folks mentioned above, and many other colleagues as well. They are quite a unique group and our corner of Wisconsin is privileged to have them as teachers.

Though each has blazed a unique teaching trail, many of our learning landmarks along the way have much in common. First and foremost, is an abiding respect of students. Effective teachers simply do not encounter sustained disrespect in their classrooms. Why? Because of the learning itself. Students, as veterans of years of various teaching styles, admire and respect places of genuine learning as opposed to places of rules, regulations, and rote drill of simplistic instruction. Student brains are hard-wired for complex learning intertwined with social interaction in lessons that have meaning to them. In my teaching work, I have strived to place students first while building places of learning in the school and out in the community.

I have arranged To Know The Joy of Work Well Done with the voices of students who have experienced this type of learning, as well as my own stories portraying the nuances and dynamics that work, or in some cases don't. For decades, I have been utilizing place-based learning with my students, and more recently, I have been fortunate to help others design and deliver solid place-based learning in their new schools. Conducting workshops or attending conferences, I'm so impressed with discussions regarding place-based learning. Insights accumulated, some used here, provide a window into the intrinsic worth that so many, young and old, teachers and students, parents and administrators, attach to this work. As Kelley, 14, a student who thrived on place-based learning, poetically proclaimed after 100 days of learning in the community, "*What you learn makes you who you are. And you never stop. Learning is an eternal flame that catches everyone in a bonfire of brilliance. To learn is to live life.*"

Chapter 2

Place-Based Learning

If a child happens to show that he knows any fact about astronomy, or plants, or birds, or rocks, or history, that interests him and you, hush all the classes and encourage him to tell it so that all may hear. Then you have made your schoolroom like the world.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

I had never known just how fantastic science could be...For me being in the field, mucking around in ponds, spending whole days outdoors and using all my senses to take in the knowledge that textbooks try to pound in with facts, was wonderful. For me there is no better way to introduce students to a subject than by literally making it real to them. Learning took on a whole new dimension for me.

- Ximena, 14, Wisconsin

I have had many best moments in my educational career, many times when the fire of learning was alight and the focus of the student community was bright. By sharing voices from students I hope to underscore, from their perspectives, the taproot of place based learning. As a continuing and consistent part of my life's work, this approach to education has been a worthy partner. I will explore the primary features of place-based learning, before moving onto aspects that ring true with educators, students, and community members from across the country and in many different kinds of schools.

Place-based learning is a term that embraces a philosophical and pedagogical approach to teaching and learning. As an organizing principle, this approach to learning is a broad pathway, a 'curriculum construct' that is the compelling learning blueprint for a new or reinvented school, grade level, subject-area department, or a classroom. Though the 1990's witnessed a significant emergence of this approach (see: www.ruraledu.org) the qualitative aspects of place-based learning have deep and interlocking historical roots. Evidence of place-based education permeates the education literature from John Dewey to today.¹ I prefer to term it place-based learning, as it has been for me a vivid verb in my teaching career.

My memories of place influencing learning go back to my first years of teaching. One event was an important marker for my emerging teaching years in alerting me to the power of place in a student's learning cosmology.

It was an early morning fire drill one spring. Shirt sleeved students milled about snow-free sidewalks, talking in staccatos of enthusiasm, the warmth and sunshine activating awareness of the changing seasons. Each group soaked in gallons of fresh air, aware of the contrast between a winter of 'insidiness' and the spring surrounding them. Later this very same day, I led my fourth-grade class back outside for a journal activity. The day before, the wind had whipped, the air temperature never breaking 30 degrees. This day the students stepped outside into a 65-degree calm, blue sky. Huge amounts of water melted from assorted playground snow piles. Miniature lakes built from snow dams suddenly broke, releasing a flurry of sound as water cascaded downhill. Our class found the only place to write - a piece of sun-

dried sidewalk running parallel to the playground. Each student sat down, took a few sensory moments, and then wrote in his or her journal. Erica, 10, wrote with a strong flourish of pen across paper, and in a few stunning moments handed me the following.

Spring certainly has its miracles. What miracles? Baby animals, rushing water. But to me, there is something deeper in spring. I have memories. Memories of my Grandpa playing with me when I was only five. Memories of my family taking trips. That's what I find special in spring.

Everyone finds something different in the rushing water, the returning birds. Not in sight alone, but in thought and in heart.

When I look into the partly frozen river, I wonder how many people, old and young, have listened, seen, and wondered as well. I wonder how long it will be until the partly frozen river will be destroyed by the coming of spring.

This is my favorite time of year. Everything is new. Everything is warm and bright, inside and outside.

Spring is magic.

I can touch the feeling then, today: surprise, delight, and finally a wave of appreciation regarding the bottomless capacities of young students to connect with place and then convey deep thoughts.

Again and again, I have experienced student writing -- engaged by place -- to be profound and potent. Given the time and space - and in this case, place - young people readily engage in thoughtful writing like Erica's piece.

Two widely read and deeply respected authors regarding place-based learning are David Orr and Paul Theobald. Orr envisions place-based learning as "a patient and disciplined effort to learn, and in some ways, to relearn the arts of inhabitation. These will differ from place to place, reflecting various culture, values, and ecologies. They will, however, share a common sense of rootedness in a particular locality."²

In effect, Orr is looking for place as the framing of purposeful schooling. How well do our students really

understand their home communities? How well do they grasp the many unique features of their local landscape? What stories from elders have they heard? What stories from elders have they not heard? Whether a rural area, small town, suburban enclave, or urban neighborhood, there are literally thousands of ideas that place-based teaching and learning embrace to provide students this ‘rootedness’.

Theobald describes how place-based learning can bring subject matter into a forceful means for student understanding. “The school’s place allows educators to take what is artificial out of the schooling experience.”³ Theobald details this development more by digging into the instructional possibilities of place-based learning. “Students can arrive at a deeper understanding of, say, mathematics, when it is used to chart the trajectories of local disposable income. They arrive at a better understanding of life sciences by doing an audit of local flora and fauna. They understand history as a force in one’s life when they chart the historical developments that have left their community in its current condition. They understand the power of aesthetics in one’s life when their efforts in art class culminate in a community mural, or when the music class captures the ethos of an era and shares it with other generations.”⁴

This artificial aspect that Theobald underscores is evident when subject lessons ring hollow with skills that are looking for a home to be applied in. From kindergarten to twelfth grade, schooling has become largely an inside occupation. We cut off children and youth from the outside world; and in so doing cut them off from the vitality and richness of the community – both natural and social -- as the ‘ultimate teacher’. We have brought generations inside, creating artificial learning scenarios, increasing the disconnection of each succeeding generation from these natural and social systems that have been our truest teachers for millennia. This circumstance has resulted in students missing out on the vast potential of community study, habitat study, and the overarching narrative of home; in effect, developing deep understanding and connections to one’s place. Rather than

intensive seminars, projects, and symposiums – field studies-- students are left with the occasional field trip.

Where does the community really fit into the learning at hand? How can the interests and issues of small villages, rural towns, suburban enclaves, or urban centers be brought front and center into each student's academic life? For students, it isn't just their bodies that seldom get out; tragically, their view becomes too parochial as well. And, most critically, their ideas, solutions, and energy are untapped – held captive 95% of their K-12 education. Rather than holding the community as a catalyst, and a potential pedagogical framing of significant learning, an increasing separation splits the world of community from the world of school, at the exact time when young people are crying out for involvement and integration into the life of their home community and/or neighborhood.

Place-based learning embraces an approach to teaching where each student experiences the community anew. Place-based learning is not exceptional; rather it is education with the familiar material of the local place. Dovetailing science standards and art standards into a Botany project reflecting local flora expands the range of a student's ordinary schooling experience. I have named this cornerstone principle of place-based learning community sensibility, blending common sense and community awareness into the central features of lessons, units, projects, and, even the school's mission. During a place-based effort, teachers embrace this community sensibility by designing academic core objectives with community needs and resources so the result -- from the student's frame of learning – is that the two are indistinguishable from each other.

On one field study, I recall a student, with a tongue in cheek query, lifting a barbwire strand high so I could duck under it, when we were hiking through a pasture to an upland limestone formation. “Hey, Mr. L. is this when we go from our chemistry class (we had been doing water monitoring on a wetland) to our English class? (we were about to write some poetry in our journals, inspired by the view at the top of the limestone outcropping).

To clarify this feature, walk through the many school doors these days, too often the commercial textbooks and the aligned state and/or federal testing take a disproportionate place value, thereby driving the learning. Then – tragically -- a student's experience will,

too often, be devoid of the rich learning evident in local history, main street economics, and natural habitats; to pull only three foci from the hat of place-based learning. The consequence? Rather than holding the community as a catalyst and organizing place as a means of learning, a deception of what is important sets deep within each student. To be clear, this lack of looking at the community as a rich partner for core academics is very often the fault of a school's structure, rather than the imagination of the educators themselves. Much too frequently, we have created schools as indoor places, confined and confining with scanty, superficial connections to the community where reality is unfolding. And this community reality is time and time again what drives purposeful student learning in the schools that I work with these days. And – to be sure – realities that are unfolding in ways that ask, albeit silently, for the engagement of youth and youthful energies.

I have presented place-based learning to hundreds of educators across America and abroad. I seldom ever receive “barrier talk” about the concept itself. Most teachers readily grasp that local government can be a social studies workshop, watershed hydrology a great field-based science activity, forestry management a math project, and the local newspaper a great practicing Internship. What seems to get in the way is all the vast limiting conditions; the schedule, the budget, the permission, the entourage of assessment demands, and the isolation of the profession itself. These form an aggregate of barriers that have, too often, narrowed the teacher's dreams of what is possible.

At this defining time in education, after a generation of reform minded initiatives, and billions of dollars invested in change – it is time for the dream of place, the dream of engagement, and the dream of student's connecting place to themselves and others.

Place-based learning is often evident in student-led and student-initiated projects; yet it is more than projects alone. A critical community-partnering dimension to the mix is also needed. Barbara Cervone, director of What Kids Can Do www.whatkidscando.org (a national nonprofit that documents the value of young people working with teachers and other adults on projects that combine powerful learning with public purpose) stated this clearly when she pointed out:

The project work by students always involves a mentor, sometimes also an internship linked to the

project. In the case of the Rural Trust, the project work by students also must respond to and fill a community need; PBL [place-based learning], in the words of the Rural Trust, is a strategy through which "schools and communities get better together."⁵

Place-based learning is also about service, attending to the community. Woodhouse and Knapp describe that place-based pedagogy emerges from the particular attributes of a place, is inherently multidisciplinary and experiential while often including a participatory action or service.⁶ This service aspect is a great way to actually originate a good place-based commitment. Holding the community and its needs in consideration as students discuss their next academic steps often reveals some great project ideas. Like the 4th grade tree planting idea; often what is missing from a community becomes the gap that students want to bridge. And when they fill this gap successfully there is a wonderful sense of achievement. Cheri, a high school senior from South Dakota, echoed this sentiment when writing at a place-based conference:

We visit the elderly in my community and I visit my friend whose name is Hilde. She is 80 years old, and she is a widow. She lost her husband and never had any children, and she looks at me as her daughter. Hilde makes me feel needed, she never reflects on the bad, but the good. She has given me a chance to reflect on my future and given me a light I would never have seen before. This is the light of hope, courage, and bravery.

Place-based learning can also be examined through the lens of social change as well as academic achievement. Interviewed for the What Kids Can Do website, Doris Williams, then Capacity Building Director for the Rural School and Community Trust emphasized how building a partnership between young and old benefits both.

The adults have history and wisdom of the years, but the young people have their energy! And they are the ones who are in touch with the current situation, and wisdom from the years means nothing if you're not in touch with the current situation. It doesn't mean a whole lot if you don't have the energy to do something

with it! That's what young people bring. The civil rights movement would never have been a movement without young people. So it's important to link young people and adults, and get them respecting each other and respecting what each other has to say and what they think.⁷

From the community's perspective, place-based learning often asks that community members participate as partners in the education of the youth. Each community has numerous people with a wide range of talents and experience who can contribute-- applying and enriching the place-based curriculum. People with thoughtful ideas about place proliferate throughout each community.

Over the years, I have experienced many kinds of place-based learning. Each learning experience echoes the sound of community and school joining forces. Here are but a few examples:

- My colleague, Russell Gilbert, and myself worked with our 6th grade students in creating a maple syrup company. They tapped trees, bottled the syrup, made \$1,000 in profit, and formed a foundation to return \$100 grants back to the community.

- Each spring, my 4th grade students would visit Leita Slayton, a 50-year veteran of teaching. Leita was a remarkable woman who lived well into her 90's in the same log cabin her family built when they first arrived in the Kickapoo Valley during the 1850's. From this experience my students were inspired to research and narrate each family story of how they came to call the Kickapoo Valley home.

- Kickapoo River Institute students conducted long-term monitoring of hydraulic, plant, and wildlife changes in a Department of Natural Resources wetlands restoration project on 1,750 acres with a half-dozen new ponds recently 'scrapped'. This project entailed longitudinal field studies, working with a Department of Natural Resource soil scientist, hydrologist, and wildlife biologist.

- These same KRI students became involved in original primary

source research to examine the Kickapoo Valley Civil War veterans, pioneer heritage stories, and investigating a student's query "Did the Kickapoo Indians ever live in the Kickapoo Valley?" which asked for extensive archival research behind Native American treaties and Upper Mississippi early 19th century history.

- Native Plant Propagation: Students learned to propagate native plants from seeds and cuttings. Working with a local farm, students mastered techniques, then partnered with an AmeriCorps watershed project to transplant these plants in the schoolyard, community, and watershed restoration project
- County Beach Handbook : Students created a handbook of area beaches containing information that included: scientific and geological measurements, diagrams and facts, historical events, an identification for sea life, recreational information, ocean conservation information, maps, photos, drawings, etc. Working with a local geologist and harbormaster, the students involved various citizens, fishermen, divers, historians, and game wardens that also contributed to the handbook.
- Local Economic Development: A high school Future Business Leaders of America class conducted an economic inquiry into the spending patterns of members in their community. Results indicated that too much money was being spent outside the county, thus compromising the local tax base and, ultimately, contributing to the demise of county businesses. Sharing this information and conducting a 'buy local' campaign, the students were able to increase county spending over six months by several million dollars.
- Watershed Analysis: The Department of Wildlife partnered with several high schools to collect, tabulate, and compile necessary data regarding the Yampa River and watershed in Colorado. To provide a comprehensive river analysis, students measured pH, alkalinity, hardness, dissolved oxygen, metals, total dissolved solids, and water temperatures at different

points along the Yampa. Utilizing students as researchers provided many agencies with valuable data, and asked students to perform science at a 'useful' level.

- Tide Pools Brochure: Meeting a need in the community for an informative brochure, a group of high school students combined photography and advanced biology to produce both a brochure and website of tide pools along the California coast.
- Original Historical Research: A group of middle school students discovered some new facts about their neighborhood in a unique community history project related to local architecture. The neighborhood to the school had modest sized lots and a number of houses designed in the cottage or "Craftsman style." Their research revealed the relationship between the Craftsman movement and the Sears and Roebuck catalog, which sold thousands of "assemble yourself" home kits at the turn of the century. With a copy of the 1900 catalog, they discovered a number of genuine Sears Roebuck homes and verified their findings by checking deeds and building permits from the town office.
- Fine Arts CD: A school developed and produced an original CD title "Winter on the San Juan Ridge" that comprised original songs, artwork, storytelling, and poetry by students about their rural place. The \$1500 profit from the sale of 500 CD's helped create a new non-profit venture, Children Reaching Out, offering items in a catalogue, created and marketed by young people. This visual and performing arts project was achieved by tremendous support from area photographers, recording studios, authors, and small business people.¹⁰

Numerous community people enabled the depth and sophistication of these above projects and typically support place-based learning. Once community people are brought into the design and planning portfolio, an interaction between school and community builds a momentum upon itself, generating new contacts and avenues

of study. From my vantage point, the unheralded hero of successful place based learning is the community itself. A stronger school/community connection is the essence, the driving force. Using the daily life of the community to draw out lessons is nothing new. John Dewey set the philosophical tone early. Vito Perrone, noted Harvard Educator, Dean of Harvard Graduate School of Education, described Dewey's approach to education.

Dewey stressed the need for a "new pedagogy" that calls upon teachers to integrate the content of schooling with the activities of daily life. He understood the prevailing separation between school and life as assuring a limited education for children and young people, emptying the possibilities. In addition he viewed education at its best as growth in understanding, capacity, self-discovery, control of events, and ability to define the world--in other words, as always leading somewhere.⁸

Somewhere was often close to home. Dewey believed education was at its best when students were learning from "the familiar material of ordinary experience."⁹

Exciting ideas, what's the first step? Well there are many, and, just like the projects themselves no teacher would suggest that these ideas are the same for everyone. So, rather than try to create some sort of place-based template, I have framed some important considerations for you to contemplate. Ahead, I will be more explicit, and I hope, by sharing multiple examples, you will be able to take away valuable aspects of place-based learning that will fit your school as well as your distinctive teaching style.

Take a group of students outside, and begin the process of acclimating. Students need time to get used to a new classroom with a tall ceiling. You can't expect students to stay indoors for 107 days then suddenly go outside without feeling a bit overwhelmed. I recall teaching Math Their Way to first-grade students. The program was rich with many manipulative blocks, reminding me of an assortment of Legos. We needed several days of free play with these colorful blocks before we could really get down to business. Likewise, the first trip to the state archives in Madison differed from the third and fourth. By the latter, students marched right into the manuscript room at the Wisconsin State Historical Museum, sat down, and examined the historical documents as if they owned the place.

Besides working well in a particular subject area, the real power of place-based learning is its unmatched ability to integrate many subject area standards into a new student paradigm for learning. From the humanities to math and science to technology and media; if the project is comprehensive the learning goals can be as well. Beth Spieles, with the Center for Rural and Regional Studies at Southwest State University in Marshall, stated the broad scope of place-based learning in an interview when she stated, "It's not studying the environment as another subject on top of everything else. It's using your local environment -- what's outside your door -- to study everything within the realm of subjects that you would normally study in the traditional classroom."¹¹

As you shift a pedagogical philosophy and learning plan into the community, this attending to new ways of learning will take time. Familiarity is always a key to sustaining achievement. It is important to distinguish a single field trip from field studies. One is a singular event; the latter repeated experiences over time. A good place to start field studies is at one of the many natural areas that each community is proud of.

One reason I developed a charter high school, based upon learning in the field, was an experience I had teaching my 45-minute English class of eighth-grade students. One afternoon, I was discussing with my students a weekend hike with three of my daughters, Hana, Cora, and Jamie along the limestone bluffs of Wildcat Mountain State Park. The more I shared with my students about the hike - the hawks flying below us, the blue sky, the warm spring winds - the more their many faces were overtaken by blank stares.

I pushed onward, "You know the State Park up the valley...close to where the Kickapoo River begins?" The blank looks continued. "C'mon, you've been canoeing from Ontario right below the park, right?" More stares.

Finally catching on, I asked, "How many of you have canoed through Wildcat Mountain State Park?" Seven of 26 students raised their hands.

How could nearly three-quarters of my students have spent the first 13 years of their lives without experiencing the upper reaches of the Kickapoo River, which defines their valley for 100 meandering

miles and flows by their homes a mere 15 miles south? One reason is that we, the schools; constricting our schooling day and practice to the brick and mortar; moreover, organized by the sequential, often separated, Carnegie subject defined course-based curriculum, had not seen the land or villages as a worthy enough 'classroom'. In effect, the physical building often becomes a 'comfort zone' that teachers are reluctant to move away from on any significant level. And the disconnected curriculum and testing mandates don't align well with the interdisciplinary life that defines natural and human habitats of place. Contrast this with the idea that a place based teaching and learning philosophy embraces the many unique learning platforms, whether the Kickapoo River or Main Street, that make up your own community – prioritizes them – unleashing the potential to transport a young person to phenomenal understanding and insight?

Paul Gruchow, noted Minnesota writer, put it best when he wrote in Grass Roots: A Universe of Home:

For me, the most important place on the farm was the cattail marsh at its north end. To get there, you took the farm's interior road, a grass track that ran east to the edge of the maple grove and then north as far as the waterway that drained into the slough from the east. The physical distance was not quite half a mile, but so far as I was concerned it might have been halfway around the world.¹²

Fifteen months after my conversation with 8th graders, the Kickapoo River Institute Charter School, mentioned earlier, ended its singular school year with a bicycling, hiking, and canoeing trip from the source of the Kickapoo to its confluence with the Wisconsin. We located the seeping source of the Kickapoo River, hiked until the stream was large enough for our canoes, and bicycled miles down the valley as well. On the fourth day we canoed again, leaving the mouth of the Kickapoo, gliding into the Wisconsin River, mere miles upstream from its confluence with the Mississippi. All of us felt a deep accomplishment, a strong sense of place, having traveled the length of the Kickapoo River, from origin to end. I understand this trip sounds more like a scouting adventure than school, and, in many ways -- it is. But these mini-community centered expeditions have a distinctive purpose of establishing a cohesive team of students; and moreover, opening each student's eyes to the wonders of home. I will

emphasize, again and again, throughout this book, that once the students are connected to place, then, without hesitation the academic standards will flow into each new place-based experience -- the learning really taking off.

Kelly captured this connection when she wrote:

Dear Kickapoo Valley,

For the time I have spent in your valleys, among your wooded forests and on your river I would like to thank you. I value you for your vastness in variety. From the tops of your ridges to the bottom of your streams, your diversity in life is amazing...peacefulness on your waters, enlightenment standing on your hills, joy and refreshment hiking through your forests will always be something that make me what I am today.

And Chris moved the place-based anchor feeling further with his thoughts:

...An island in time. Perhaps that is what the Kickapoo Valley is. A home to a diverse number of plants, animals, and people. No matter how far I travel, no matter what corners of the earth I visit, I will always return to the Kickapoo Valley. As time passes and changes occur it will forever be to me a place of small country stores and gravel roads that forever wind through the hills. It will stay in my heart as a place where I learned to love the land, a place where I learned to love the people of the land, and most of all a place I can call home.

Both Kelly and Chris articulate the profound impact schooling can have to students when it connects in a deep and vital manner to the place called home. When this is undertaken, curriculum leaves its separate silos of specialization and becomes strongly integrative and anchored anew. Place-based learning will push pedagogical design towards full integration, because studying the community's history, natural habitats, and economic capacity demands a big picture approach. A garden naturally produces diverse colors; likewise it is the nature of place-based field studies to integrate divergent subjects to reflect reality. As you can well imagine, place-based learning, by its very nature, is interdisciplinary.

Gregory Smith writing in Phi Delta Kappan relates that the purpose of place-based education is ‘to ground learning in local phenomena and students’ lived experience.’¹³ Smith goes on to suggest five thematic patterns evident in place-based education work to ‘engage a wide range of students in the demands and opportunities of learning.’¹⁴ These five are cultural studies, nature studies, real-world problem solving, internships and entrepreneurial opportunities, and induction into community processes.

Many of the place based project vignettes shared earlier fit into one of these categories. Any subject area, when overlaid with the philosophy and community sensibility of place-based learning, becomes a new experience for the student. And even more than this fresh and exciting pedagogical approach, the project learning invigorates a new understanding of home.

At the turn of the century, students were conversant regarding the plants of their home. Today, the technical nature of geology and biology are covered in high school or college science classes, but often their application in the community is narrow and limited. We too often miss a vital understanding and special relationship to the landscape and flora and fauna of home. After 100 days throughout the Kickapoo Valley in all sorts of weather, during every season, engaged in many place-based projects my students had a very new awareness and appreciation of our area. The natural landscape spoke volumes to these students. One student, Ximena, looked back several years after her KRI experience and wrote:

When I moved to the Kickapoo Valley area I never really set it apart in my mind as someplace special. However, through my year at KRI [the charter school], I began to see it for its uniqueness, for a community, and a beautiful place, unlike any other. I also got a glimpse of the multitudes of small towns that fill it, treasures in themselves.

To connect students like Ximena with home, we should take greater advantage of the opportunities for integrating curriculum offered by each place’s natural systems. David Orr supplies a comprehensive viewpoint in his work, Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect, when he asserts it is time for us to “take our senses seriously throughout education at all levels and

that doing so requires immersion in particular components of the natural world - a river, a lake, a mountain, a farm, a wetland, a forest, a particular animal, a lake, an island - *before* students are introduced to more advanced level of disciplinary knowledge.”¹⁵

Another way to express the relationship of schools and community comes from the work of the Land Institute in Kansas. Their project, The Matfield Green Consortium for Place-based Education in Salina, KS states that "schools really are the expression of the community." They have a purpose to “bring community members, teachers, and students together to learn about, celebrate, and nurture their home place.”¹⁶

Beyond community, always present, is the realization that nature itself is a powerful force for learning. “A dawn wind stirs on the great marsh...” Thus Aldo Leopold begins a beautiful marshland elegy to the Sandhill Crane. In a special commemorative edition of the Sand County Almanac, Leopold writes an eloquent piece about nature and understanding. He states: “Our ability to perceive quality in nature begins, as in art, with the pretty. It expands through successive stages of the beautiful to values as yet uncaptured by language. The quality of cranes lies, I think, in this higher gamut, as yet beyond the reach of words.”¹⁷

I am convinced, more than ever, that essential life long-learning skills are wrapped around the field studies, activities, and projects that we encounter in place-based learning. When given a choice, people will learn: first, what they want to learn and second, what they need to learn in order to spend more time on what they want to learn. Human motivation and learning interests, though varying in degrees and often direction, are not much different whether one is 10, 40, or 70.

Watching students in place-based work is fascinating. Students want to be involved in what they learn, see the many talents and efforts bare fruit, and enjoy the comradeship of others while we learn. Sadly, schools too often reduce their mission to organizing and teaching units of knowledge where students seldom see the genuine fruit of their labors. You can’t savor a test, worksheet, or contrived teacher activity that is *disconnected from a greater purpose* the way you can look back at a garden, community performance, historical survey, or restored habitat, which by their outcomes *project purpose* thereby allowing for

meaningful teacher-led activities, worksheets as needed, and tests to measure the level of learning – not to mention the student initiated learning that often drives the means and outcomes.

To reverse this tendency and uphold students as essential learners, we can return to the roots of place as a perpetual fountain of learning ideas, situations, issues, and problems to be solved, for community is the ultimate ‘case study’. It is education’s fundamental responsibility to help today’s students - and each succeeding generation - to take root in their home soil. We cannot continue to remove young people from the geology, botany, astronomy, geography, zoology, hydrology, and ecology of home as if it doesn’t make a difference. Besides understanding home, they can serve it like Doris Williams mentioned earlier. As Rebecca Jaycox writes, “place-based educators use local particulars to teach universal concepts, engage students in community life, and involve people and resources unique to the home community.”²⁰

Noah, a student from the Kickapoo River Institute, said it succinctly when he declared, “*The first thing you otta know is when we go outside we’re not stopped by the snow, when we set off tromping through the wetlands we’re not always with all our friends, we are spread out across a half-mile valley.*” Noah was referring to the previously mentioned yearlong wetlands restoration project, monitoring changes from a half dozen new ponds in a wide valley.

These last several years I have been working with more and more place-based elementary schools. By using community sensibility, multi-age learning design where applicable, and building an ‘adjunct faculty’ of community elders and experts, these elementary schools are setting the stage for a future of connected adults and influencing secondary education in a myriad of profound ways. The thrill of botanical research, for instance, is very different at 8 or 12, or even at 16 - like Noah - than at or 24 or 34. The biology of exuberance is in the favor of the younger person, for it is during those years that a life-long bond to the land is formed, interests are activated, and patterns of learning foundations established. When elementary schools ‘get it right’ then the work of their secondary colleagues is immensely more powerful and precise.

Aristotle asserted, “The fate of empires depends upon the education of youth.” We can redouble and refocus opportunities for

children and youth to immerse themselves in nature's teachings through place-based learning. We must shift the familiarity and routine of schooling from inside a building - where time is organized in predictable units - to outside, where time is wrapped around the learning needs of the community and the 'routines' of the seasons and landscape. Only then will the community and its natural rhythms have retained its proper place of importance at the table of education. Moreover, the value attached by students to this work will cement the learning to last a lifetime.

The Harvard Graduate School of Education addressed the power of place-based learning in its monograph, Learning in Place:

Pedagogy of place brings school and community together on a common pathway dedicated to stewardship and life-long learning. It is teaching by using one's landscape, family, and community surroundings as the educational foundation. Significant learning takes place outdoors and in the community. This community expands outward from local landscape and home, to regional realities, to international issues. In coming to know one's place, one comes to know what is fundamental to all places.²¹

Learning in Place goes on to describe in detail the historical roots of place-based education and its shared principles, as well as providing extensive narratives regarding place-based work in rural Pennsylvania, South Dakota, West Virginia, Tennessee, Maine, California, and Texas. Through its years of working with over 700 schools in 35 states, the Rural School and Community Trust (www.ruraledu.org) arrived at the following points they deemed essential in place-based education.

- The school and community actively collaborate to make the local place a good one in which to learn, work, and live.
- Students do sustained academic work that draws upon and contributes to the place in which they live. They practice new skills and responsibilities, serving as scholars, workers, and citizens in their community.
- Schools mirror the democratic values they seek to

instill, arranging their resources so that every child is known well and every child's participation, regardless of ability, is needed and wanted.

- Decision-making about the education of the community's children is shared, informed by expertise both in and outside the school.
- All participants, including teachers, students, and community members, expect excellent effort from each other and review their joint progress regularly and thoughtfully. Multiple measures and public input enlarge assessments of student performance.
- The school and community support students, their teachers, and their adult mentors in these new roles.

Place-based learning is, at its core, a personal journey. Each student redefines their relationships with the land, with the people, with the community through an increased understanding of home driven by new purpose. In my own life, and I would venture in every other person's as well, nature and people, family and place are all interwoven into an inseparable cloth of a mutual narrative. My childhood of Michigan vacation memories at White Sands Resort, small town Pontiac 4th of July parades, wandering the cornfield lined streams during rural Illinois summers, and small town Christmas memories with grandparents contrast strongly with my Chicago area urban/suburban upbringing. Moreover, those youthful bicycle excursions through the streets of Lombard and Elmhurst, a teenage 'bleacher bum' riding the early morning subways to be at Wrigley Field for 15 games during the historic 1969 season, and fast-pitch 'alley' baseball games against the back walls of the local grocer, contrast distinctly with college-age backpacking trips through Wyoming Wind River and Grand Teton mountain lakes, passes, and alpine wildflower meadows. Whether small town, urban/suburban, or wilderness; each stand timeless in my place based archive.

After a 15-year absence, a recent visit to Carbondale, Colorado, where I received an Associate Degree in Outdoor Education Leadership, underscored the importance of place - and people - in my life. Visiting with my former college teacher Barb Snobble and discovering that her husband Jack had recently passed away froze a

moment in time. For 24 months, which still feels like years, Jack had been like a father, as the lead teacher leading a motley crew of outdoor education students at Colorado Mtn. College. Jack and Barb opened their home for Tuesday evenings of American literature, reading and discussing Annie Dillard or Ralph Waldo Emerson. Jack also opened his stables to us restless riders and would lead us into the Pinion country, finding 19th century Ute Indian wickiup shelters, meandering canyons, and endless sky. He taught us to be outdoor leaders, no small honor from a man of the 10th Mountaineering Division of WW II fame. He was a man of many talents. After the war, Jack came home to his mountain valley and ventured up to Aspen, a small idyllic ranch town, with a few friends to see if this skill they had learned during the war - skiing - might have some place in a post-war society looking for rest and relaxation but imbued with reservoirs of pent-up energy.

Jack was a man of the mountains - and the mountains were in him. Rough, and rough again, like the mountain landscape, Jack enveloped life as the Indian paintbrush showcased the sage along the horse trails he carved into the greater Carbondale valley. Yet, Jack was a teacher - understanding, nurturing, knowledgeable, and connected to place. Caring and devoted to young people, he was impatient to see that each student learned from his mountains key lessons about life.

Standing in her kitchen, Barb proudly gestured to a wall-sized oil painting of Jack. And there he was, sitting atop his horse, deeply bronzed skin framing a fulfilled smile; hat perched, eyes betraying a rapture of love for the surrounding mountain landscape. Man, horse, and landscape are indistinguishable. Jack is Colorado.

I'm sure you can recall a person of place: the sailor at the dockside, the farmer in the field, the street vendor defining a corner, the teacher in the classroom. In a modern world of fragmenting connections, how will school contribute to the bonding of individuals with place? Or is Jack, and others like him, becoming a passing tribute to a passing time? Can a society wrapped in urban-minded priorities, cyber neighborhoods, and constant mobility actually create stewards of place? Or have we crossed a silent Rubicon with an agenda that now creates stewards of self?

Jack's strong personality matched the strong personality of the mountains. His preparation hadn't been years of schooling but years

of service to his country, community, and landscape of home. Would Jack be welcome in today's schools as a community elder working with a place-based teacher? I would hope so. Do our schools support character-development shaped by place, or do we install a system of rules, grades, and 'insiderness' that tends to soften the 'edges' of character dimension? Jack was - to us students - well - Jack. He had his flaws, he had his gifts, but we all knew his love of the mountains, love of learning, and love of us students -- because it spilled from every pore of his body and soul.

How can we dissolve the barriers of design, time, intent, and outcomes that come between the school and community really thriving in partnership? How can we work to remove these barriers so young people can enthusiastically engage their understanding of people and place? Place-based learning is not exceptional; rather it is educating with the 'familiar material' of the local place by expanding the range of 'ordinary experience.' As mentioned earlier, I have called this organizing principle of place-based education, community sensibility, blending common sense and community awareness into the organizing mandates of a place-based learning pedagogy.

Ximena, quoted earlier as a student, is now a teacher herself, working with young students in a small town setting. How can we assure young teacher's liked Ximena that their community sensibility will be both honored and encouraged, and that the barriers to place-based learning will be removed so a new generation of understanding teachers can get to work?

One way is to grasp what is essential about learning. Recently, I heard a keynote entitle, ONLY CONNECT that has grown in meaning over time and has come into play, again and again, the way that only great ideas, like great books, can accomplish. William Cronon, the Frederick Jackson Turner and Vilas Research Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin asserted in his keynote that "Education for human freedom is also education for human community. The two cannot exist without each other."

Abraham Lincoln has been identified by historians and the public alike as the greatest President in American History. He was also a great example of place-based learning in action, consequence, and effect. Historians understand that the ability he brought to focus in his presidential years was a direct consequence of his many years as

lawyer doing the circuit in small town and rural Illinois. Each fall and spring, Lincoln would spend weeks “

To passionately perfect place-based learning; only one solution rings true; students must spend hours upon hours with passionate citizens and elders, in effect, community elders like Jack, in their home place. If school is truly, as Wayne Jennings, noted Twin Cities educator, proclaims -- ‘a time of life’ -- then each school must examine its place within the community, searching every nook and cranny of the places the students call home for every possible learning opportunity that will define this time of life.

Senior citizen lunch. The memories are vivid, years later. For several weeks the Kickapoo River Institute students, every Wednesday, ate lunch with the elders and talked about their common home. Jenny -- kneeling down on her left knee -- talking with an elder about making maple syrup. Together, each laughing about this shared tradition. Another student, Tim, -- learns about life on a 1930’s railroad -- from a conductor in his late eighties. Several students marveling at the collection of family photographs that another elder had spontaneously brought in, knowing that every Wednesday the students would be coming to lunch.

Like many fine initiatives across American education, the understanding that this youth/elder link can become the lifeblood of a school is well understood. Cheri knew it like thousands of other students who volunteer their time, or teachers, who share their class with the community elders, whether in a community center or at their homes, like my living room conversations with Leita Slayton.

Place-based learning begins with people but is always firmly rooted in place.

Going to school is a continual process of learning. We can, and must, create cycles of learning about the world, defining missions to serve and understand it better, creating expeditions of field study to achieve those missions, learning again, and then defining new missions as we start a new ring of growth. Jack would understand.

Chapter 3

Learning Communities

“It is the function of education to turn capacity into ability”

- Jerome Bruner

My work is good and I am very, very proud. I help elderly and help my community research on our land to find out the effects in the past and present. We also predict how the land and people are going to change in the future. I am very, very proud. I can learn as well as have fun. All at the same time.

- Elvira, 16, New Mexico

In 1987, while completing my master's degree before these days of the Internet -- when research was often my feet scuffling up metal stairways and along narrow hallways of lengthy libraries -- I undertook an inquiry into building learning communities. After scanning many journal articles, thesis summaries, and bibliographies, I sent a request to the Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC). I started with the keyword descriptor, COMMUNITY. ERIC awarded me 37,386 potential sites. I clearly needed to narrow down my search. So I added SCHOOL to the request, and my total shrunk to 4,893 articles. Still too many.

What about classroom and community building? Since the bulk of instruction is done in the classroom, this was the logical place to focus my efforts. Starting fresh, I requested CLASSROOM and was overwhelmed with 80,923 places to begin my reading! Hoping to get my leads down to a few hundred, I began thinking of other key words I could use in my search request. Certainly asking for COMMUNITY with CLASSROOM would yield too many, given that my earlier research for COMMUNITY coupled with SCHOOL had provided almost 5,000 articles. I decided it was worth a try to see exactly how many thousands of sources I would receive from this latest request.

When I requested CLASSROOM with COMMUNITY, surprised isn't the right word for my reaction; I was floored. I didn't get thousands of sources. Instead, I obtained the grand total of 46! How could this be? How could there be over 80,000 articles about classroom but only 46 with community in the classroom. The best school community begins in each classroom. Where was the interest? the effort? the awareness? What was this numerical story trying to tell me?

Since my search of the present had revealed so little, maybe yesterday would provide some answers. I began to study one-room schools, where the community and the classroom were indistinguishable. As is often the case with library and historical research, I found a wide range of archival material documenting teachers' one-room school experiences. Some teachers were authoritarian, controlling everything from the schedule, the

curriculum, and even the size of the water bucket. Some were incompetent, transient teachers moving from one failure to another while roaming through the early years of their youth. On the other hand, some extraordinary teachers - men and women both - guided one-room schools. Fully comprehending the potential of a multi-age small learning community, they worked effortlessly to bring the best learning community to fruition.

One place I ended up conducting research was at Friend's University in Wichita, Kansas, a university founded by the Quakers who had been historical leaders in early American education. They had trained generations of young men and woman to be teachers - filling frontier and early settlement schoolhouses. Their library contains a wonderful archive of this pioneering work.

I came across an astounding journal by Jeremiah Hubbard, who taught for 30 years in the early settlements of Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, and the Western Territories. Jeremiah was highly aware of his unique role to work the one-room school into a learning community. His deep understanding of his students, how they learned best, and what his school community meant to them shone brightly on many journal entries. At the end of each year, he would sit down and write a note to each student highlighting his or her unique qualities, encouraging them forward. These student vignettes revealed a deep understanding and clearly showed that building a learning community had been the apex of his teaching plan.

Learning from Jeremiah, I borrowed his idea and sat down one early May to write my 28 sixth-grade students each their own vignette. Holding the value and worth of each student in my mind, I wrote about each student. After a few days I was done.

Sitting together on the hillside behind school - the last day - the sunshine of a late spring day, I read them aloud. Each student was touched - as was I - by their responses.

What must it have been like for a one-room teacher to remain with the same students year in and year out? Imagine, as a classroom teacher, having the power to determine the daily, weekly, even yearly schedule. Rather than fitting your teaching to the schedule, you could fit the schedule to your teaching, in effect creating a schedule that supports the learning that is taking place. This structural flexibility would allow you to adapt the subjects and lessons as the learning

unfolds.

What does this mean? In effect, this design allows you to attend to the ongoing inquiry. Questions arise; answers are brought forth, which lead to new questions. Therefore, inquiry is powerful when the organization of the students and schedule are led by the learning. These are conditions for place-based learning to thrive.

Conducting a place-based workshop for a hundred teachers in Nashville one summer, I heard passionate discussion around the primary barriers to conducting place-based innovation: ineffective scheduling + isolated teachers = fragmenting learning. Year after year specific units of instruction were carried forward confined to structure. As I listened to these educators, it was very clear that they saw the value in the place-based learning, yet kept returning to the structure of the school day as a barrier. This made it very difficult for a solitary teacher to overcome.

One need not be discouraged because of existing limitations, excellent place-based learning occur in all kinds of teaching situations. Certainly, during the charter, I was fortunate to have an entire year of place-based learning with little barriers. However, I have taught years of self-contained classes, block department teaching, and an eight period day. Each can be designed to work for and respond to the generative curriculum that often occurs with place-based efforts. A consistent use of ‘community sensibility’ and the ‘partnering’ approach, with shorter timetables, reaps value as well. I hope by sharing a few stories of what has worked in my situations, you will be able to extrapolate some principles, elements, and successes that might fit for you.

The Kickapoo River Institute students learned for over 100 days in the community. With a student body of 22, a small bus, and the flexibility to design our schedule and calendar, we often followed the learning - figuratively and literally. One student, Matt, remembers,

“The work I’ve done this year for me has been some of my most prized work I have done yet in my life. I’m able to share it with my community and that makes me feel proud. I just wished everyone could see that this way of learning is one of the more productive ways.”

A great example of how inquiry is central to a learning community occurred in mid-fall when we had just finished one learning cycle, yet to embark on another. One morning, a seemingly innocent question during a silent reading time led us down a path of immense undertaking. A classic example of curriculum emergence from a student contribution, question, or concern. Ali was reading a history of Black Hawk, the Sauk chief who defied U.S. wishes and treaties, when she looked up at me, a question having been triggered, and asked, “Did the Kickapoo Indians ever really live in the Kickapoo Valley?” Her classmates on the chairs and couch in our living room unhooked their literary eyes from their books. I paused, thinking of all the local history that I had taught the last 10 years, and replied, “I really don’t know.”

The ensuing discussion led to the next step. What did we really know about the Kickapoo Indians in terms of the land where we all lived? Very little. No one had ever read of Kickapoo Indians actually living in the Kickapoo Valley. Nor did anyone know who or why the Valley was named Kickapoo. With this historical gap in mind we began that morning to discuss ways to bridge it. We knew archival research would be critical. Essentially, we needed to find a historical document that placed the Kickapoo Indians in the Kickapoo River watershed. First stop, to read the original United States Government & Kickapoo treaties from the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The next week in the historical archives at University of Wisconsin - Platteville we read all seven U.S. treaties from the original records of Congress. Clearly, in all the treaties, the land ceded by the Kickapoo was in Illinois not Wisconsin. Treaties described territory bordered by the Wabash and Vermillion Rivers of Illinois, not the Kickapoo River of Wisconsin.

Later, in Madison, at the State Historical Archives room, we were reviewing scores of notes, letters, and transcripts of meetings between chiefs recorded by a U.S. Indian Agent from 1790 - 1810 at Prairie du Chien. While we sorted through these artifacts, you could

have heard a pin drop in the stately marble-pillared reading room. Suddenly, Jenny shrieked. Backs straightened. Heads of historians working at their archive filled tabled quickly turned. “I found it!” she gasped. We gathered around her table. Eyes looked upon a tattered yellow parchment, an original record of a speech by a Kickapoo Chief given in Prairie du Chien in 1807 – a mere twenty miles from the Kickapoo River watershed. We were close. Twenty miles. Our community expert, a professor of history, a vital partner for this project, confirmed that this was the first historical document to place a Kickapoo Indian, let alone a Kickapoo chief, within a day’s horse-ride from the Kickapoo River. This didn’t fully answer our questions, but it certainly whetted our appetites.

The other question was pressing the student’s inquiry buttons: how did the valley receive the name Kickapoo, if now we understood that it had not been their historical tribal land?

On a separate research trip a few weeks later, looking into the history of

Haney Creek, a tributary of the Kickapoo River, a student was reading the private letters of John Haney from 1842 – one of the first white men to enter the soon to be named Kickapoo Wilderness. In one letter to his father he mentioned two Native American families living along the banks of the river below his cabin. Could these have been Kickapoo? This historical association led the students to hypothesize that John Haney, who had a creek, township, and school named after him, may have originated the name Kickapoo for the river, which ran 100 miles from its source near Tomah, Wisconsin past his log cabin to its confluence into the Wisconsin River. It certainly refined our line of questioning. Was John Haney, an early settler, the person who named the Kickapoo Valley?

What a chain of research events unfolded that spring. Like a one-room school, we were small enough to structure our day to attend to the learning at hand. The base of inquiry became like a compass bearing, leading us forward to new understandings. Though the Kickapoo River Institute possessed a flexible means to conduct this particular project, various successful place-based learning experiences are continuously conducted in all sorts of schools, whether on block schedules or eight period days. What is needed? A focus on the learning at hand that allows for flexible scheduling, students going into

the community and the community coming into the schools. Many projects connect academics with community, but certainly bring the community to the school as much, if not more, than taking the students to the community. Neighborhood schools can often walk to sites, and rural schools sometimes find themselves within close proximity of great learning sites as well. Where transportation is a need, then thinking outside the box and collaboration amongst teachers often frees the necessary time in the day.

In addition to lessons from one-room schools, I have found over the years that geology provides many valuable metaphors for examining learning communities - and understanding the landscape of my classroom. Geological forces like erosion, glaciers, volcanoes, rivers and the constant elements of wind, rain, freezing, and thawing work – combined with massive amounts of time -- transform landscapes.

My students once conducted an historical analysis of the changing course of the Kickapoo River in southwest Wisconsin. Students obtained hundred-year old maps showing the river's route, and then secured recent aerial photographs. Blending these together on an overhead projector, we could see places where the river had moved from one side of the valley to the other in just 100 years! The meandering channels and historic ox-bows evident from the air captured this back and forth movement when compared with the 1880 land survey maps. Rarely can geologic transformation be appreciated in such an accessible historical timeframe.

Geology contains vastly different ranges of time. Its stories are captured in the incremental slowness of erosion over eons, as well as the immediacy of split-second eruptions. Often, the evident geological timetable is thousands of years not hundreds, and then suddenly, cataclysmic events like volcanoes and earthquakes push the geological timeline into minutes rather than centuries.

Learning communities are measured in similarly contrasting ranges of time and timeliness. Most learning is incremental, painstakingly slow. Patience and tolerance, diligence and commitment are necessary in this step-by-step means of learning. Often it's the constant plodding up the hillside that brings the successful learner to the view of the valley stretched below. Students readily and willingly understand this concept.

Once my eighth graders were adapting The Diary of Anne Frank, adding three historically accurate scenes of their own invention. The lab was alive with the chatter of keyboards hammering out stage movements, giving new lines to Margot or having Anne work on new entries in her diary. Day by day, page by page, they incrementally moved their creative adaptations further. They finished this piece in several weeks with a very satisfying sense of completion. Their work had required patience and tolerance. Each step was taken with confidence and ownership as it provided meaning for the student.

Of course, in contrast to this incremental learning are the huge moments, dramatic experiences, which can propel new learning. Ask any NOLS graduate (National Outdoor Leadership School) of a thirty day wilderness expedition, for instance, or someone who has returned from a 16-day tour of Europe, and you will see that something big can enter into a person's life, creating new learning seemingly overnight. Finally, beside this sudden insight or incremental learning – a third path is where they are often blended into the same goal. A math student struggles to resolve a problem then, in an instant, the solution appears like a beam from above.

All three ways are incredible learning moments to experience. In effect, learning itself becomes its own subject matter. The structure, bells, and assignments fall quickly to the wayside, and all activities are fueled simply by the need to know! As Deborah, 17, from California, maintained,

“ I never imagined the joy and pride of planning, setting up, and caring for projects that made not only myself, but also my school and community proud. The self-satisfaction that I have received this year is enormous.”

Besides geology teaching us about the learning; geology can as easily teach us about the teaching. Just as geologists learn to read the topography of desert, canyon, mountain, and valley; teachers, too, must learn to read the student learning landscape. By peeling back surface layers and using all the senses to view the rich historical development beneath, teachers and geologists alike build a future by observing the present and making connections to the past.

Appreciating the incremental nature of learning, the steady drumbeat, and the sudden leap forward is the best way for a teacher to plan for and respond to the learning at hand. And these forces of

learning work to transform the landscape of ideas, values, tasks, and capacities evident in every place-based learning community.

For ideas, what makes this group of students work well? What challenges gather its core interests and propel them successfully forward into activity? Does this student love inquiry, or do they desire problem solving, or maybe strives for highly visible community involvement?

For values, and yes there are so many, which ones anchor this group? Maybe thoroughness and listening well are hallmarks, possibly building a fair-minded team is a constant goal, or even inviting partnerships with unlikely partners becomes a value all subscribe to, or tolerance, hard work, or generosity. Discuss and identify, it will build a special spirit.

For tasks, the world is a stage. What will this group hold in common as a mission to propel the above identified ideas and values forward? When you arrive at a project idea that aligns with the above team values, everyone seems to know it, when it doesn't there is a silence, sometimes awkward, that seems to say, "Nope, this isn't it, don't go down this path."

For capacities, how has the group determined who does what? This is so vital to ensure that all members receive equal attention to their own goals, time to move on their dreams. Likewise it is vital to support each weakness, by students giving away their strengths to the group thereby uplifting individuals in need.

Turning the corner from my teens to early 20's, I found myself working for NOLS, hiking for 45 days in the Absaroka range in west central Wyoming. One morning, while I was stirring the coffeepot, a cowboy rode up to our campfire. His many years and creased face couldn't hide the youthful manner in which he gazed at the ridges around us on three sides. With a wistful glance over his shoulder, he said, "Y'know son, if you boys stay 'round here - 'bout 4 o'clock - I'd stay off those ridges. Gonna be some big lightnin' hitten those hills." I turned and inquired how he knew this, given the peaceful face upon that morning's clear blue sky. Responding, he pointed to a solitary wisp of black cloud, racing like a furtive dancer over the western ridgeline.

Where was I at 4 o'clock? Fortunately, not on the ridges. At that predicted moment, a mighty storm struck where his prophetic

finger had pointed hours earlier. From our sheltering rain fly pitched a few thousand feet below the ridge, we could only wonder at the cowboy's gift of prediction.

Twenty years ago this uncanny weather forecast seemed a gift; today, I recognize it as the same gift teachers develop as they read their learning community landscape. The cowboy's talent was intense outdoor living, combined with a keen observation of the place he called home. He had learned to read the landscape in both overt and subtle ways: a skill many indigenous people possess and express as easily as breathing home's clean air, a skill many young people haven't enough opportunity to acquire - kept inside from K-12 - leaving them too dependent upon the technologies of today to inform their observations.

Teachers begin with an understanding that reading the emerging student landscape is an art form indispensable to building a productive learning community. Seeing below the surface of dialogue and interaction is a precious gift, intentionally cultivated by master teachers over time. At any given moment, several layers of meaning occur simultaneously in a learning community. These plentiful subterranean forms can help to inform teaching strategies and climate building. And so, geology and teaching, occupations of observation, ask the practitioner to activate subtle skills seldom taught in education courses, but skills, nevertheless, that are used daily during our teaching.

Project-based learning communities demand multiple roles for the teacher; teachers serving as project facilitators highly aware that clear observation informs their work, teachers serving as coaches guiding and encouraging student productivity, and teachers continuing to work as instructors - activating the opportunistic lesson, teaching the skill-based workshop, answering the question with another Socratic question.

Student realities always offer several layers of meaning. One layer is personal. Melissa, for instance, woke up late, rushed to catch the bus, forgot her assignment, and one thing seemed to lead to another. Dominoes. She's having a difficult time concentrating in class, and it is difficult to draw out her attentiveness from the rush of anxiety she's been coping with all morning. Whereas, Jasaan didn't sleep at home last night. He felt obliged to stay with his sister's

boyfriend since he knew his Dad would be drinking. It was Tuesday, again. And for some reason unknown to young Jason, his Dad's drinking night is always Tuesday.

Though below the surface, these realities are certainly concrete enough for these students. To me, this home turf is like the lay of the land - the curving nature of a valley, the demarcation of a coastline, the winding realities of a river. We know about these conditions, can work with them, yet seldom can we fundamentally change them. Though every student appreciates a teacher's noticing and being empathetic with his or her home turf issues, students realize that the teacher's prevalent influence is predominately in that home away from home - the school, specifically the classroom learning community.

Learning communities work hard to see that each member is important. The positional value that each member holds in the system is critical; both for defining individual worth and in defining how that individual relates in the system. Depending upon each other opens all sorts of benefits beyond academic objectives. Like a self-fulfilling prophecy or a feedback loop reinvigorating itself in tighter spirals - this collaborative work powers learning. Listen to the power of a successful learning community when Abbey, a high school junior from California, continues:

This work means and has shown this past year that the 'average' student and human being can get involved and make a great change and impact. This work means that my community's future is only brighter, and we never look back, except to learn from experience and history. This work is like a match, with one strike we can light many other ways.

Sustaining the balance between an academic challenge and each educator's capabilities to address that challenge through a successful learning community is the key to success in place-based learning. And, moreover, this conjunction and constant interplay of challenge and capacity is precisely the function of schooling in a democratic society. As Dewey confirms, "Every activity engaged in for its own sake reaches beyond itself."¹ In effect, the balance achieved with a community of learners, reaches forward with the increasing complexity of learning.

What does it feel like to be a student during this rewarding level of learning? What does it feel like to be a teacher using such a

place-based pedagogy? Dewey, again, zeroed in on this aspect when he stated, “In such shared activity, the teacher is a learner, and the learner is, without knowing it, a teacher – and upon the whole, the less consequences there is on either side, of either giving or receiving instruction, the better.”²

Echoing my experience, we have all touched upon the generative nature of learning, pure and simple. One of the beauties of teaching is when a student fully engaged, and a teacher fully involved, trigger a place of learning that takes on a life of its own. One fall evening a dozen of my high school students were invited to a graduate education class at the University of Wisconsin – LaCrosse. Being students of a new rural charter, the prospective teachers wanted to query us on how the charter was working. As we sat in a circle, and the give and take of questions from the teachers was followed by clear answers from the students; I was struck by the total engagement of my students. At one point Jenny leaned forward in her chair and asked the graduate students, “ So, you’ve got a sense of what and how we like to learn, what about you guys? What can you each bring to a school?” Fair question, though explicit, I thought to myself. The graduate student’s answers were as passionate as my student’s voices had been in the beginning. The evening became a generative time: each of us, youth and adult alike, walked away knowing the mutual discussion was special.

This knowing something is special, an awareness that a learning community is working well, doesn’t always have to have an observable splash. One year, in one of my literature classes each student was reading a novel of their choice silently – intensely – you could hear the proverbial pin drop. After 12 minutes, I walked to the front of the room and sheepishly mentioned, “ Hey, I hate to interrupt such devoted readers...” Pairs of eyes looked up from The Lord of the Rings, Hatcher, and Harry Potter. “Then don’t,” interrupted Melissa, a knowing smile gracing her polite though effective dismissal.

Silence. I knew enough to know she was right. I returned to my desk, opened my book, and for the next thirty minutes each student dove back into their novel. Looking up, on occasion, the reward of seeing each and every student totally engrossed was something special as well. Like a science lab humming with purposeful experimentation; the air was thick with storylines being consumed, even relished.

Remarkably, not one set of eyes wandered to the clock, looking for the end of the class. In fact, after a full 50 minutes of reading, the bell -- ringing for lunch -- served as the wakeup call that suddenly thrust them, some said, “Cruelly”, back into the present and onto their next class. Of course the best line was, “Can’t we just stay here and read, please!”

Whether a class is full of bustling activity or full of silent activity, when a student’s capacity is turned into ability – to paraphrase Bruner - then the passion of learning is so strong that the air seems to radiate. Students easily talk about how this feels, about the difference powerful learning can make for them.

Nicole, experiencing the same powerful place-based learning as Abbey, yet unique to her Colorado community, captured some of the associated qualities when she declares:

I learned more about myself, my peers, and my community than I could possibly imagine. It is incredible to be with so many people with a strong passion working together to make their dreams happen. I learned to trust and respect people for the good that they had. It is an incredible feeling to work with people and make a successful product. I did things that I didn’t think I could.

‘I did things that I didn’t think I could.’ Isn’t that what we all feel when a learning community is working, visible to others and clear to ourselves? So these are important considerations for successful learning communities. And a successful learning community is ALWAYS much more likely to turn a neat place-based idea into a highly visible, personally rewarding project, completed for the benefit of the community.

Where do I pick up some of these ideas? Bits and pieces of writing over the years. Just as reflective writing was good for Jeremiah, the one-room schoolteacher, I have found it useful as well in reading the classroom landscape, and reflecting on what works. Keeping a journal is the benchmark of observation and reflection for most field-based professionals. Imagine a field geologist without a well-worn journal. What would the Lewis and Clark expedition have been without their daily recordings, illustrations, and musings? Reflective writing that teachers can - and should - create for themselves is a treasure of lasting value, a vivid oasis of insight and

suggestion. Take a few minutes between classes or at the beginning of the day to write. Accumulated reflections, aggregates of observation will build a scaffold of meaning, giving a cohesive structure to teaching efforts. Try it.

Place your observation, thoughts, and aspirations in a journal, then look for patterns and connections. This will bring a singular focus as you move from one stage of teaching to another. Capture the educational flow at that moment. Gather meaning and depth from the gift of time and perspective. Without these introspective efforts, and the usefulness of nature to provide models for understanding human dynamics, I would be more likely to spin my canoe endlessly in an eddy, watching the current continue down river without me, rather than navigating with some reflective wisdom.

This kind of learning results in very special outcomes. . In his recent work, The Global Achievement Gap, Tony Wagner identified the capacity needed to be a life long learner in the 21st century.

- Critical thinking and Problem Solving
- Collaborative and Leadership
- Agility and Adaptability
- Initiative and Entrepreneurialism
- Effective Oral and Written Communication
- Accessing and Analyzing Information
- Curiosity and Imagination

Again and again, in the learning and the language of students, you will see these above skills come into a very active role in place-based learning. It is the heart of the matter, the heart of the educational flow.

Chapter 4

Respect

Education is not the filling of a bucket
but the lighting of a fire.
- Yeats

*Learning is an eternal flame that catches everyone in a bonfire of
brilliance. To learn is to live life.*
- Kelly, 14, Wisconsin

Imagine teaching the same students four years in a row. This opportunity where I moved from fourth grade to fifth and sixth grade Social Studies, then to Junior High English gave me the same students for four years. This experience shaped my view of how essential time and continuity is as a means to establishing profound learning connections and engagement in a learning community. Many of the original fourth graders were students of mine for four consecutive years, and we came to know each other very well. Several years ago, those students graduated from high school. Over the years we have greeted each other many times, passing in the hallway, waving as we drove by each other, or meeting by chance in a store. The mutual respect we share for each other, the many memories that -- year by year -- built upon themselves to define our caring, is simply the best reward teaching has given me.

Respect is a beautiful word and the single most important factor in successful teaching and learning. Understanding its fullest dimensions, therefore, is vital to understanding schooling. When respect is acknowledged by the actions of students toward a teacher and by a teacher toward each student, a learning community is at its strongest. What one person can achieve with purpose and backbone, a group of people, respectful of each other, can achieve many times over.

Respect is the flowering of a productive relationship. Respect is earned, never taken for granted. Maturing from seeds of patience, respect can only be attained after significant work by teachers attending to the students and by students attending to the place they inhabit. Morgan, 14, from California, offered a clear explanation when she contended, *“It’s definitely a good thing when you work with an adult and they treat you like you’re not just a kid. It changes the perspective if you’re treated like an equal. In lots of instances, kids just feel like what they think maybe doesn’t matter.”*

Respect is a powerful word with a curious origin. From the Latin word, *respicere*, it means, “to look back at.” Rather than an anticipatory group quality, respect is grasped after the work is done. Once a learning community has connected, solved problems, and made a difference it quickly accumulates a respectful quotient that springs from their common actions. As the group looks back, holding up a

mirror to the preceding actions, they will see respect reflected back to them.

For an educator, respect is an outcome of facilitating and sustaining a positive and productive place and space. How does one establish these learning conditions where respect flourishes? First, by listening; second, by attending to the growth of empathy; third, by acknowledging that trusting others requires a firm commitment. Through the ups and downs inevitable over time, listening, empathy and trustbuilding, triangulated, do more than anything else to build a climate of respect.

One fall, I had a visit from Erica, who had moved away to Minnesota several years after writing her wonderful spring journal piece. As we reminisced, she recalled the collection of vignettes, a few shared earlier, I had written about my students at the end of her sixth-grade year. A brief essay, each vignette captured characteristics that I had come to appreciate about that particular student. As mentioned, I printed these vignettes as a class book and gave each student a copy on the last day of school. Now a senior, Erica told me she had looked at her vignette each year with appreciation and respect. Eric's vignette:

Erica, the moment you spoke your first lines as the Queen of Narnia, we all knew you had achieved more than winning the role; you were going to define the character. Such strength and singular expression on stage is a wonderful gift to carry within you. However, you don't stop with being an expressive actress. Erica, you have also developed the joy of writing into a unique voice.

I read the first scenes of *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* as a gust of fresh air, incorporating your keen sense of storytelling alongside C.S. Lewis's masterpiece. [Erica adapted the novel into a play] To be a writer who loves to act is a combination of gifts that you will enjoy again and again and again in the unfolding years ahead. Thanks so very much for taking the initiative to work long hours developing your craft. Your writing has taught me volumes. Because of your work, I view the possibilities, creations, and progress of middle grade students in a never-ending expansive view. By setting your sights higher, you have lifted my approach to teaching to new

heights. Thanks again...

At the time, writing Erica's vignette was affirming for me. With the benefit of hindsight, I understand why. Back then it just seemed the right thing to do. But Erica's visit made me realize that my trusting and prizing of each student had cemented a profound memory for her and for the other students.

Respect spawns such memories. Respect also lasts. It is the remaining signpost of our personal heritage. On the 100th anniversary of Ralph Waldo Emerson's death, William James gave an address in Concord where he stated, "When the days of one's life are ended...what remains of one in memory should usually be so slight a thing. The phantom of an attitude, [like respect] the echo of a certain mode of thought, a few pages of print, some invention, or some victory we gained in a brief critical hour, are all that survive of the best of us."¹

Each school displays enormous amounts of respect every day. You can see it in the eyes of students and teachers who respect each other. You can see it in the calm after a confrontation. One day, fed up with the antics of a student, I snapped at her. She returned the favor. The matter of right and wrong was in my court, but the matter of caring, the matter of courtesy, resided in both our courts. And we both were accountable to them. Supplanting our pride with a higher purpose, mutual respect, we resolved the dispute.

Respect is not simply made up of positive words. Frustration and anger, shared honestly, are as much a part of respect as nurturing and patience. Too many teachers ignore the steady hand of respect, favoring a transitory permissiveness rationalized in their minds as compassion. Students want adults who know what they're about and give respect based on behavior. Respect comes equally from both the firm taskmaster and compassionate coach; the best teachers embody both.

How can place-based learning inculcate respect? One question can be answered with another, how couldn't they inculcate respect? Imagine the hard work; imagine the constant problem solving, the connections with elders, meeting deadlines, and the subsequent sense of personal and team accomplishment evident through presentations. Respect is always evident during place-based learning. Leslie, a senior, who accepted a leadership role amongst a group of Wisconsin youth

leaders, really captured the positive journey for students, *“Throughout life importance is connected with power, the ability to personally make a difference. When a student can see where, in the big picture, he/she has made a difference, he/she can sense that a difference has been made.”*

Being important and having pride in the work at hand is a common component of place-based learning. Deborah, a junior attending a national gathering of place-based learners, built upon Leslie’s sense of power with her understanding of a deepened sense of community: *“I have learned so much this year, not only about my community, but also about myself and how good it feels and how proud it makes me to have been born and raised in my community.”*

Devan, a project colleague agreed with her sentiment, *“To me being important to the community gives me a lift both mentally and physically. I get the feeling that I am wanted more and more... when people ask me to do things like help build the fire hall, or help set up work and clean up at the annual picnic. I just think that the smaller our community is, the more people need volunteers like my friends and me. I am proud of that.”*

Teachers earn respect. Students earn respect. Like anything earned, work is involved. Sometimes respect is given freely, at first, in hopes of being returned. However, for it to become a permanent part of the learning community climate respectful choices need to be made each and every day.

At the taproot of learning, respect exponentially nurtures teachers and students in many ways. Orion, 16, a KRI student, reasons, *“ Respect is in my mind the essential word here. Respect is the thing that allows for the kind of environment needed to get the work done, and thus the learning.”* Respect in Orion’s eyes is *“needed to get the work done.”* What a profound and true statement. No curriculum guide in the world can be implemented without the touch of a teacher/student relationship creating conditions of mutual respect. Moreover, like rain infiltrating a parched landscape, respect will erode the apathy and alienation to often present today.

Simple choices cause big effects in building respect. Teachers who cultivate the art of ‘small talk’ understand how big it really is. Inquiring about an extra-curricular event, noticing a haircut, appreciating a helpful act, or thanking a student for his or her careful

work all contribute to the momentum necessary for a continuing atmosphere of mutual respect. Students are part of this process as well: commenting on the teacher's new shirt, mentioning a recent encounter in town, and giving a warm hello as they enter the school – or join the circle. Each moment and each choice make a difference and, in the aggregate, define the respectfulness of the class – which in turn expands the possibilities.

Imagine the opposite: a place where opportunistic criticism and sarcasm seem the norm, where anxiously looking over one's shoulders takes the place of respectful expectations. It is impossible to sustain learning in such a climate of disrespect. And though much can be written about dysfunctional learning situations where disrespect IS the norm; suffice it to say that once one finds oneself in such a situation the ONLY way out is through achieving incremental steps of mutual respect. Respect is the antidote.

When place-based learning is functioning smoothly, the students, in a mature and intelligent manner, often drive the learning. It isn't that the teacher doesn't have the professional 'control' of the learning, it is more that these teachers find themselves as managers and facilitators. Respect allows this to happen.

In learning communities where learning is deep and sustained, discipline is almost never an issue. Incidents of discipline usually imply an absence of respect. I can't hold someone in high regard one minute then turn around the next minute and treat him or her like the enemy. Libby, 14, another KRI student shared, *"It seems to me that if you walk up to a person and compliment her and are just really nice, that with some people, it just makes their day, and if you are nice to someone they are more likely to be nice to you."* Respect is the ultimate barometer of the golden rule functioning in the classroom.

Looking closer, we can see two levels of respect that teachers work with in school. First, there is dutiful regard, the respect given because of one's position as a teacher. Addressing me as "Mr. Lewicki" is one small example. Of far greater import is the earned respect that comes only after many interactions. When a student like Erica shares with me her memories of my teaching, she conveys her esteem for my work, and for the degree of respect I was able to invest in her and her fellow students.

Though dutiful regard is important for the first couple of weeks each September, earned respect is what builds learning communities that work. An effective and productive learning community must be centered on mutual respect, and the window of opportunity to begin this process is small. Much has been written about the importance of the first day, first week, even first month of school. These times are critical in the development of a learning community. Like any fresh development, early success begets later success, and soon a pattern of respect will become evident as the class unfolds.

Ron Newell has written upon project-based learning from his many years as a teacher at New Country School, an innovative charter where student in grades 7-12 learn comprehensive academics through varied self-selected projects. In his book, Passion for Learning, he summarizes how project learning is student directed:

The student role in project-based learning becomes one of carrying out self-directed learning activities rather than carrying out teacher directed activities; defining their own roles, tasks and time management rather than receiving and completing brief, directed tasks; learning how to communicate, show, affect, produce and take responsibility rather than listen, behave, speak only when spoken to. The short-term goals change from knowledge of facts, terms and content to understanding and application of complex ideas and processes; from mastery of isolated skills to mastery of integrated skills. Long-term goals change from breadth of knowledge to depth of knowledge; from performing successfully on standard achievement tests to acquiring dispositions and skills to engage in sustained, lifelong learning.²

It really isn't very hard to extrapolate meaningfully from Ron's thoughts above and realize the deep respect that would be manifest in this type of learning community, or other kinds of learning communities where the curriculum is truly generative. Whether project-based, integrated thematic, expeditionary, Montessori, or placed-based; I have witnessed Dewey's axiom that all learning is fundamentally a measure of curiosity and completeness fueled by Ron's above description of Passion.

Nicole, a freshman writing about place-based learning from her Nebraska home, spoke from a place of deep conviction after her project: *“I learned more about myself, my peers, and my community than I could possibly imagine. It is incredible to see so many people with a strong passion working together to make their dreams happen. I learned to trust and respect people for the good that they had. It is an incredible feeling to work with people and make a successful product.”*

Again, a student voice defines a fundamental construct. Generative Curriculum. By this I mean a curriculum that is shaped by the dreams and aspirations of the students themselves, the voices that are engaged in this learning community, and the choices that students are empowered to make in shaping their learning itself. To venture into this realm an amount of respect equal to the ideas is essential.

What else does a climate of respect do? It cultivates curiosity, a major ingredient of place-based learning. I have never taught a student who is genuinely curious and at the same time a behavior problem. When students are on fire with curiosity; they simply do not misbehave. To make connections is characteristic of a curious mind. John Dewey caught this idea well:

Curiosity is not an accidental possession; it is a necessary consequence of the fact that an experience is a moving, changing thing, involving all kinds of connections with other things. Curiosity is but the tendency to make these conditions perceptible. It is the business of educators to supply an environment so that this reaching out of an experience may be fruitfully rewarded and kept continuously active.³

Fruitfully rewarded. How? I believe learning itself is an internal motivator, while respect is the teacher’s gift to the student, and reciprocally the student’s gift to the teacher. Students want to do well and want to learn, at all ages. When they are doing well and when curiosity is taking flight, these are reward enough. However, when curiosity is ignored, hands are never raised. Respect is absent. I was fortunate to spend four years with the same group of young people, but mutual respect can be attained during a single school year, or for that matter, through short experiences as well.

One summer, I facilitated a Wisconsin retreat for forty students who were high school leaders in their respective communities. We

discussed youth issues throughout the state. During the retreat time at a camp setting - besides our many discussions - we also worked, played, and ate together, supporting these youth to gather a level of shared respect. At the end of this initial retreat, I asked the students to answer several questions about our time together. Their answers reveal and affirm a depth of understanding, which youth inevitably possess but are seldom asked about. I asked them what made them feel important as a student? Mike, 16, wrote, *“ I feel important as a student when my problems are embraced by others who help me work through them. I feel important when I am recognized as an individual with all my personality quirks and uniqueness and accepted for who I am. I am encouraged to form and voice opinions that will be heard and discussed by the group to solve a problem together. ”*

Clearly, encouragement was a decisive part of feeling important. Leslie, 17, another retreat leader, endorsed this point of view wholeheartedly noting, *“[. . .] others in groups can encourage and foster growth. The first time someone says, “Wow, great job!” or “That’s a great idea.” the student may just take the comment with a grain of salt. No big deal. But the more encouragement that is given, the more students will believe it. Suddenly, the realization comes that someone cares. Along with that realization comes the dawning of the idea that they are an integral part of the group. ”*

Students engaged in place-based learning experience a keen sense of community when the field study, workshop, service, or project is undertaken as a team. Therefore, the language of community; the experience of community; and the development of community is always a present factor in individual learning achievement.

My second question asked the students about this importance of the community we had established at the retreat. Justin, 15, understood this importance in the give and take when he asserted, *“This community works so well because of the total involvement of all participants. Everyone here is giving their all because they brought with them the same ideals as everyone else. This helped them find some firm ground in every discussion. ”*

Tiffany, 15, acknowledged other critical elements of community when she observed, *“This learning community*

works really well because everyone is listening to each other and recognizing good ideas. We are all working as a team to meet a common goal.”

Cory, 16, echoed Tiffany’s sentiments when he said, *“This learning community works for me because we work in small groups and then we all pull together at the end to kind of glue everything together for the following meeting.”* Finally, Lauren, 15, returned to that vital sense of importance and being valued as a barometer of a successful learning community, *“Everyone has a voice and can be heard. There are adults to keep us in line, but in the end, we are making a difference.”*

Though missing the word “respect” itself, the language used by these students is that of a respectful learning place.

Discussed earlier, respect is often easier to recognize looking into the past than in the present tense verbiage. Remember, to describe immediate moments of learning, other language is often used because respect, by its very definition, is a looking back act. Therefore, teachers must be cognizant of the language of engagement, connection, vitality, and passion that are indicators in the present. The key words these students use as they speak in the immediate moment include listening, voice, glue, pull together, team, encourage, care, recognize, embrace, involvement, making a difference, accept, and solve. Respect, as a word employed, will come later for it is the essential organizing outcome of the behaviors they describe.

Ask your students what their learning community means to them. Ask them three questions.

- How do you feel important?
- Describe the characteristics of this learning community?
- What works, and works well?

Then look for these key words and others like them. What do you see? What pattern emerges? And if you were to imaginatively place these words on a scale; would it tilt in a positive or a negative direction? No matter what they say, these student contributions and insights will provide a vital foundation to build respectfulness in your learning place.

Chapter 5

Listening, Student Voice, and Group work

The view of externally imposed ends has deep roots...too rarely is the individual teacher so free from the dictation of authoritative “mandates” that he can let himself come to close quarters with the pupil’s mind and the subject matter...There is also an inclination to propound aims which are so uniform as to neglect the specific powers and requirements of an individual, forgetting that all learning is something which happens to an individual at a given time and place.

- John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*

Talk with us. Try to hear us out. Take us seriously.

- Saaneah, 15, Alabama

Place-based learning works when the triangulation of listening, student voice, and the ‘one-room school’ group work come together to form a successful learning community. Each is indispensable to an educator’s vision.

Some time ago, after a conference in New Mexico, I had some time free before my return flight home. I ventured to the Albuquerque Art Museum. Waiting for the doors to open that bright winter Sunday morning, I sat on a granite bench below a towering sculpture. Above me three long aluminum poles, ten feet in height, ascended skyward out of several large blocks of pink granite gathered in a circle at my feet. Each pole came close to the other two at their apex, but did not quite touch. Forming a triangle of possibilities. The amazing thing was that each of the three poles pierced a single rectangular slab of granite, holding it aloft, ten feet over my head. The slab must have weighed a ton. Together, these three slender poles could hold this slice of New Mexico mountain. What possibilities! Admiring the contrast between shiny aluminum poles and rugged pink granite, I seized a sudden insight.

Triangulation supports mass.

The collaboration of these three poles produced the supporting infrastructure for a ton of granite to be held aloft. Without any one of the poles, the structure would collapse. What a wonderful physical reminder that something new, and often greater, is the result of parts working together. And listening, student voice, and the ‘one-room schoolhouse’ group work concept are the three poles that create the conditions for place-based learning to thrive within. The work of these three together create a “granite slab” of learning. This slab is only made possible by the relationships symbolized by the individual poles coming together at the apex.

Listening.

As a teacher for 17 years, a YMCA camp director prior, and a school developer these last ten; I find my best counsel is to listen and listen well. I listen to students as they are learning, in the hallway, at the assembly, and in the field. I ask questions: If you could change one thing what would it be? What is working and working well for you? What makes you feel important at this school? Imagine bumping into your Aunt on a corner waiting for the light to change. If

she asked, “ Say, what is that school about that your going to? How would you describe to her the school’s mission, its essential purpose, before the walk sign came on? Yesterday, what happened that was unexpected? Can you shape your learning? What are the experiences when you feel most connected? Disconnected? On and on the questions will flow.

I’ve also facilitated student workshops for school districts, leadership retreats, state and national conferences. In so doing, hundreds of student insights have moved me greatly. Whether I am talking with rural youth in Wisconsin, Kansas, or Florida or urban youth in New Jersey, Milwaukee, or Las Vegas; several threads run strongly throughout these conversations. First, students are immensely grateful when adults listen to them. It is an act that too seldom occurs in their experience of school. Don’t misunderstand me. Certainly, they are listened to when they have a question about an academic subject, when they want to plan a dance, or receive help on a paper. Yet, they seldom are asked about their experience of learning itself.

One summer, I was in a room with 35 high school students gathered from Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota. Students for the benefit of educators led this session. They led off with one question for the adults to answer: “What is your learning style?”

For the next hour or so, almost 60 people, one at a time, shared the way they learned best. Some explained they were visual learners, having to map out information in their minds. Others described themselves as auditory learners. Most felt they were hands-on learners, learning best by demonstration and practice. With such a wide range of viewpoints, passionately shared, the discussion was certainly intriguing.

At the end of the hour, I realized this group of 35 students embodied a wealth of educational experience. Since most were sophomores or older, they represented collectively almost 400 years of school, from over 20 different school districts. I began to wonder what their experiences they had had like the ones shared in their learning style session.

“How many of you, in your long student careers,” I asked, “ have had a teacher, somewhere along the line, ask you, ‘What is your learning style?’ ”

I fully expected to see an assortment of hands in the air. Hadn't they just led a great workshop on the very topic? Nothing. One hand finally slowly rose.

Incredulous, I pursued, "So, what you have led us through, asked us to share this last hour is something you have never experienced yourselves?"

Heads nodded. Next question, clearly rhetorical.

"How many of you would like a teacher at the beginning of the course, or somewhere along the way, to ask that question of you and your classmates?"

Hands shot up, en masse.

Students experience a curious gap. On one hand, the adults articulate a prescribed vision of school; on the other, the student experience of school differs vastly. How these two worldviews, these realities, are aligned is often a clear barometer of the generative quality of the school as an authentic learning place.

In terms of creating conditions for this alignment to take place, clearly, individual teachers make an enormous difference with students. Moreover, a dynamic teacher can make an impact upon a class, grade level, or even, at times, a department. But in terms of school change, the radiating influence of any successful teacher is too often diluted and diminished the farther one moves down the hallway, so to speak, from his or her classroom; leaving the influence of the teacher to a solitary world.

What happens? What invisible barrier seems to block the energy of youth whom, when allowed, can transform any space, any school into a living laboratory of learning?

Why is student alienation a stubborn weed infecting this garden of determined growth? How can we build schools where the learning itself drives back the growth of alienation?

I have found only one time-tested antidote: listening and listening well. I have never seen a master teacher who is not a master listener. And not only the complicated art of listening to others speak but also the listening with the observing eye; drinking in the non-verbal cues and social behavior that DEFINE culture. Listening is the bedrock of understanding. When students are listened to, they know they are important. Knowledge comes alive for them. The first casualty of schooling is, too often, listening.

“Teachers don’t care,” students often remark.

“How do you mean that?” I ask in return.

“They just don’t get it. They never have time to listen.”

The other day I had a moment to talk with a troubled teenager. The anger available at the surface of our conversation and his constantly challenging everyone brought him front and center to my attention. I began by inquiring about his viewpoints, soliciting his opinions on the adult authorities he perceived pitted against him. His lines sounded to me like quotes from Walden and Civil Disobedience. Here was a different drummer pounding out an idealistic worldview. As we talked, his anger subsided and his ability to empathize increased. Only by my really listening, asking questions, summarizing what he said, did this young man’s rage soften.

A decade later I ran into him at a social event. He was the DJ for the night. And quite a good one at that, inventing on the spot – connecting with the youth. He came over to me and we re-connected as well. Being able to do this was directly related to the authentic communication we had established years prior. Again and again, as I have said in other places ... it will be the incremental acts, the opportunistic moments that often last a lifetime. Only a deep respect for the student as an individual can prepare you to produce these moments. From this disposition of respect, this orientation to discover the brilliance within each student, will an educator color the act of listening with the many hues of productive engagement.

True listening is productive engagement in itself; but as you work with a student, you begin to go deeper into the realities of the situation and that often translates into action: opening up as their advocate, standing up with them when the system or community is unjust, and being there for them on a daily basis. Listening is caring, caring is devotion to ACTION. I believe there really is no such thing as passive listening, but there are plenty of teachers who will listen to their students on one level, but then when it comes to ACTION they are passive. Students know who these teacher are and this hesitancy to act is at the root of their connecting or not connecting. “Unconditional regard”, the heart of Carl Rodger’s work, always translated into growth and action scenarios. So what is best? To be both an active listener and a listener who is active! Your teaching will be twice as powerful because the students will KNOW you, as you KNOW them.

The path is always mutual. This is why a decade later the DJ and I could re-connect as if the intervening time stood still.

Sometimes, we forget that students carry their knowledge within. We must pay attention to the individuals before us! Teacher education programs build the knowledge to teach math to a nine-year old. Yet, a warning label should be attached to the diploma. This gift of knowledge must be wrapped with the wisdom of your students. Listen to them! Without listening, knowledge alone robs the individual of his or her distinctive foundation. What else creates alienation but this lack of listening and shallow understanding? Cara, 21, a seven year veteran of place-based education, understood this, *“You have to take risks sometimes when you’re not sure about the capabilities of the students that’ll be in charge, and you definitely have to drop the ‘I’m the adult, I’m in charge’ platform and really build a partnership.”*

Listening skills are fundamental to accomplish this. Treating students fairly does not mean treating them all the same. Imagine a forest. Each tree grows in a community of forest. Every tree is connected to all others through the common bonds of soil, water, and sunlight. Yet while one tree towers above, another clings to life along a rocky crust, because each tree has a unique and determining relationship to the soil, water, and sunlight. And so it is with the teacher-student relationship. Teachers nurture learning through uncommon acts of listening. Only by listening can a teacher go beyond the basics of soil, water, and sunlight, discovering what growth means to individual students. Dewey’s work shines with this disposition:

And it is well to remind us that education as such has no aims. Only persons, parents, and teachers, etc., have aims, not an abstract idea like education. And consequently their purposes are indefinitely varied, differing with different children, changing as children grow and with the growth of experience on the part of one who teaches. Even the most valid aims which can be put in words will, as words, do more harm than good unless one recognizes that they are not aims, but rather suggestions to an educator as to how to observe, how to look ahead, and how to choose in liberating and directing the energies of the concrete situation in which they find themselves.¹

Student Voice.

Many times I have taken a student's draft piece of writing, and with permission, read it dramatically aloud to the class. You can see the color beaming from their faces. The sparkle in the eyes grows intense, because for the first time, the ideas presented on paper are rendered in a confident voice - and they sound great! And the power of their ideas radiates as performance. Afterwards, these students seldom lack motivation when working on a difficult piece of writing.

We must help students develop their own voices not only for their sakes but for ours as well. School is a social institution where the rights of all youth are held to a fair and equitable standard, with an inclusive mission to be served. Much of this mission exists as a vision, yet even the best school understands that this vital work is undertaken each and every day, for the dreams of youth to mature into full expression and deepened learning. Rachel, 17, involved in a place-based project from Idaho, had this grand perspective:

To me, this work brings hope for America's future because all of the work revolves around kids, and kids are our future leaders. This work first of all shows that kids care about their education and the way they learn; and second of all it shows that we care about the world around us. Almost every project involves bettering our communities and this demonstrates to me that we're doing everything in our power to create a solid future.

How are students positioned in this democratic experiment? How are their voices nurtured? Sustained? Applied? How can we reconcile the varying answers into a cohesive community called school?

In effect, each school has a bundle of individual roots held in its learning soil, defined by individual participants acting as a collective over time. The individuals in any school community are constantly changing, not just with the addition of new faces but with changes in age and understanding as well. Each student, teacher, and community member brings to the group individuality; each is challenged to contribute, to become part of a greater whole.

Youth must be included in the dialogue of schools, and in place-based learning this dialogue is critical to the project's success. A learning organization worth its weight in high-minded visions,

goals, and instructional objectives needs the constant companionship and voice of youth to succeed. Without active youth involvement, a strong cultural current flows: a definite tendency for adults to “presume and assume” as if walking in fog surrounded by youth but not really seeing them. Adults often stay busy but ultimately get sidetracked on the schooling day to day demands because the essential landmarks and signposts of youth voice pass by unseen. If young people are genuinely involved, they provide a constant compass bearing to assure both teachers and students a fruitful journey.

In my years of working with young people, I have witnessed many consequences of the full involvement of youth - or lack thereof. I characterize four distinct degrees of student involvement ranging from superficial to deep involvement. I call each by its function: window-dressing, informing, guiding, and partnership.

Window-dressing. All too often, students are superficial - part of the mission statement, certainly part of the calling for the adults who work in the organization, but never genuinely listened to or asked for advice. In effect, they are pawns moved around the schooling chessboard. Highly visible to the outside world, they have little to do with decisions that run the school.

I empathize when students in these situations express their accumulated frustration at not being listened to by adults. Students often are placed in positions of seeming participation, but an adult wielding veto power typically monitors the proceedings. As a result, genuine issues are driven underground where they suffer all sorts of interesting fates and avenues of development.

Informing. Informing is a more mature stage of involvement, characterized by students telling the learning organization about what works and what doesn't.

Adults are genuine about listening to students and often place them in strategic positions beyond the traditional student council. They may be asked to join a curriculum committee, athletic council, or school/community interest group. In this unique position, students are often asked for their opinion. After giving their side of an issue to a committee, the school board, or a community group, the students - feeling affirmed and empowered - are sent back to the classroom.

At this juncture, student involvement in the process often ends, seldom is comprehensive action taken. Student input becomes a

process of positive affirmation but not one of guiding.

Guiding. Imagine a decision-making committee of 12, comprised of four students and eight adults. This would describe an organization growing more sophisticated at empowering youth, extending its reach to youth beyond informing to guiding. One of the best ways to do this is to increase the number of students on committees, while simultaneously increasing the number of committees that have student representatives. A useful critical mass of student involvement seems to build upon itself, generating more interest and building confidence in the youth to join committees and share from the heart. The precise number that constitutes a critical mass will be unique for each school. Usually, a full third to one-quarter of students teamed with adults often gave the task at hand a strong partnering foundation. Don't fret about a student takeover; students seem to understand the realities of the organization, acting with a restrained yet determined focus.

In this guiding form of involvement the organization is committed to developing and sustaining youth leadership. Students emerge as significant leaders in areas like extra-curricular activities, community connections, peer counseling, hallway behavior, and drug and alcohol prevention. Despite this admirable level of involvement, a curtain still restrains student participation in several areas at the heart of the school - those like staffing, budget, curriculum, and discipline. These issues are essentially left for the adults to decide, with student participation scaled back to an informing role.

Partnering. Infrequently found in my years of working with youth, the partnering stage is clearly developed over much time and with much effort. Partnering can only be sustained by becoming a strong cultural tradition in a school where students are perceived as full partners acting jointly with adults in the school operation. This stage implies the activation of students informing the organization, guiding the organization, and undertaking responsible decision making in all areas and facets of the learning community. Adults are likewise empowered in their own professional areas. The idea that a teacher would give up the ship of state to insurgent youth is full of inaccurate apprehension! Full partnership strengthens both students and adults. True alignment of issues creates a strong center of gravity and stability for the organization.

Typical with place-base learning, significant student initiative is brought to fruition through successive stages of planning to implementation. Students are voting members on committees and boards, have an integral hand in curriculum development, and are key to the instructional maturation and governance of the school. If a news team came to interview the schools founders; several students would be interviewed for each year there is a place for the power of influence of founders.

Of course, this is where fear often rises in adults, because adults sometimes confuse full partnership with a relationship as co-equals. It is the gravest of errors for students and adults to assume that full partnership means equal functionality. One partner is young and inexperienced in life's ways; the other has professional training and life experiences that provide a richer, more knowledgeable perspective. One is certified in his or her profession, the other still searching for a pathway. However, they can still create a working partnership fully cognizant of these major distinctions.

True partnering is when each role, whether teacher or student, is uniquely respected and understood. Cara, quoted earlier, suggests, *"This sort of teaching [place-based] empowers students to take charge of what is being taught to them and apply it to the greater community."* Each capacity acts out of a sense of co-responsibility to the mission of the particular learning that is always beneficial to the student as well as the community.

Of course, co-responsible and co-equal are not synonymous. Students are not employees and employees are not students; both, however, are genuine learners in the organization they share and care for. Shared responsibility strengthens the ability for teachers and students to respond to the dynamics of learning. There is plenty of power, decisions, and leadership to go around. To achieve shared responsibility means to get rid of the superficiality of window dressing antics, the artificialness of tokenism, and the frustration of guiding without fully leading. What a tremendous outpouring that came from Matt, 22, an experienced place-based student from Virginia, as he explained how this concept of partnering builds capacity:

I think that adults need to look at students as being equal partners in their ability to bring ideas to the table. The only thing barring them from being equal partners is the vision and the girth that adults are going to allow them to have. If you look to youth and young people as the providers of new thoughts, as having the ability to look outside the box, then it will enrich the entire community. As I said earlier, I truly believe that we fill the shoes that we're expected to fill. And providing that vision with the large shoes is what I think adults can do.

One-Room School Philosophy

If there is one constant in my years of work with young people, it is the primacy of the small group as a means of empowering student voice - whether in English class, wilderness expedition, or big brother program. Successful small group work ensures what I call an, "connecting quality" - a permanent feature in any class, expedition, school, or business that echoes loudly the leadership taking place. I like to call this the "one-room school philosophy." Individuals pick and choose their times of engagement for hordes of self-benefiting reasons. A small group, by contrast, when truly functioning as a team, grows beyond the reasonable range of any one of its members, creating an independent momentum and sub-culture greater than any one person. Like a furnace needing fuel, a successful small group demands full participation to perpetuate itself. One-room school teachers ultimately knew that they had to create a confident and productive social group or the academic piece would never have the right conditions to excel. Their smallness and multi-age configuration of the students, combined that they were the only adult...demanded this generalist approach to teaching, fully cognizant of how community building was essential.

A group without every member involved is merely an aggregate. The 'connecting quality' becomes more than the glue holding a group of individuals together, it defines the emerging qualities that constitute the essential by-products of a cohesive team working together well: a productive committee will arrive at a new idea that is marked by its energy, integrity, and value for the organization; a successful athletic team will overcome a season of ups and downs to sustain its competitive edge; a research team will unify

its assorted tasks into a comprehensive discovery.

In effect, where the Connecting Quality of learning is on fire, those close to its epicenter will learn significantly. This is really not complicated. There aren't hidden secrets to the essential success of learning communities. It gets down to members treating one another with the following attributes: respect, compassion, honesty, justice, service, enthusiasm, purpose, patience, tolerance, knowledge, responsibility, caring, unity, trust, creativity, courtesy, honor, love, loyalty, and kindness.

The words in this list are common, reachable, understandable, and even, to some degree, overused. We often look right past them as the key to creating a learning community. Do not be fooled by the ease with which these words can slip off the tongues of educators and parents alike. Like a miner hunting for gold, the real thing can be found only after backbreaking work, diligence, and sometimes luck! The truth is that we seldom experience these words ourselves. Often stated in vision statements, they are rarely attained. In that contradiction lays the crux of a generational issue that has been frequently described as teachers often teaching, "as they were taught." If you haven't experienced a true learning community, how are you to establish one? We all know what it means to care; yet how many teachers have truly felt the bond of 25 people caring for each other?

My point is that teachers, dedicated to their work, have to activate the above one-room school attributes within themselves to do a good job! We experience these values every day. One can no more teach without tolerance, knowledge, and determination than one can sail without understanding the winds, rigging, and sails. Aimless movement would be the result. However, as much as it begins with each teacher as the leader - the key remains creating a school climate, series of experiences, and level of trust where students develop these attributes as well.

It is only in the relational growth between individual and environment, between student and student, student and teacher, student and subject, student and school, that the place called school is created. In the next generation of teachers, more time needs to be spent attaining these experiences of learning communities. We need to attend to young teachers as learners as much as masters of subject material. If school is where the next generation learns about itself,

gathers skills for adulthood, and sustains the flame of democracy, then the task is to create schools and within them self-sustaining learning communities, instead of perpetuating schools as fragmented instruction within competing pedagogies.

Listening and student voice when leveraged with successful small group ‘one-room school’ dynamics creates successful schools. I know this. I have seen it again and again. As John Dewey described, this ability to “come to close quarters with the pupil’s mind and the subject matter” is, for me, the magic of learning and the reward of teaching.

Ximena, a freshman at the charter school, added to my appreciation of this magic when I read her comments about how she learned through the year-long curriculum of place-based learning: *“We definitely learn but it is in a different way. We are not always stuck in a classroom; we are much freer. Our love (of learning) is combined with our work, our joy is combined with our work, and we are learning things that are important to us.”*

Chapter 6

Attributes of Learning: *Telling your Story*

True education involves growing to appreciate the direct links that exist between actions and consequences -- in one's body, in one's social network, in the planetary environment as a whole. Nowadays learning is generally mediated by abstract information: no appreciable risk is involved, no direct experience of effects is possible, except through a failing grade.

Only a few generations ago, a person who grew up on a farm knew what he or she had to know, and why. Information was concrete, familiar, and relevant. Knowledge was integrated around survival tasks -- planting crops, caring for domestic animals -- or around crafts like building barns and weaving cloth, or around symbolic necessities like playing music, dancing, or religious activities outside of school. What he or she has to do is learn a great amount of abstract material, such as chemistry, biology, genetics, physics, mathematics, world geography, and history -- most of the time without understanding what purpose these subjects will actually serve.¹

- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

You can't just let life pass you by. You can't let things you care about just happen without you.

- Kelsey, 15, California

In literature, the journey is the mainstay of the heroic cycle. Whether Odysseus, Bilbo, or Dorothy, each hero begins his or her journey from home and travels to unknown lands. Whether fighting the Trojans, slaying Smaug the Dragon, or unmasking the Wizard of Oz, each hero must overcome a series of challenges to achieve his or her goal.

How heroes go about this journey, and with whom, is the essence of the heroic tale. The main character - the hero - will often join forces with a band of colleagues, dwarves, or a wizard, tin man, scarecrow, and lion. Once wrapped in each other's mutual interest, each loyal band solves the many dilemmas that come its way. And, by doing so, they turn the spotlight onto their heroic qualities. Good learning like a good hero tale encompasses these qualities as Tiffany, 15, expressed, *"As a learner I feel important when I have overcome something. When I've worked hard and then finally achieved something. It's not the same feeling you get when you haven't worked hard."*

When Odysseus trusts his men, or Bilbo solves the riddles of Gollum, or Dorothy inspires the human intellect in the Scarecrow, these heroes are modeling to each reader several achievable human characteristics. And they are achievable, because all heroic attributes are human ones. Leadership, cleverness, and inspiration are only three examples of many qualities that elevate the hero or heroine. The lasting value of heroic tales resides in the human condition, broad as the endless sky. In place-based learning, the wide range of skills and attitude, caring and background knowledge all fuse to present learning in a very broad sense. Erin, 14, was astute in saying, *"I feel we learn to be able to comprehend and communicate with the world around us. Learning is observing, listening, and feeling. There are multiple ways to learn, and different people learn using those ways."*

Human characteristics and heroic qualities are the raw materials mined by the storyteller into bright jewels that adorn a reader's intellect. Only by meeting the intellect of the scarecrow, the compassion of the tin man, and the willful courage of the lion does the reader fully understand Dorothy's capacity as a human being and her actions as a heroine.

Heroes seldom roam in isolation, but, rather, they exist at the center of change, at the center of community, and most importantly at the center of learning. It is only through intensive learning that the hero obtains the heroic qualities that give life to the story. Heroes also make mistakes, many of them. As with ageless adversity, it is how the hero responds to these mistakes that provides the illumination to the tale. Timeless in truth through the ages, heroic stories propel the reader into a land of wishes, dreams, visions, and hope of what it means to be human.

“ Learning is making mistakes and taking what you believe is important from that mistake [. . .] we are on a road of life. You may pass many people and say nothing and still continue. You can stop and talk to a traveler ask him what lies ahead and you may learn something,” confirmed Lucas, 16, a Kickapoo River Institute student as he reflected during an end of the year writing reflection.

The learning cycle parallels the heroic journey. Each child travels daily from home to school tossed upon his or her voyage with an assortment of peers. Each grade and each year can best be recalled as a singular journey of its own: in early fall, the energy of new beginnings; by late autumn the steady rhythm of deepening patterns, by mid-winter established connections, then a burst of spring and, before we know it - the end of the year and a summer in which to reflect. The summer, like a settling pond, is time apart, essential for clearing the turbulent waters of raw experience so students and teachers can gather up their reflective identities, organize their journey, critique their roles, and thereby lay another foundation for the next cycle to begin anew in the fall.

What does this say for the teacher? In addition to recognizing the importance of the journey metaphor for students, teachers must also put heroic qualities front and center in a learning community. They can inform our understandings, and most critically, fuel our attitude as we teach. Of the many heroic qualities, three are particularly relevant for teachers.

Patience. Patience shares the Latin root, **pati**, meaning to suffer. Characteristic of the will to endure without complaint, patience implies the bearing of a burden, enduring something one does not necessarily want to do, but will for a greater good. Students go to school to develop their individual capacities, yet need to show patience

when a learning experience is tilted towards the group, rather than the individual. Furthermore, patience, like listening, is a pillar for successful teachers, always a two-way street. Without it, the other values never have a chance to take hold.

Moderation. From Latin **moderate**, meaning to keep within bounds, a moderator influences behavior within reasonable limits. He or she avoids excesses and extremes and by doing so presides over a meeting of the minds or an expanding discussion. Moderation, coupled with loyalty, is a powerful commitment by individuals to accommodate the group in deliberation instead of focusing on self, what's in it for me. Moderation and loyalty are both group-oriented values. Encouraged by group behavior, they thrive in an arena of trust.

Reliability. To be able to count on someone is a solid value that groups hold out for individuals. Reliability and trust are interwoven into a fine mesh of dependability. It's interesting to note that rely, the basic word form of reliability, comes from the Latin **religare**, meaning to bind together. Reliability is an outcome of many successful learning experiences. Listen to the feedback after a team experience. Is the language one of interdependent phrases? -- like, "They showed they cared." "My group was helpful." "I liked her ideas." "We worked past the time given to us." All are indicators of reliability. When we have these four (patience, moderation, and reliability) then each student has hope profound. In contrast, learning in desperate circumstances is the reality for way too many students these days. I'll never forget an eighth grade student who captured the nature of hope so well. Rachel, a very quiet student who seldom talked yet always thoughtful, declares:

Hope means believing and holding on even when things seem pointless. When things look really bad, hope is there. Hope is the key to unlock all the happiness and fortune in the world. Hope is the will to hold on even at the darkest hour in someone's life. If you have hope - you have something pretty special. Hope is a way to think positive and have faith in yourself while giving faith to others. In the long run, we will all need hope in order to live, whether it is a rainy day and you want the clouds to go away, or your back is to the wall and it seems like you have nothing to live for. Just remember, hope is always there.

It is often up to the teacher to bring these qualities into the open. With a full appreciation of these qualities - posted visibly on walls, chosen as key language in a quote, or as topics for a morning meeting - they will come alive. It doesn't take inordinate energy or skill to activate these qualities in a learning community. They are alive in each and every student like a dry desert pothole awaiting the first spring rain. Audra, from Wisconsin, knew this well when she insisted that, "*students feel the passion radiating from their teacher and respond positively. As long as there is passion, there's a light of knowledge.*"

Of course many other heroic qualities can easily come front and center in a purposeful learning environment. Here are several more:

Tactfulness. From the Latin **tangere** meaning to touch. This is an important layer to a mature learning community. Being thoughtful, discreet, considerate, and judicious are all behaviors of tactful students. And these excellent group dispositions are critical to the success of a team. Holding back opinions while active listening; leading by example rather than force of voice; giving space for the meek to speak; selecting the right time to share the right path. Tactfulness capabilities are the manners of small group success.

Compassion. From the Latin **compassio** meaning sympathy; compassion is an empathetic understanding of the world around us. This ability to engage what one is most interested in is a hallmark of compassion. And in every community there are amazing elders who stand ready to share their compassionate knowledge with students. The two age groups, elders and youth, that can benefit from each other's compassion, are increasingly isolated in their respective lives: school or retirement.

Enthusiasm. From the Greek **enthios** meaning possessed by a God. A student imbued with enthusiasm is easy to spot in a vibrant learning community. They command attention, grabbing interest -- living and breathing it every moment. This is powerful learning charisma that brings a zeal and zest to a small learning community. When I talk with students visiting schools across the country...the measure of the power of the most successful schools is often indicated by the enthusiasm evident.

Trustworthiness. From the Indo-European base of **treu** meaning tree. A student who is firm with integrity, in effect --- deep roots. This heroic quality is THE anchor of sustaining a learning community. Integrity is everything.

Confidence. From the Latin **confidere** meaning ‘intense trust. Whether a student trusts in their own capabilities or the student trust in others...confidence is, like respect, the RESULT of almost all the above qualities coming to play in a learning community. Again, talking with students it doesn’t take more that a few seconds to ascertain qualities of confidence.

Portfolios

Walking into the grocery store the other day, I noticed the tall stack of boxes, opened on one end in the aisle. One inch, three ring binders, many colors. Price? Less than two dollars. It dawned on me what has happened these last few years in schools. It seems everybody has a portfolio; not just the usual English teachers but in science, maybe even in an elective like information processing or music. Portfolios per capita have seen exponential growth lately.

That’s ok, good reasons for that. Besides bringing up all those fun aspects of scrapbooks, portfolios essentially tell a story. My story; your story. And, in so doing, offer evidence of something. I am a qualified candidate. Or I am a successful student. Many reasons, but what is important to understand in place-based learning, or in any undertaking where the proof is in the pudding, the portfolio becomes the student’s storyteller. So it’s best to start in the beginning.

In the fall, it is important to establish a baseline to bring the portfolio into the life of a learning community. What has the student experienced to date? How will last year shape this year? What issues or ideas need continuation? Which ones are completed and need a next stage of growth? Which one is best left to incubate for further work? Having students begin this early discussion of the past will bring their learning portfolio ‘up-to-date’. And, in the end, a well-done learning portfolio captures exquisite moments, stunning the reader and inspiring like Kelly’s mid-June reflection after a year with the Kickapoo River Institute when she states: *“Learning is caring and finding truth in something that you can’t see. It’s listening and watching, viewing and doing. Why someone would not want to learn*

new things is wrong, you learn them no matter what. What you learn makes you who you are. And you never stop. Learning is an eternal flame that catches everyone in a bonfire of brilliance. To learn is to live life."

A learning portfolio is a history of the life of the learner. They can be profound for students. Each is a work about the work: thinking about thinking, feeling about feeling, inquiring about inquiring - in other words, a means to self-examination. A learning portfolio tracks self-knowledge, maybe deviating for personal anecdotes but returning quickly to the learning journey being documented.

It will go through stages and drafts like any work - but in the end a sequential series of snapshots will rest in place, a strong foundation to build the next layer along the student's journey. By and large, it is a thoughtful, public declaration of learning. It demonstrates first to the student, then to the world the student's strength of learning over time. Clear writing surfaces from each student.

In contrast to the vibrancy of Kelly's previous reflection, Marley, a fellow student, captures complex understanding with an elegant simplicity, *"Learning is trial and failure. You have to have fun while learning or you won't learn much. It's taking stuff that makes no sense and adding stuff to it to make sense."*

Learning portfolios work to the advantage of the learner because they provide a harbor, a refuge for thoughts, a place for hindsight to work its wisdom. During the first few weeks every September, I facilitate a reflective linkage from present to past that thereby informs the future. Examine the previous year's learning cycle. Start with writing, and then allow writing to inspire discussion. These initial writings in a student's learning portfolio have the means to draw out the meaningful threads from several years past, identifying strong issues and patterns. By asking a series of questions in a trusting writing environment, each student can broaden his or her understanding of learning about learning.

What worked well for you last year? Recall a lesson, day, or experience that will give detail to this question. What part of learning has been the strongest for you in the last three years? Given your personal magic wand of change, what would you change in your reading class, math class, science class, etc? What is it about the way you learn these subjects that you would wish to change? Of the ten

heroic qualities on the board which three speak to you the strongest? Why? Which three speak to you the least? Why? Of these heroic qualities, which three would you like to work on this year? Why? How?

After students write for awhile on these questions, the small group discussion can be profound. The oral sharing, the giving of voice to these important matters, is always a great moment of learning for a new class. Be sure to capture the words being written and spoken. By building on the power of the words and phrases gathered, displaying some visibly, and most importantly, integrating them into your teaching vocabulary, you are creating a nest from which this flight of self-expression can take off.

Thereafter, these words of self-reflective writing will act as a trigger, a node of nourishment, to prod the writers forward in their ongoing learning portfolio work. This is especially critical for place-based learning work. Give a period of reflection between learning cycles. During the year, take time, every couple weeks, to ask the same questions in a context fitting that particular period. The act of reflective journaling, in effect, becomes a community of action that demonstrates how learning is cared for, how it will be attended to. As Leslie proclaimed, *“The first time someone says, “Wow, great job” or “That’s a great idea” the student may just take the comment with a grain of salt. No big deal. But the more encouragement that is given, the more students will believe it. Suddenly, the realization comes that someone cares.”*

As this chapter’s excerpts from students’ writing show, a learning portfolio can help each student identify his or her own heroic journey. And as students voyage through their learning portfolios, they sometimes take their teachers along with them. Alex, another Wisconsin leader from the retreat, gets the last say in this chapter. *“The most important part of my life as a student is to see that you can make a difference and that sometimes the adults even seem to listen and maybe even think about what I say.”*

Chapter 7

Measuring the Success of Place-Based Learning

Education must take account of those factors in the process of adjustment that make it possible to meet new and changing needs. It must emphasize intelligence, initiative, originality, and enterprise. It is not so much a fixed adjustment that we want as adjustability...

- Irving E. Miller, Education for the Needs of Life, (NY: Macmillan, 1925), 14

One thing I always say is that each person is given their own talent and their own gift, and it just takes patience to receive that gift. If there's anything that I learned this year by serving in other places, is that you don't have to get in a high position to be recognized as a leader. Because it starts with you. But you have to make that choice, whether to accept the responsibilities of being a leader or not.

- Crystal, 16, Arizona

Imagine teaching in a high school without walls. Imagine instructing a small group of diverse freshman and sophomores limited only by the learning resources and people of your community, region and state. Imagine 100 days of field studies - studying the history, ecology, and culture of home; whether historical archive, restored wetland, or senior citizen community center. Imagine working with sixty professionals and community members over the year, integrating learning into interdisciplinary courses titled Nature and Technology; Energy, Ecosystems, and Economics; and The Kickapoo Valley: A Bio-Regional Map.

Finally, imagine giving these students an Iowa Basic Skills Standardized Test to assess if this kind of learning, this 'Pedagogy of Place', would make a difference in a conventional assessment. What would you find from a Pre-Test/Post-Test design? Will students score well in Science by working closely with biologists on a wetlands restoration project? Will students' score well in Social Studies by working closely with historians, conducting research in archives and presenting their findings at a history conference? Will students' score well in Math by computing the flow rate, volume and drift of the Kickapoo River? Will students score well in Language Arts by the consistent and constant application of oral and written skills in deadline-oriented tasks? In effect, will students, when working in a small school setting and learning in the community, engage in powerful learning, as measured by a nationally recognized test? Does place-based learning hold a unique 'quality of permanence' that is readily accessible during a testing time?

As mentioned several places earlier, I had the unique experience of establishing, and then teaching in a small charter high school that spent over 100 days learning in the community. Students learned together, like a one-room schoolhouse, for over nine months. These students reflected the widest range of skills, abilities, and backgrounds. Some were 'gifted' and some were 'at-risk'; several students even scored at college levels on certain sub-sections of the pre-test; and several scored at early elementary levels. Some were 'model' students; some -- during the previous year -- were constantly challenged and being challenging.

What kind of work took us into the community for 100 days? Here is a small sampling of projects we undertook:

- Researched the Civil War veterans from the Valley.
- Answered the question: Did the Kickapoo Indians ever actually live in the Kickapoo Valley?
- Built picnic tables and benches for the community.
- Worked with the Department of Natural Resources and a private landowner to monitor changes at a two hundred and fifty-acre wetland restoration project.
- Created art pieces reflecting the natural and cultural heritage of home; wrote poetry perched atop a sun swept limestone outcropping overlooking a pre-historical site.
- Discovered the geological history of the area and the Kickapoo Rivers' changing course through investigation and analysis of 100 years of archival maps and recent aerial photographs.
- Found the source of the Kickapoo River and hiked, canoed, and biked 100 miles to its confluence with the Wisconsin River.

After this eventful year of learning, as one means of assessment, these students were given the Iowa Test of Educational Development in September and a post-test in June. I will share the results of these tests and propose several thoughts on why place-based learning is a potent, powerful, and purposeful means of learning.

A concern voiced by educators, is that a non-classroom environment can not measure up to the rigor of a traditional classroom. The thinking goes like this...field trips are good for the spirit of the students and provide an enrichment experience; but, too many trips away from school dilutes the curriculum. It takes time away from classroom teaching. Many teachers have shared with me the frustration paraphrased as the following. "With the demanding expectations of high stakes testing and covering subject area standards constantly knocking on my class door, how am I supposed to justify, opening that door, leaving, and entering the community day after day?"

Place-based learning is great, they might say, but it isn't as rigorous as my daily lessons. Isn't this risking the wherewithal of my students to meet state standards? I don't believe this. My experience says otherwise.

What did the test results show?

The composite score (all subjects combined) jumped almost

three grade levels. In each section there was a distinct pre/post movement that seems to connect strongly to the learning in the community.

The Science section moved from 10.6 grade level equivalent to 13.6. This 13.6 is the highest overall post-test section score. One of its sub-sections; *evaluating and analyzing information* increased from a national ranking of 52% to 74%. This makes sense to me understanding how the students kept the field journals, data collection logs, and analysis needed to undertake various steps in their projects.

The Social Studies section increased from 9.3 to 12.2 and its sub-section on *interpreting information* leapt 29%. Again, all the primary source research we undertook, the constant seeking of answers, the community documents, artifacts, and people tended to shift a student to a highly responsive role where they learned to discriminate, categorize, and evaluate information for what was essential and what wasn't.

The Sources of Information section jumped almost three grade levels from 8.2 to 11.0. In fact, two subsections increased by over 50%; *library sources* (44% increase to 73%) and *government sources* (54% to 83%). These students had more time in state archives, historical museums, and libraries than most students obtain in a single year.

In nine months, the composite grade equivalent, increased from the middle of freshman year (9.6) to the end of senior year (12.5).

What is it about place-based learning that shaped the learning thereby influencing these post-testing scores?

Four defining attributes of place-based pedagogy come to mind.

1. Connections shape attitudes. CA
2. Anchors define Place AP
3. Primary is the Experience PE
4. Audience determines Accountability AA

Connections shape attitudes (CA)

Attitude is always essential for high quality performance in any endeavor. Though diligent in their September pre-test, these students had yet to jell as a learning community. By the June post-test, they were fully connected; hundreds of small and many large events had brought them together as a learning community. They had been

together all day, every day, since September. They believed in what they were doing. Therefore, they were committed to place-based learning working.

Consequently, a post-test became a means to show their worth, voice their value, and affirm their hard work. Having administered our Wisconsin State Assessment Tests for many years to 4th, 8th, and 10th grade students, I understood how this commitment of community was a far cry from the conventional student attitude toward ‘fill in the circle’ testing. Because of each student’s sincere investment and caring attitude, they read each question carefully, went back over their answers, and brought into play various minor test-taking skills that made a major difference.

Engagement drives purpose, and purpose in education provides meaningfulness, i.e., connections; and when students are connected; a new multiplier increases the academic power of any one unit of time. This combination of connection and meaning simply changes the landscape for most students. In effect, through place-based learning, students will develop good basic skills as well as outscore any comparable group of teenagers who exhibit the gamut of conventional attitudes regarding state-mandated testing.

For example, when I was administering the WSAS test on writing development and the student received the blue book, one of them always seemed to raise their hand and ask, “Mr. Lewicki, am I receiving a grade on this?” When I reply, “No.” A smile crosses their face and ten minutes later they are done, with their heads in their hands. Of course, I can try persuasive skills, school pride, but the bottom line of effort lies in their level of commitment to caring about the results.

Anchors of Place (AP)

Secondly, there existed an indispensable influence that I hadn’t foreseen until in the midst of this remarkable year. The tremendous variety of community settings became anchors of memory -- readily accessible -- whether during a conversation or test. When you learn at a museum, hospital, university archive, forest, prairie, or riverbank then the vivid nature of the experience itself, works like a mnemonic device, helping retain the learning. This wealth of experience became a depository for future access, especially during a test. What each student knows of their home neighborhood or community is directly

proportional to the number and depth of field studies.

Primary is the Experience (PE)

Third, these students had many first-hand experiences, and many of them were critical to the learning. Remember that experience comes from the Latin *experiri*, which means to try. To try implies failure, constant self-evaluation, and targeted analysis of what just happened. For example, a microclimate study along the Kickapoo River was a frequent place for temperature, humidity, plant growth, and observation data collection. In the Iowa tests many questions asked each student to analyze experimental procedures; it was fairly easy for them to look back on their many experiments and extrapolate answers for the test. In fact, they scored at a college level on this sub-skill in the science section.

Audience of Accountability/Assessment (AAA)

Place-based learning frequently has students asking questions with answers yet to be discovered and conducting research no one else is doing. This one-in-a-kind work and constant community access becomes an ‘audience of accountability’ with favorable pressure exerted on quality indicators sourced from each students’ skills and abilities. The last element is critical to the success of place-based learning. And for many, becomes known to them only after they have journeyed down that road apiece. Audience is key. Because of the nature of the projects, combined with the highly visible aspects of being in the community - audience, like a magnet, will draw quality work out of the students. The students understood that family, friends, and neighbors would view their work. Furthermore, the relevancy of tasks and projects often had a direct benefit like answering local historical questions, monitoring wetlands, or building an often-used park bench. The result was often of the highest quality.

Beyond audience, another area is for students to score well on assessments. And to do so they must have solid proficient skills. A common concern of educators entering place-based learning is maintaining, if not expanding upon, levels of fundamental skill building. Innovation that doesn’t assure solid skills, rings hollow. Since many place-based ideas bring students into the community, away from the classroom’s daily conventions, teachers can rightly ask if they will be as successful without as much direct instruction time allocated to the basic skills.

We forget sometime the power of learning inherent in a group of teenagers that really care and want to show it. Revolutions are energized and often led by the young, as Doris Williams explained earlier the engine of the American civil rights movement was the young; clearly schools can pass muster and score well on some standardized test with a group of dedicated students.

How might you find that group? Make them, with the passion and connectivity of authentic learning. And, in my experience, this learning is abundantly implicit in place-based learning. Moreover, the interdisciplinary modes of learning really shine in place-based learning; thereby creating two, three, or even four different subject area standards being met with one unit of time. This 3 to 1 or 2 to 1 efficiency allows students to go more into depth with the new time gained, again underscoring meaning to the learning. Certainly, this authentic learning is found in many place-based pathways. What is best is for each teacher is to find the place-based glove that fits and wear it well.

In conclusion, looking back, I frequently wonder what lessons this intensive experience holds for teachers who teach within the more usual structure of schedules, bells, and multiple preps? Few teachers will ever have the flexibility I was given. I understand my experience was unique. However, in the last ten years since that Kickapoo River Institute experience, I have helped over 100 schools implement their visions. And what I have seen is that time and time again...a unified group of educators, partnering with community experts and elder, and honoring the voice and choice of the school's youth – can do amazing place-based work. In effect, place-based learning holds much potential even in vastly different formats. One need not spend 100 days, or 50, or even 12 days in the community to benefit; 15 days in a school year would be a revolution from the view of many students. Moreover, one need not always even be in the community, for the community can enter the school as well.

Community sensibilities must help design the blueprint. What seems essential for place-based learning is that the design assures community learning opportunities and issues vitally in mind. Benefits are assured when there is a focused time period with a well-defined community purpose. Tremendous resources, elders and experts, exist in our communities and neighborhoods. Once tapped into they often

lead to new resources that impact the evolving place-based curriculum.

We do so many things well, each and every day, in classrooms across America. Incredible learning takes place in school. I was given an opportunity few teachers witness, to move the place of learning into the community arena. The power of learning when community is the “classroom” is beyond compare. Linking your school with a place called home will pay dividends, planned and unplanned.

Given the above defining attributes of place-based pedagogy, I have developed a ‘taking stock’ tool that a teacher or group of students can utilize in a few minutes to inform a community discussion on how productive their place-based learning is developing.

Each month what is the number? Average score per box?

<p>CA 1 2 3</p> <p><u>Indicators:</u> Strong student engagement Generative curriculum Purpose is everywhere Leadership is distributed</p>	<p>AAA 1 2 3</p> <p><u>Indicators:</u> Learning product is real Compelling reasons for action Audience is real High relevance of work product</p>
<p>AP 1 2 3</p> <p><u>Indicators:</u> Different places for learning School is a ‘base camp’ Comfort of students learning in Non-traditional settings</p>	<p>PE 1 2 3</p> <p><u>Indicators:</u> The Learning matters, real data Being the researcher, inventor, historian, scientist, writer, performer, leader, etc.</p>

Less than 4

Productivity and Believability is being depleted, You are going in the wrong direction!!!

Score of 4, 5, 6

Foundation is being built, increase the numbers the very next month!

Score of 7,8,9

Where most sustaining place-based schools operate with occasional months higher.

Score of 10,11,12

An exceptional school with differentiated place-based learning operating with strong community connections. A real generative think tank and ‘best practice’ lab.

Chapter 8

Why Does Place-Based Learning Work for Today?

Zorba came upon an old man planting an apricot seedling and asked why he, an old man, was planting a new tree. “I live as though I would never die,” was his reply. “And me, I live as though I might die tomorrow,” said Zorba, “which one of us is right?”

- Nikos Kazantzakis

If there is learning taking place you can actually feel it, you can reach out and touch it.

- Howard Fuller

You have to take risks sometime.

- Cara, 22 Vermont

A generation ago, the 1983 report A Nation at Risk, focused national conversation regarding the state of American education: What was working? What was not, and why? How to fix it, tinkering or overhaul? By 1988, when I shifted careers from directing youth, family, and camp programs at the YMCA and began teaching in public school, these waves of change and reform, ushered in by its highly visible challenge, were beginning to crash upon the shore of school districts. Along with other career changers, as well as our younger colleagues, I joined newest generation of teachers. Energized, we had examined A Nation At Risk in our teacher education classes, had discussed the evolving federal and state policies, and saw ourselves as the new wave of innovators to address the needs driven into the national psyche through this seminal report.

Since my initial teaching 22 years has elapsed and reflecting upon this journey, I contemplate how education has changed, and moreover, to the point of this book, how place-based learning is a worthy pedagogy for the newest generation of educators.

By now, I trust you have a sense of what place-based learning is all about; you can appreciate what this work has meant to young people, and readily grasp the power place-based learning bestows upon in individuals and community alike. Furthermore, I would assert, confidently, that place-based learning reflects a ‘best practice’ targeted enough to matter in any learning community, comprehensive enough to impact a district, and inspirational enough to contribute to a vision for new schools, or renewal of current ones.

Why? The demands of this generation will be met by the building of relationships amongst young and old, school and community, serving and being served, attending to and being cared for, which are fundamental experiences of place-based learning.

When I first began teaching in 1988, it seemed I had so much time until the year 2000. With the echo of the ‘83 report still in our ears, making grand goals and aspiring visions for the change of the millennium seemed so logical. Now, in 2010, it seems like 1988 was a very long time ago. Myriad curriculum models spouting innovation and change, massive school reform and vast amounts of political posturing and policy initiatives have swept across the educational landscape. Some have taken hold, and some have long since

evaporated to the winds of change. With much accomplished, there is still significant work to be done.

The times are way beyond changing; the times are very, very challenging for educators. Increasing demands in the classroom, limits on funding for education, continued blame tossed our way, whether we ask for it, deserve it, or not. The demands of today demand we seek out best practices that move beyond incremental ways to improve student achievement. We need to upset the applecart of 'business as usual' schooling and support young people to believe. As Howard Fuller, Director of the Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University, noted to a group of educators in Milwaukee in the fall of 2002, "We are educating this generation not just to work in the 21st century but to create the 21st century!"

Opposite forces will come into play during this process. Schooling is evolving and devolving at the same time. Evolving, schooling is consolidating towards tremendous access to knowledge and conversation through the Internet. Imagine my students; they have always known the Internet - its ability to convey information, connect people and thereby build knowledge, which can lead to understanding when anchored correctly. This capability of access to raw information, networking in real time, and virtual libraries on demand challenge us a society in ways we are only beginning to understand.

On the other hand, schools are transitioning into loosely federated aggregates of students and teachers as life-long learners. Virtual knowledge building and communication has accelerated the melt of the rigid classroom walls. What is known as schooling is much more defined by connections and relationships than by structure and place.

Place-based learning fits this contrasting profile of learning. By reflecting the wisdom of the community as the final arbitrator of what learning can be, place-based learning takes the next step for education in the 21st century. Kids know this most readily. My guess is that schooling will look much different in a generation, much different.

With fractured consequences rather than a unified school and community approach, schools today possess, and are fitfully, at times, possessed by an organizing principle that keeps students inside the school. Knowledge remains piecemeal rather than integrated through a place context. There is a blind focus to anchor the power and place

of learning within the four walls of school, regardless of how valuable the community might be as a contributor.

Shouldn't our sensibilities be framed and shaped by the community where the school resides? The world around us, local or global, has vital issues that knock at the door of our schoolhouses for response. Students sometimes hear that knock at the school door; other times the community gives up on the school, oblivious - bored and frustrated with an effort too seldom reciprocated. And when the school and community don't work together they end up at arms length, missing an opportunity to grapple with vital economic, environmental, and engaging local issues of place. Today, with new connections and learning relationships evolving, that knock is louder than ever before.

Given an invigorated collaboration between school and community through place-based learning, we can, as educators answer that knock and make a difference. Students beseech us to pay attention to their needs to make a difference in the lives of others, now. Do they make a difference, today? Seldom. After a generation of reform since A Nation at Risk, each student's importance to his or her community has barely nudged off home plate. In too many cases, they haven't even come up to bat.

A premise of this book is to bring students to the plate. And by doing so, we all benefit. Ernest from Alabama and James from New Mexico, knew this in their respective comments: Ernest states, "*I wish that adults would understand that students do have innovative, mind-boggling ideas, and that students can put those ideas into action. And they can make the world a better place.*"

Asking to be part of the solution, part of the community is not much to ask of our schools overwhelmed with talented young people. James adds, "*Adults may have had a bad experience and they don't want to touch a subject, whereas youth will be ready to go in and dig it up and see what's there. When you think of community leaders, nobody ever thinks of a kid! Everybody's always thinking of the mayor, or these older guys in suits who make laws.*"

Again, action steps, dig it up, move forward. The future need not be vague, though we must understand that, as we move forward, real learning is murky. This murkiness often hides the messy, unclear steps to solve a problem: rather than canned, cut and paste, where the teacher knows the end before the project even begins.

Place-based learning, in fact, often has a murky start. Given birth through serious and genuine listening to each other; a student poses an inquiry, the question lingers in the air for a moment, and before we know it, as if magically, the students assemble intellect, passion, and interest to find the answer. From this focusing group of peers, the nature of the place-based learning is framed and off they go! The energy is palatable. When this happens a school really becomes a ‘time of life.’ As Ernest Boyer noted, each school community is “ -- a purposeful place; a communicative place; a just place; a disciplined place, a caring place; and a celebrative place.”¹

So this, in the end, is why I embrace place-based learning: wonder, irreverence, and of course, it works. Place-based learning, as Seymour Papert noted, will “create communities of common interest on projects that will connect with powerful ideas.”² Youth across the spectrum of American education could hardly care what this powerful experience of worth, this connection with community, this engagement by making a difference is called - what really matters to them is that they matter! What concerns students concerns adults? How does my community need me? How can I contribute to others through a skill of my own? If not me, who? If not now, when?

What has changed since 1983? Places have changed, society has changed, our home, the parks, the open spaces, and of course schools. We have done much since A Nation at Risk report, but regarding true community as Boyer describes it, the results are more miss than hit.

A school is a community that within itself can embrace a greater community. Not just in newly designed units or in a rearranged formative structure but in how it shapes the greater community, be it the village, town, neighborhood, or even city, which it is inextricably nestled within.

A Nation At Risk turns the real focus on its head - it’s not merely the nation that is at risk anymore, rather it is the relevancy that students associate with schooling itself in an age when information is everywhere, but collaborative and purposeful school effort is spare. What do we do with all this knowledge? If the strength of a nation is connected to an involved citizenry, then there is a deep lesson relevant

from place-based learning.

Community and academic achievement: place-based learning does both!

Purpose defines the individual; gathers others to achieve and in doing - believe. It's deceptively simple and hasn't changed in generations upon generations. Reports or not! Place-based learning emanates from this collaborative vision of teachers, students, and community resonating a vibrant democracy. Sentiments like Nicque's, a high school freshman Wisconsin leader, affirm what I and student's like herself have experienced numerous times over when she proposes, *"There is no elitism in true knowledge, only wonder and irreverence. You can't approach learning in awe; or you'll never be able to truly learn. For any subject to become knowledge, a pupil must touch details, smell them, and feel them."*

Chapter 9

Teaching Excellence through Place-based projects.

Just as a pile of stones is not a house,
an accumulation of facts and equations is not knowledge.
- Jules Henri Poincare

*Adults may have had a bad experience and they don't want to touch a
subject, whereas youth will be ready to go in and dig it up and see
what's there.*
- Ernest, 16, Alabama

Vito Perrone, an exceptional educator could speak with force about excellence in teaching. He asserts: “ The exceptional teachers I know are passionate about learning. They have deep interests in some aspect of learning: history, literature, and science. They are so steeped in this passion that they could manage well if all the textbooks, workbooks, and curriculum guides that fill the schools suddenly disappeared. They see connecting points everywhere.”¹

A friend who is a history professor, shared a gem of a book about teaching published in 1922. The introduction had many wonderful statements, one that caught my eye regarding place-based education: “He [the student] must not, because of any scholastic aristocracy on the part of the teacher, be unable to make his contribution to human needs and to know the joy of work well done.”²

The above 1922 maxim and Vito Perrone’s previous 1991 letter to teachers each provide bookends, creating a baseline vision for excellence in place-based learning. The 1922 maxim, for instance, request teachers to not become such aristocrats of knowledge that their students aren’t allowed an opportunity to “know the joy of work well done.” Vito’s 1991 letter asserts how teachers of excellence, “see connecting points everywhere.”

Whether contributing through work, or making connections; the unfolding of these principles of place-based learning discussed are agreed on most readily by educators everywhere. The precise language that students often contribute to these powerful experiences is a point of nodded agreement as well.

Teachers begin to say to themselves, “Yes, I can see the importance of that elder being part of the learning.”

“Yes, that is a powerful reason, as articulated by that student from Nebraska, to design my units with place-based principles in mind.”

“Yes, it would be great to collaborate with my peers and benefit the community.” In effect, an affirmation is the usual response regarding discussions of place-based learning. Yet there is a contrary reality when it comes to implementing place-based learning in schools. Teachers may agree, but few step forward and implement. In effect, this dilemma leaves us with the following question to be addressed in this chapter: If place-based pedagogy is so powerful, in both academic

achievement and social growth, why don't more teachers subscribe to it in their daily teaching?

Though excellent examples of this work can be found across America, those examples remain a disproportionate few when compared to the dominant traditions of direct instruction; a methodology remaining fairly consistent these last several generations: textbook and worksheet driven, teacher locus of control, pencil/paper assignment, the end result too often a student disconnect.

From the student's view of things, school unfolds with ninety percent of each day, inside, within the physical structure built to house the learning at hand. Imagine for a moment the student's realities. Waking up each morning, getting ready for school, maybe wondering what the six or seven teachers have planned for them this particular day. Looking out the window, noticing the weather, making no connection between the school day ahead and the weather overhead, unless it's a rare field trip day. As for community, it seldom registers on the student's or teacher's radar screens.

This viewpoint can be easily flipped for the teacher as well. Driving to work on the same day as the student is looking out the window of the bus, the teacher, though cognizant of what they are doing, seldom have any empathy let alone knowledge of what the student will be doing at school the other eighty-five percent of the day. In effect, the nature of our eight period system is fragmentation, sparse communication between the silos of being a teacher or being a student, all housed in a place removed both physically and often psychologically from the community, disconnecting a fundamental purpose for the schooling in the first place. Unless teachers are careful to build a learning community to counter the structural tendencies to fragment learning, then these places of disconnect, too often, can lead to alienation.

In this chapter, I will examine what I perceive to be the barriers that teachers often construct for themselves regarding this work. Then I will look at the barriers constructed by others, the real issues of transportation, budgets, inflexible administrators, state standards, and testing expectations that often block movement towards, and acceptance of place-based work.

Veteran teachers, like any professional group, develop certain pathways that, year after year, become their manner and style of

teaching. One seldom sees a 3rd grade teacher of ten years experience shift to being a subject area teacher of 8th grade students, though their certification would allow for that. One seldom sees a veteran high school subject area teacher shift to middle school teaching though their certification allows for that. It takes time to develop both the competencies and confidence as a teacher. We all know the emerging qualities of the first year teacher. Much work, much trial and error, and much anxiety as well. Be that as it may, why would a veteran teacher want to shift from an earned comfort zone all over again?

There are four answers that seem to resonate with teachers as I discuss with them this very dilemma. And, interestingly enough, these four reasons that a teacher would adopt place-based learning are the exact four reasons that a student values place-based learning. So for the sake of a clear explanation, allow me to start with the student's point of view and work my way around to the teacher's answers.

Imagine a student, a teenager these days, full of exuberance - full of life. As a father of five, my son and four daughters have taught me much. Always up front, their smiles of hope, jumps of joy never far from my experience of life. Then I drive to school and what do I see: a significant contrast, at times, a professional disappointment. Let me explain.

Certainly many, many young people enjoy and look forward to their schooling experience. And many, many teachers have spent their working lives creating classrooms and extra-curricular opportunities devoted to the best interests of these students. And many classroom and athletic or performing venues are highly successful. Yet, these same outstanding teachers would agree that, too often, for each student that is engaged, another student is not, disconnected from the exuberance of learning and participation.

How can this be? As a parent, I empathetically try to put my mind around this conundrum. How can the energy of youth be thwarted to such a degree that these significant numbers of disconnected youth occur in most every school? I realize the percentages change with each school. But whatever the actual numbers, they represent too many students. Would I accept three of my children being engaged in life, and the other two disconnected? Of course not, my measure of success is 100%. Should we expect school to be any different?

Look closely at your school, how many students are truly involved in the academic life of your school? Certainly, being on the honor roll is a measure of academic success, yet this doesn't always translate into involvement. Involvement, as opposed to participation, requires a sustained initiative and capacity, whereas participation asks for response, following directions, and limited performance.

I have had many conversations with students achieving good grades who recognize the superficiality of their work. One spring, during a sixth grade outdoor education camp, I stayed up late with the senior boy counselors pushing sticks into the dying embers of an evening campfire. It was a reflective moment around the campfire with several of the most academic and athletically talented students our school had produced. Their comments and reflections made it abundantly clear that they knew how to participate and get the A's for college. They could perform, score well on tests, and, in so doing, satisfy the adults at school as well as those at home. What I found intriguing was how the conversation would move to their involvement level. In this next breath they talked passionately and with conviction about some other activity, non-academic, in their school life. Whether playing on the volleyball team, acting in the play, or even leading the quiz bowl; these memories held their attention and clearly were the stuff of involvement, where the participation in classes was a distant second.

This campfire experience dovetails with another experience years earlier at a teacher's conference. William Glasser engaged, or in more accurate terms, tried to engage a handful of eighth grade students on the stage before several hundred teachers. His solitary question, "What makes you feel important as school?" received a silent response of bewildered eyes searching for an answer. After a couple of very long minutes, Glasser restated the question. Still, no answer. Finally, a student offered, "Is it ok if it is sport?"

"Certainly," replied Glasser. Then the floodgates opened. Playing football, volleyball, the middle school play, organizing dances, cheerleading, on and on. Not a breath of academics. Not even a glimmer of recognition that they, as individual students, may feel important in English, science, math, or social studies.

It is at this juncture that place-based learning can make a monumental difference in the way that students are involved in school.

Not wanting to take anything away from extra-curricula's, it is great that students have such strong feelings of involvement for them. However, we must add to that and include this level of engagement in their academic life as well. Place-based learning, as you have seen expressed in the preceding pages, will decrease the active number of students disengaged, even alienated from school. Why? Time to return to the teacher's four reasons to use place-based pedagogy aligned with the same four values from the student's perspective.

1. Place projects purpose. And when purpose is experienced one feels important. If anything has tied together the student's quotes placed throughout this book it is how each student reflects and elucidates this essential point. This is no different for teachers as well. Many of the learning highlighted underscores the importance felt by the teacher and students as they manage and work together.

2. What I do makes a difference. The assorted skills to complete a project produce clear feedback, for student and teacher alike. This feedback is real and immediate, and often unambiguous. I can do this. I can't do that. I need help here, or I can help someone there. I appreciate others, others appreciate me. This project helped my community, my school, and my skills. Like the final score of a game, place-based efforts have real outcomes.

3. This type of learning is dynamic. The answers aren't always known ahead of time. And one piece of learning often leads to another piece of understanding which may frame a new set of inquiry leading to new aspects of the project unplanned for, but which need attending to. There is a fresh sense of originality in a place-based learning. And like any real life endeavor, there is a constant dynamic of matching the challenge of the learning itself with the ability of the group and individuals therein.

4. I belong to a community of learners. The same reason that those middle school students connected with the extra-curricular sense of belonging, fits for place-based learning as well. Implicit in community, courage runs rampant and a passion for learning is the hallmark. For teachers, often faced with the social isolation of the classroom, this reason alone is often the most significant benefit that moves them forward out of their usual comfort zone to implementing place-based pedagogy.

Working with a team of teachers and a dynamic group of students is worth the extra time needed to make the shift from one instructional pedagogy to another. Seeing the difference made in the community and feeling a new sense of power as a teacher cements this change. What about finding teachers, new or veteran, that have the disposition for place-based education? I think some organizing of issues is helpful in this regard. But before looking at these issues, it would be valuable to examine for a moment the richness found in generations of teachers who have successfully used this approach. Place-based learning and its allied constructivist learning theory doesn't preclude the fact that thousands of educators historically have been using the best principles of this practice and theory. For whatever the current generation calls it, it is about learning, and where you have solid learning in a milieu of close school/community connections, then you have place-based learning.

There exists a medley of constructivist sentiments written by educators over the years, echoing place-based instructional insights right to this day. Whether 1922 or 2009, I am convinced that place-based learning, a coat of many colors, is as old as teaching. With this heritage, educators have a very accessible archive of successful teaching to guide us in our work. Given this evidence of successful learning through school and community collaboration, gathering support is graciously plentiful, resulting in each teacher knowing the 'joy of work well done.'

Every library has books on teaching and education written before WWII. They are a treasure trove of guidance, general and specific, for place-based educators. Written at a time when the barriers between the professionalism of education and the purpose of schooling in the community was more permeable; these books contain numerous examples of projects and programs that engaged students powerfully in their community. Moreover, the details given to some of these lessons, the natural integration of the sciences with the humanities, for instance, is really awe-inspiring.

With most education still in rural communities, and most teachers still in the role of generalist, it was expected, and therefore the training was provided, to teach across the curriculum. It was the norm to find the English teacher two periods later conducting a field walk in the neighboring forest pointing out the spring flora; it was the norm to

find the Agriculture teacher partnering with area farmers to bring the students into sustained repair of local machinery, then turn around in the afternoon and be the math teacher who'd make certain connections between the am activity and the pm textbook with those same students. Finally, it was the norm to find the history teacher also the chair of the local historical society. Moreover, besides a diverse teaching portfolio, each teacher's instruction was augmented by a constant flow of elders into the school and, going the other way, students into the community listening to the sharing of stories, building legacy.

The philosophy of constructivism was rampant in these works. "Each quest opens many new lines of thought; interest deepens as the list of discoveries lengthens," wrote the authors of Volume II, *Public School Methods* published in 1922. This seven-volume work extensively examined the entire K-12 curriculum in both broad philosophical strokes as well as minute, helpful detail. Like a teacher's Sears Roebuck catalog, it would be the one set of books a teacher would use to run a small school.⁴

Furthermore, I found this volume interesting with its capture of the curriculum called Nature Study. Aware of nature as a highly integrative subject matter, the many lessons found literature and song, poetry and prose, alongside science and math. There it was, though almost ninety years old, a rich litany of experience by teachers engaged in teaching objectives wrapped in community rather than worksheets constructed by a graduate student working in some commercial cubicle focused on the subject skill alone.

Historical place-based lessons do justice to place. Lessons on air, snow, wind, clouds, rain and even one entitled 'studying sunshine' contained many gems polished by the hands of veteran one-room school practitioners. These educators knew that 'through nature sympathy and observation the little children will have foundations for science.'⁵

Pages were even full of detailed projects like robin studies, grapevine orchards, how to build a terrarium, and lessons on the common housefly. There was a project-based calendar, tied to the seasons, for each week of the year! Understanding of deep, comprehensive projects was evident as well. For example, a study of a brook was conceived as a place-study for an entire year.

Alfred North Whitehead writing in his work Aim of Education spoke of the danger of “inert ideas, that is to say, ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilized or tested or thrown into fresh combinations.” In fact, Whitehead went on to declare that “Education with inert ideas is not only useless; it is, above all things, harmful.”⁶ Knowledge being tested, utilized, and thrown into fresh combinations is another way to define place-based learning.

Continuing my reading on pre-WWII educational writing, I discovered for myself a wonderful document by Sir John Livingston from 1944 entitled: Education for a World Adrift. Written during the summer of 1943, Livingston authored the most significant and helpful of many works to guide the British government as they reorganized the school system to meet a looming post-war demand to extend equality of opportunity to all. He wrote, “The test of a successful education is not the amount of knowledge that a pupil takes away from school, but his appetite to know and his capacity to learn.”⁷ It is this same appetite and capacity that moves a teacher to engage in place-based learning. And if a person desires to shift from a conventional teaching pedagogy to place-based learning, what fundamental capacities, beyond a specific subject area expertise, may point to a promising teacher? In effect, how to hire a place-based teacher.

Ted Sizer uttered a memorable quote as he was touring high schools. He wrote in Horace’s Compromise: The Dilemmas of the American High School, “The people are better than the structure. Therefore, the structure must be at fault.”⁸ I could not agree more. The teachers that populate our schools are dedicated folks that give many unheralded moments to young people. Some schools have great leadership, some have dismal leadership, nevertheless, the teachers forge ahead, regardless, with a personal vision that speaks for itself. The teacher/student relationship is the key to place-based learning as in any other pedagogy. This being the case, finding teachers for place-based learning becomes a critical ingredient for reforming the structure that Sizer places the blame upon. What does it take to teach in a place-based school or facilitate a place-based learning community? What does a commitment to place-based learning ask of the teacher, what characteristics are embodied?

William Glasser noted intelligently how, “Life in school must be thought of as life itself, not simply preparation for later life. Life in

school -- for adults as well as for children -- must be lived fully. And again, in a democracy, school life should embody democratic (rather than say, authoritarian, autocratic, bureaucratic, or feudal) principles.”⁹ Glasser clearly felt that the way for small learning-teams in schools to succeed was to “redistribute the power to get more productivity.”¹⁰ Being open to something new and dynamic is a given mindset for teachers of project-based learning, gaining a student’s unique view of learning. What follows are student views of learning after a year of place-based education.

...learning is asking questions and finding answers. It’s discovering things about the world and your past that you never knew. Learning can introduce all kinds of new ideas. It can make you wonder...why? and how? instead of just taking things for granted. - Kelly, 14

...learning can happen in many different ways. Sometimes a learning community must learn from each other. - Chris, 14

...learning is gaining knowledge. Learning does not have to take place in school, you can learn from just about everything in life. I think that sometimes the things you decide to learn on your own will stick with you all your life. - Ximena, 14

Teaching with this kind of student authenticity brings out the greatness in teaching. William Ayers, Chicago educator, believes:

Greatness in teaching also requires getting over the notion that teaching is a set of techniques or disconnected methods. There are lots of people who write adequate lesson plans, keep order and quiet in their classrooms, and deliver competent instruction in algebra or phonics... Outstanding teachers engage youngsters, interact with them, draw energy and direction from them, and find ways to give them a reason to follow along. This is the difficult and serious work of teaching. Greatness in teaching, as in acting or writing, is always in pursuit of the next utterance, the next performance, and the next encounter. It is not--can never be--finished or summed up...Great teaching demands an openness to something new, something unique, and something dynamic. In teaching it must always be, “Here we go again.”¹⁰

Experience and education are not the same thing. We are all having experiences all the time, and yet some experiences may be

disconnected events leading nowhere, or they may even be uneducative in the sense that they shut down or distort future growth. The challenge for teachers who are building an education based on experience is to create opportunities for students to have the kinds of experience that will enable them to grow and develop into further experiences, and eventually to take control of their own learning. As Ayers continues, “We know we are successful when students are willing to forge their own next steps, when they face the future with some love, some indignation, and a lot of courage.”¹¹

I trust these couple of quotes from Ayers gives a reasonable sense of the kind of teaching vital for today’s youth. Since place-based learning is very much a continuous means of connecting, putting people, resources, and meaningfulness together, then it is imperative to find teachers with an ‘action bias’ towards this kind of facilitative teaching. Moreover, a quality place-based teacher will analyze the significant learning that takes place in various projects, drawing out the enduring knowledge, those skills like, for instance, scientific investigation, teamwork, presentation styles, survey data analysis, and writing press releases.

I believe teaching with a place-based pedagogy requires three fundamental capacities beyond specific subject area expertise:

- * Proven aptitude for life-long learning.
- * Unconditional regard for the success of students.
- * Ability to communicate in multiple surroundings with a wide variety of people.

Life-long learning: Life-long learning has a set of critical skills embrace people who exhibit a high degree of varied subject area interest, combined with the skills to gather information, solve problems, and make connections. Questions to ask a prospective colleague could go like this: explain a situation where you found your initial success as a learner unsuccessful, but with perseverance and work you finally learned what you needed to know? Discuss how you go about solving a problem. What are your general steps? What learning qualities work for you as a problem solver? When you know very little about a particular subject, how do you go about learning more information in a relatively short period of time? What are your interests and hobbies?

An unconditional regard for the success of students: Always

being there for the students; putting their needs ahead of competing adult issues; and developing the productive teacher-student relationship are all indicators of this unconditional regard. Further questions that ‘get at’ this capacity in prospective teachers could be... What kind of influence did teachers have in your life? What kind of influence would you like to have in your student’s lives? How can you best help a student to learn? How can you best help a student to be productive rather than merely busy in a place-based setting? What is a weakness you would like to strengthen as a teacher? Share the last time you raised your voice at a student; what happened? Share your last success with a student or young person in a non-school setting; what happened? Why do you want to teach at the ‘Name of School’?

School improvement always, in the end, points to the quality of relationships as the critical leverage feature. John Maguire, Claremont College president, echoed this sentiment in a 1992 report, declaring, “If the relationships are wrong between teachers and students, for whatever reason, you can restructure until the cows come home, but transformation won’t take place.”¹²

An ability to communicate effectively in multiple surroundings with a wide variety of people: Thomas Sergiovanni’s book, Building Community in Schools, encouraged a fresh way to view schools. “If we view schools as communities rather than organizations, the practices that make sense in schools understood as organizations just don’t fit. The bonding together of people in special ways and binding of them to shared values, and ideas are the defining characteristics of schools as communities.”¹³ Collaborative and decision-making capacity is essential for this teaching position; moreover, an ability to facilitate this development in the students is equally critical. Interview questions that ‘get at’ this capacity in prospective teachers could be...What kind of skills would a student display to have effective collaboration skills? What are the cornerstones of communication to you? What qualities do you demonstrate that makes you an effective listener? An effective observer? Please give an example of each.

During a period of dialogue with a prospective place-based teacher elements of constructivist thinking pop up here and there. It will be apparent that the process of education is understood to be more than the accumulation of facts. Meaning for both students and teachers

alike is constructed, not prescribed. And during these times as a learning community valuable learning results from both failing and succeeding.

Once these questions are out, and others as well, the discussion can begin to move towards the types of place based ideas that the prospective students are excited about. How they might facilitate success; how they would overcome barriers; and how they would share the successes with the community and parents are all excellent questions. The ability to discern and create connections is the essence of knowing. Moreover, it's vital to recall how the culture of schooling is very powerful. Schools shape people.

How do you move teachers out of existing teacher mode to project based learning? In an existing school what helps is to break the 'business as usual' and learn as a team with a mini-project. Even done once, it demonstrates the power, passion, and potential of project-based learning to experienced teachers. And once teachers see something work, there is an 'action bias' that you can nurture along.

For example, we obtained a \$1,000 grant and had an oral history day. We obtained subs for 10 junior high teachers to spend the day on the project. Each teacher had four or five students and visited WWII veterans in their home for an oral history interview. It was terrific to watch the students, in a small group, interview the veterans. One gentleman, a veteran of the 8th Air Force stationed in England, shared stories in the kitchen and farmhouse where he was raised. At one time he jumped up, and searching in a drawer, as if he was looking for a screwdriver lost under scraps of paper, finally pulled out his original flight log from 1944. He went over each mission with the kids.

Teachers, given this opportunity to see students in a very different setting, utilizing oral skills seldom seen in the traditional settings. I found, for instance, that some of the best interviewers were the 'at-risk' kids. There seems to be a 'believability quotient' for experienced teachers to overcome. Does this really work? The best way is to create a mini-project and show them through participation.

Once this is accomplished then you can begin to shift the conversation around place-based scenarios that might fit the existing school structure; or if you're very lucky, shift the existing structure to fit the learning and logistical needs of the community needs. Either way a series of short-term highly visible and successful efforts achieve

a momentum that often diminishes the doubters. The next discussion, as you move forward in place-based teaching, refers to certain areas of concern, that if anticipated well, will allow for a smoother and equally more productive learning shift.

In many ways, traditional textbook teaching is set up as a teacher having power over the student, in sharp contrast the typical place-based teaching is set up as a teacher sharing power with the student.

We all know this teacher-led vs. student driven design deeply. However, most best practices follow through with the same system in place, an inculcation and pattern of power over. What does this mean? It means we're missing something vital.

Power with breeds growth and potency, in contrast, power over, though more easily managed, leaves both the teacher and especially the student operating within a limited paradigm of power. Borrowing a metaphor from science: The power of a neutron lies in its capacity to be open to the inevitable charge, open to the messages traveling through the larger body. From that inherent capacity arises ever more intricate and appropriate responses. Open systems are examples of how we learn and how each and every society learns. It is precisely how wisdom and deep understanding unfolds and emerges.

The power of place-based learning springs from its inherent capacity to be open to the learning at hand (charge) and to be open to the feedback of its collective learning community. When students engage and successfully complete something there is an exponential surge of attention, excitement, and interest. From this energetic, emerging capacity, ever more complex questions and integrated endeavors will take place.

I tend to agree with Glasser when he states: “ It is this lack of access to power in the academic classes that is so frustrating to students because it comes just at the time when students are beginning to experience the increased need for power which is part of the normal biology of adolescence.¹⁴

Clearly, the student is engaged in ‘power with’ during place-based learning, recall the dozens of student quotes in this book...examples of ‘withness’. Moving from one kind of pedagogy to the other, is a dramatic shift for both students and teachers alike. Four distinctive areas can be examined and the knowledge derived brought

to bear on making a positive transition. These four areas are communication, leadership/initiative, responsibility, and academic. Though overlapping in implementation it is helpful to address them in the order given. Let's look at each.

Communication during place-based learning: Seldom does a teacher release the thinking of why a certain lesson or unit is undertaken before they teach, whereas, in project-based learning seldom should an idea be undertaken without a thorough vetting of the why and how before the student begins. The vetting is a process with fellow students, teacher/advisors, parents, and community resource people to understand the worthiness and academic value of the place-based learning itself. This isn't meant to dampen a student's raw enthusiasm (though if you're not careful it will); it is meant to bring clarity, so success is attained through the triad of hard work, respect, and courtesy.

Leadership/initiative during place-based learning: Sure, you can jump in, but (like a cold lake in April) you might just lose your breath. It is best to have someone close by to give you a hand up and out, and be there for a good laugh now and then. Generally, developing leadership with the students, and giving away real power as you do this, is a stair step proposition. Design good leadership experiences early, some can be the team building sort that abound in the training manuals, and of course, others will be real, based from the needs and timelines of the learning itself. The key is to manage this leadership flow so no one is overwhelmed with it at first, and in the more mature stages the fair distribution of real power will become self-evident often selected by the learning demands.

Stair stepping research capability might follow September's daily water temperatures taken in the field, to November's spreadsheet of these fall H₂O variations, to March's experiment with transplanting wetland plants; each stage building upon the successive skills earned within the preceding learnings. Stair stepping communication capability might follow a September learning community retreat on active listening skills, to a November interview workshop, to a March oral history project. The important dimension for the teachers of each student undergoing this place-based learning transition is to meet the challenge evident in the learning. And when the skill isn't enough then develop capacity before the challenge becomes to great.

Responsibility. Too often, this ability to respond has atrophied by the time the child reaches middle school. The students are veterans of responsibility being narrowly defined to the lesson/assignment/test cycle. Projects, when they happen, are often controlled by the teacher with fairly specific tasks to complete the project. Moving into student-driven place-based learning should be consciously undertaken. Unfreeze the old ways, step by step. And, as you go at it, understand the four primary layers of responsibility evident in a learning community.

Self-responsibility: being able to follow-through, be on time, and take care of oneself, so the rest of the team can count on you. Responsibility to others in the team: being part of a team has all sorts of implications for responsible behavior, it is good to occasionally talk about this growth. Responsibility to the general community: being able to speak clearly and act responsible to people in the community regarding the place based learning outcomes. Finally, there is responsibility to the learning at hand; the myriad amount of fine detail and broad-brush strokes that go into any worthwhile learning endeavor.

Academics: An element of place-based learning that contrasts with my teaching experiences in traditional pedagogies is that place-based students often possess a very strong and active bias for learning. Each student can move forward in significant fashion because the focus is there, the motivation is there, and the application is embedded in the ‘community as context’ itself. Because of this, students reduce the inconsequential moments of schooling and reinvigorate the connected, productive learning times.

Why would a teacher shift from conventional teaching pedagogy to project-based learning?

Several answers can bring light to this dilemma. But prior to this discussion we must keep in mind the audience being addressed regarding shifting from a traditional pedagogy to a place-based pedagogy.

First, accept that a third of each school district’s teachers wouldn’t, for any reason, even entertain the idea of a different pedagogy. This shouldn’t be taken as a negative. Many, many of these teachers care about their students and create positive places for learning; however, for too many reasons to go into here, they have

determined that their way is THE way teaching is going to be; changing it would be like changing jobs.

Second, accept that another third are just too preoccupied with life and work, as they know it. They certainly might nod their heads in the affirmative regarding place-based learning at a conference presentation. However, after that nod signifying agreement, they say to themselves, “Not me, not now.”

Therefore, that leaves about a third of the teachers who might be willing to take a closer look at place-based learning and strongly consider bringing its strengths into their teaching. And returning to our question stated a moment ago, why would they really shift? Essentially, for the same reasons that each student loves project-based learning: a dynamic increase of a sense of belonging, sense of power, and sense of accomplishment. Let’s take a closer look at these three:

Sense of belonging

To be part of something more than yourself, to be part of a team, to feel the way it can support itself, grow in common understanding, thereby influencing others and making a visible difference. This sense of belonging is critical to the success that students in place-based learning discuss so readily both in this book and elsewhere.

William Glasser devoted much of his writing to the intrinsic reasons students learn. Many of these reasons that students learn well are no different than the reasons teachers learn so well. He stated, “Why must we stick to the rigid tradition that academic classes must be restricted to individual effort and individual competition, a structure that, by its very nature, limits the chances of almost all students to gain not only the power, but also the fun and belonging they all desire?”¹⁵

Why not as well for teachers? Imagine our teaching profession of closed doors, one adult and a group of students, born within months of each other. There is a glaring reality every teacher knows all too well. In these very busy schools with hundreds of people, hallways of radiant energy, and activities that abound during the school day and after, the classroom teacher can be a very lonely occupation. This isolation in a social community is commonplace.

What can place-based learning do about this? Place-based learning, often team-taught with effective alliances between school adults and adult community partners, accounts for a surge in each

teacher's sense of belonging. For many teachers this belonging is more than equal to the extra time, the stress of a challenge where answers are not always a file cabinet away. Once inexperienced teachers experience a successful project, project-based learning becomes its own best salesperson.

As Dean Lind, a teacher at New Country School in Minnesota, explains, "How far could you get from natural learning than to teach disconnected subjects out of context? Would you teach someone how to build a house by teaching a class on pounding nails, cutting lumber, and putting on the shingles - then later build the house? I believe learning is in a large sense connecting, putting information together. That sure is contrary to the 'pulling apart' that is done in a traditional school."¹⁶

Sense of power

Recently, in Milwaukee, I met with a dozen educators interested in or practicing place-based learning. A driving question that several people asked in their own way was how to increase teachers willing to work with them. This broadening of the work can best be answered by examining the second reason that I believe that one-third of teachers might take on place-based learning: a sense of power.

Individuals have self-defined limits. A classroom teacher, no matter how dynamic, remains a single entity. Eventually, no matter how creative, each teacher reaches their limits, reaches their edge of capacity and power. Whereas, it should be clear that a team of teachers expands this level of capacity and power, leveraging a whole new array of learning possibilities. Being able to run a local newspaper, change a zoning law, developing a student-run business, conducting original research, or shaping an arts foundation's annual goals, are worthy and significant efforts, complex in nature, that can only be achieved by a group of students and teachers committed to the success of the project and each other. Exponential capacity and power is the single biggest draw to place-based learning.

Sense of accomplishment

Teaching is touching the future. And yes, it's wonderful to hear from students the difference I made in their lives when they were in my 4th grade class fifteen years ago. It's great to have a high visibility project completed, acknowledged by others, where the

student benefit is apparent and immediate. This sense of accomplishment draws many to place-based projects.

We sometimes forget that applied learning is full of accomplishment. As students have reflected throughout this book accomplishment is a quality as old as learning itself. The other day in the library, I found a reprint of an essay about education written by an anonymous author in 1698. It was entitled, An Essay Concerning Critical and Curious Learning. As you read consider accomplishment as a key thought the writer gave to producing knowledge and, in his view, anchoring learning with application. To me, a distinctive place-based idea.

The Mind of Man takes impressions from external objects; and these impressions make her reflect upon the Nature of the thing, from whence she receives them, leading us through a long chain and series of thoughts before we can arrive at any conclusions. Now in order to bring these conclusions to some clearness and perfection, we must often ruminate upon them, we must turn our thoughts into words and expressions; and thus we shall instruct and inform the very mind that produces them, by putting it still upon a more intense application.¹⁷

This explanation is a wonderful three-hundred year old argument for the constant interplay of experience, reflection, and expression found in any evident experience of learning. These aforementioned third of educators in your typical district are willing to work placed-based learning because of these experiences and the fact that it will increase their sense of belonging, power, and accomplishment. The time and challenge is balanced by three significant benefits. And when that group of teachers becomes an experienced group the benefits to the district at large radiant outward from their potent work.

But, first things first. How does one get the ‘buy-in’ from veteran teachers to try place-based learning? You can’t simply send them off to a conference and they return set to go, right?

What is needed is time for these teachers, to experience for themselves, the attributes and effectiveness of place-based learning. A small team of teachers needs a project, community partners, time, and resources to succeed where they will soon be asking students to go.

Why is this above so important? Because the depth of educational reform is inextricably tied to the depth of the reformers themselves. As Michael Fullan explained, “You cannot have students as continuous learners and effective collaborators, without teachers having the same characteristics.”¹⁸

To shift teachers from one set of pedagogical ways to adopt and experiment with another set of pedagogical conditions warrants a thoughtful approach. Packaged curriculum, motivational speakers, and the abundance of commercial material hardly qualify for the depth necessary for this change. Only significant learning itself can propel a teacher from one set of teaching practices to another set of teaching practices.

Thomas J. Sergiovanni, an acknowledged leader in education writing about learning communities, nailed this point when he declared, “Instead of being dispensers of knowledge, teachers -like physicians, lawyers, architects, and other professionals - must become producers of knowledge. Professionals transmit and dispense, but at root their job is to produce something worth transmitting or dispensing in the first place. Professionals create knowledge in use as the practice.”¹⁹

In short, by creating their own place-based learning first, teachers will create knowledge and their first-hand understanding of the process to achieve and believe in place-based learning. Of course, the other way is to just jump in and go for it. This, of course, seems to be the prevalent way that teachers learn place-based pedagogy; trial and error. We can do better, we can give our teachers willing to go an extra mile, an extra mile of support before they hit the ground running.

Chapter 10

Seven Discoveries about Place-based Learning

The action of the mind is like the action of the fire. One billet of wood will hardly burn alone, though dry as sun northwest winds can make it, and though placed in the range of a current of air; ten such billets will burn well together; but a hundred will create a heat fifty times as intense as ten, will make a current of air to fan their own flame, and consume even greenness itself. - Horace Mann, 1848

Put the student in the habitual attitude of finding point of contact and mutual bearings.

- John Dewey, 1915

Learning is caring and finding truth in something that you can't see. It's listening and watching, viewing and doing. Why someone would not want to learn new things is wrong, you learn them no matter what. What you learn makes you who you are. And you never stop. Learning is an eternal flame that catches everyone in a bonfire of brilliance. To learn is to live life. - Kelly, 1998, Wisconsin

In my years of working with place-based learning communities there are seven distinctive pedagogical features that have been re-taught for me again and again. In fact, I'm finally reached that point in my teaching career that I feel I can say, "I get it!"

In the course of place-based work, students own deep aspirations, students face complex challenges, and students drive significant responses and results that form the evidence of place-based learning's value. Student voice throughout this book echoes how place-based learning develops real-life settings in which students face particular challenges and develops new capacities, individually and collectively, to meet those challenges.

What are those challenges? Many, and many I may not be totally aware of. I can only speak for those that have escorted me these last thirty years in education. For others, there may be other circumstances. However, I can state with confidence that after scores of place-based workshops and assisting others to work this wonderful pedagogy, those challenges that I will now discuss, fit for many other educators as well. In fact, the challenges students and teachers face are the same pedagogical features that make place-based learning so powerful. It seems like the right way to close this narrative with a brief sharing of them. Highlighted, I trust your learning curve will be more rapid than mine; though I don't regret the challenges I've had to overcome, as they often make for a deeper furrow of learning.

Socially Constructed Learning

Place-based learning works from the premise that learning is socially constructed. And socially constructed learning creates a compelling social directive for each student to frame their work; a supporting web of critical relationships that manifest as powerful connectivity. Each place-based learning climate encompasses this social complexity in a manner much different than the traditional classroom. Students can often step back; knowing a successful accomplishment. Each student incorporates a clear successful social experience into their own lives enhancing personal competence. As Carl Glickman notes, "teaching and learning between students and teachers must demonstrate in actions the relationship between education and democracy - the power of learning for engagement in real issues."¹

Adding to Glickman's engagement point, and further clarified, each student's competence is gained from the appropriate mix of the academic content (skills and knowledge) and the social process (problem solving, decision-making, nature of inquiry) in a generative learning situation. In the best of circumstances, this learning has an organic flow to it, with the structure and unstructured activities blending collaboratively to unify and strengthen the academic learning.

Community is key

The school culture and the place-based learning engendered within all engage some aspect of the home community, broadening the social matrix of the student for increased learning. Gradually, other significant adults, besides teachers, come into play in the student's learning life. From individual to student team to the greater community, as each student steps back from this community accomplishment they understand how to make a difference in the world around them, civically and personally. As Maria, 17, from Texas exclaims:

You get a sense of pride out of all this volunteering and helping out in the community, and out of being involved. It probably sounds like a lot of work and not much fun, but when it all is over and all the projects are completed, you get a real sense of pride and dignity. And there is fun involved too. It's worth it, because you're going to leave a mark somewhere. And I'd rather be remembered for something good, that I was the one that Helped. You could be that person.

Authentic learning is cumulative.

Place-based learning is authentic, thereby simultaneously driving both incremental learning and leaps of further learning because the students gain self-confidence through increased skills, activated inquiry, and empowered capacity. This constant cognitive assimilation and accommodation of new insights, concepts, and understanding is the basis for each student's perception of the authenticity of the place-based learning as a 'teacher' for them. Hindsight often becomes a barometer of this success. When students say, "I have grown so much." they are highlighting this authentic learning. We know this kind of learning-how-to-learn is very empowering. Howard Gardner

clarified this authenticity as central to schooling when he asserts, “Recapturing student experience and meaning making as the center of the learning enterprise is crucial to educational reform.”² Authentic learning equals for the students an experience with purpose, meaningfulness. Life-long inquiry can result as Gardner supports when he says, “On my educational landscape, questions are more important than answers; knowledge and, more important, understanding should evolve from the constant probing of such questions.”³

Place-based is powerful learning.

It isn't just the power of place-based learning but the fact that its timing for adolescence is, simply put, a life-saver! To have the very tangible and real success at an elusive time of transitory and uncertain power (adolescence) is a huge, often unmeasured, yet profound benefit. Moreover, this contrasts sharply with the given reality that Glasser suggests, “Why must we stick to the rigid tradition that academic classes must be restricted to individual effort and individual competition, a structure that, by its very nature, limits the chances of almost all students to gain not only the power, but also the fun and belonging they all desire?”⁴

Traditional high schools understand very well the incredible source of energy that an adolescent student community represents. Successful with many of its students, there are still others, plenty in number, who could transform our communities with their care, their concern, and their courage. As James says, “I wish that adults would understand that students do have innovative, mind-boggling ideas, and that students can put those ideas into action. And they can make the world a better place.”

Value-added learning is the definition of Place-based learning

What does it mean to be student-centered as a school? Many different things, since the two words are often used as a general descriptor. For myself, student-centered in place-based learning, in a nutshell, translates to worth. How will an individual student assess his or her wherewithal to make a difference? Will they be recognized by peers and adults in doing so?

Worth, we all have it, and it is unique to our development and capacities. Moreover, to feel this worth, to see the consequential results of exerting our energies, is one of the most powerful student

experiences I have witnessed as a teacher. And, as a teacher, it is equally powerful as well. Place-based learning scenarios, too numerous to mention, give back to each student through the community interaction a profound meaning. They know they are part of something greater than themselves, and the community exists for the individual. This is the central philosophy of place-based education. And as Robert Rusk writes, “ Teachers who assume that they can afford to ignore philosophy pay the penalty of their neglect for their efforts, lacking a coordinating principle, are thereby rendered ineffective.”⁵ Community interaction is the coordinating principle of place-based learning, and the central outcome is to “turn capacity into ability.”⁶

Additionally, full involvement leaves a message of worth that each student will carry with them. This process of learning is a matter of valuing everyone for what they can contribute, and, moreover, the clear message being that all are expected to contribute.

Every student, to achieve this involvement, is assured an entry point in the place-based project. There is no better lesson in civic mindedness than this example. This theme of inclusiveness works to design many entry points that depend on various types of skills to include everyone. A project, for instance, needs leaders, writers, researchers, model makers, and followers. Therefore, the value added is a shared phenomenon, not a hoarded commodity as in a competitive, top down system.

Personal genius

Each person, exerting him or herself from their own base of experience, is an expert - always assume genius. Honor who the person is and what s/he wants to be.

Honor and dignity have profound value in teaching, but seldom get the airplay that more discipline driven words obtain. Like respect, honor and dignity are the result of authentic actions, they simply cannot be conjured from abstract notions. What one does, one is; what one thinks one does, confuses. When students share the post-project insights of honor and dignity from a job well done; this is very, very powerful stuff. It is this power that drives genius, giving it a true voice, and an academic platform to act upon.

6. Experience is always contextual.

Place-based learning is very sophisticated contextual stuff.

Take time to back off, listen to each other, track the mistakes, the ‘ahas’ and learn what you’ve learned. I’ll never forget Megan looking at me after eight straight days in the field and pleading, “Can’t we just stay inside, today, and figure out what we’ve been learning.” Suddenly, I realized from her truthful and well-timed comment, that in the excitement of significant field studies, I had lost sight of the reflective period as a valued part of the learning. As I knew from my readings of John Dewey; hands-on learning is mental. Experience for the sake of experience can be confusing, tangling up mental constructs and leading to nowhere. What Megan knew, and what I have returned to again and again, is the value of the reflective period to fathom the learning at hand, as well as the learning about learning. Many of the student quotes you’ve read came from reflective writing I had undertaken with students in various settings. I have learned the lesson well that the first contextualization of a place-based project is the students themselves. Their passionate understanding of the learning, of the dynamics to complete the project is priceless.

Community Sensibility

Though I have already talked at length about this vital principle of place-based education, my thoughts keep returning to it as THE indispensable cornerstone. Like a self-organizing entity, activating community sensibility assures all the other above features will come into play. Like an attitude or a disposition, being in touch with how the academic objectives and the community realities mesh, support, interact, blend, and depend upon each other is the central philosophical compass bearing of place-based education. Stay on that bearing, and you will arrive at many profound and rewarding destinations. Plus, you’ll have great stories to tell about the journey itself, which, of course, often seems like the most rewarding destination of all.

Epilogue

“It isn’t so much that teachers purposely negate development of community in their classroom – it is more likely they haven’t recently experienced an actual community where they can extrapolate ‘lessons learned’ into their teaching language, planning, and delivery.” – Lewicki Journal 7-14-1998

How does learning work in a community of students who share both common time and common curriculum goals? How does the generative nature of learning move through this community of learners, from one participant to another, shaping both individual aspirations and community climate?

The language of learning can often roll off our tongues with little further examination. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts – we have heard time and time again. Yet, are we fully cognizant of its profound implications for powerful learning? Do we understand, deeply, both the critical indicators and dynamics to make this happen?

To better understand learning systems I have often referred to the work of one-room schools. Another earlier resource for my guidance in education work has been the work of Andras Angyal who wrote about systems and learning before WWII. He explored the nature of people’s participation in systems. He was a pioneer in this early work and influenced many of the post WWII systems work. He explained how each “part is determined by its place position in the whole.” This ‘place position’ in my cooperative ecology vernacular is called the niche. Every learning community is both a habitat system and an aggregate of niches being expressed through a common framework.

Angyal understood a very deep construct central to teachers that both build and then sustain learning communities. *The essence of being a fragment means that the individual learner does not subscribe to the meaning of the whole.* This state of affairs, for a developing youth, can be an enormous barrier to growth. They feel like they are standing outside of the mainstream looking in -- often feeling arbitrary and rather unimportant to the central tendencies of the whole.

When Angyal declared that a part is determined by its place

position in the whole he understood that the part – be being embedded in the meaningfulness of the whole, as relatively complete in itself. In effect, in mature, healthy, and productive systems: true parts of a whole are whole themselves. A niche has a coherency and consistency that is a system unto itself. The nested Russian dolls are a true affinity to this system within system reality.

Therefore, educators committed to the greater whole must always attend to the capacity of the individual, not simply as a individual without roots, rather as a CONNECTED individual to the system whole. In effect, a student who has established his or her niche, will contribute meaningfully and substantially to the community's growth.

Linking individual dreams within the generative vision, aspirations, and compelling work of a vibrant learning community is the heart of the matter.

I live along the West Fork of the Kickapoo River in SW Wisconsin; its spring-fed waters move steadily over gravel bottoms where trout live along its reaches. At our place, the river slows down and backs up a bit, obstructed by a wash of large rocks and stones that roared forth from our creek one rainy spring night, merging into the river and partially blocking its path, creating an island.

Looking over the bridge railing, my family and I often drop small pebbles, watching them sinking back and forth until they rest upon the bottom. We observe the beaver and herons in the early light of morning. Many of us call the river home.

I think of the river tonight as I complete this book. Yes, the writing is done and yet, so like a river, this sharing of teaching and place-based learning will continue. After a restful Sunday, I will be back again with my educational colleagues, their students, and exciting new schools. Likewise, after you set this book down, you will be back with your students – engaged in sustaining a school community. I trust each of us will find continued moments, both rough and polished gems, as we move downstream.

Bibliography

Ayers, William. To Teach: the journey of a teacher. Columbia University: Teachers College Press, 1993

Bruner, Jerome. The Process of Education. Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1960.

Catton, William R. Jr. Overshoot: The Ecological Basis of Revolutionary Change. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. The Evolving Self. New York: Harper Collins, 1993.

Dewey, John. Democracy and Education. New York: The Free Press, 1916.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. On Education

Glickman, Carl. Reviewing America's Schools: A Guide for School-based Action. San Francisco, Josey-Bass, 1993.

Glasser, William. Control Theory in the Classroom. New York: Harper & Row, 1986.

Haas, Toni, Nachtigal, Paul. Place Value: An educator's guide to good literature on rural lifeways, environments, and purposes of education. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. (ED 420 461), 1998.

Jaycox, Rebecca. Rural Home Schooling and Place-Based Education. Charleston, WV: (EDO-RC-01-9), 2001.

Knapp, Clifford. Just Beyond the Classroom: Community Adventures for Interdisciplinary Learning. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. (ED 388 485), 1996.

Lewicki, James. Cooperative Ecology and Place: Development of a Pedagogy of Place Curriculum, self-published booklet, 1997.

Lewicki, James. 100 Days of Learning in Place: How a Small School Mastered State Standards through Place-Based Learning, Washington D.C.: Rural School and Community Trust, (ruraledu.org), 2000.

Livingston, Sir John. Education for a World Adrift. London: Macmillan, 1944.

Mann, Horace. Report for 1848, 259.

Orr, David. Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect. Washington, DC: Island Press, 1994.

Perrone, Vito. "Why Do We Need A Pedagogy of Understanding?" in Martha Stone Wiske, Ed. Teaching For Understanding: Linking Research with Practice. San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 1998.

Public School Methods, Vol. II Chicago, School Methods Publishing Co., 1922.

Sergiovanni, Thomas. Building Community in Schools. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1999.

Smith, G.A. "Place-Based Education: Learning to Be Where We Are" Phi Delta Kappan, April 2002 584-594.
www.pdkintl.org/kappan/ktoc0204.htm

Sobel, David. Stories in the Land: A Place-based Environmental Education Anthology. Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society, 1998.

Theobald, Paul. Communities as Curricula. Forum for Applied Research and Public Policy, 15(1), Spring, 2000, 106-111.

Theobald, Paul. Teaching the Commons: Place, Pride, and the Renewal of Community. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997.

Theobald, P. 'Preparing Teachers for our Nation's Rural Schools' Basic Education Online www.c-b-e.org/be/iss0201/a0toc.htm January 2002 Vol. 46 NO. 5

Theobald, P., & Nachtigal, P. 'Culture, Community, and the Promise of Rural Education' in *Phi Delta Kappan*, 77(2), 1995, 132-135

Chapter 2 Place-based Learning

¹ Toni Haas, Paul Nachtigal. Place Value: An Educator's Guide to Good Literature on Rural Lifeway, Environments, and Purposes of Education. (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1998) (ED 420 461)

² David Orr. Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect. (Washington, DC: Island Press,), 170.

³ Paul Theobald. Teaching the Commons: Place, Pride, and the Renewal of Community. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 173.

⁴ Paul Theobald. 'Preparing teachers for our nation's rural schools' (Basic Education Online <www.c-b-e.org/be/iss0201/a0toc.htm> January 2002 Vol. 46 NO. 5), 138.

⁵ Barbara Cervone, Executive Director, What Kids Can Do <www.whatkidscando.org>, EdVisions Forum discussion. Posting #21 of 150 <www.edvisions.coop> (29 January 2003).

⁶ Janice Woodhouse, Clifford Knapp. Place-Based Curriculum and Instruction: Outdoor and Environmental Education Approaches. 2002,

⁷ Barbara Cervone, What Kids Can Do on-line feature,
<www.whatkidscando.org/featurestories/doriswilliams.html>

¹⁰ www.ruraledu.org (Place-based projects are summarized by topic area., 2003)

⁸ Vito Perrone, “Why Do We Need A Pedagogy of Understanding?” in Martha Stone Wiske, Ed. Teaching For Understanding: Linking Research with Practice. (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 1998), 19.

⁹ John Dewey, Democracy and Education. (New York: The Free Press, 1916),

¹¹ Beth Spieles, environmental information officer, Center for Rural and Regional Studies, Southwest Minnesota State University, on-line interview at <www.crrs.net/story47.htm>

¹² Paul Gruchow. Grass Roots: A Universe of Home

¹³ Gregory Smith. Place-Based Education: Learning to Be Where We Are” (Phi Delta Kappan, April 2002), 586.

¹⁴ Smith, 590.

¹⁵ David Orr. Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect. (Washington, DC: Island Press,), 96.

¹⁶ The Matfield Green Consortium for Place-based Education in Salina, KS (www.landinstitute.org)

¹⁷ Aldo Leopold. Sand County Almanac,

²⁰ Rebecca Jaycox. (2001) Rural Home Schooling and Place-Based Education. Charleston, WV: ERIC Digest: EDO-RC-01-9

²¹ The Harvard Graduate School of Education published the monograph, Learning in Place (2000

Chapter 3 Learning Community

¹ John Dewey, Democracy and Education. (New York: The Free Press, 1915), 209.

² John Dewey, Democracy and Education. (New York: The Free Press, 1915), 160.

Chapter 4 Respect

¹ William James gave an address in Concord

² Ron Newell, Passion for Learning. (Scarecrow Press, 2003),

³ John Dewey, Democracy and Education. (New York: The Free Press, 1915), 158.

Chapter 5 Listening, Student Voice, Reflection

¹ John Dewey, Democracy and Education. (New York: The Free Press, 1915), 107.

Chapter 8 Why Place-based Learning works for Today

¹ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, The Evolving Self. (New York: Harper Collins, 1993)

¹ Ernest Boyer

² Seymour Papert

Chapter 9 Teaching Excellence through place-based projects:

¹ Vito Perrone, A Letter to Teachers: Reflections on Schooling & the Art of Teaching, San Francisco, Josey-Bass, 1991), pg # _____???

² Public School Methods, Vol. II Chicago, School Methods Publishing Co., 1922), 4.

⁴ Public School Methods, Vol. II Chicago, School Methods Publishing Co., 1922), 2.

⁵ Public School Methods, Vol. II Chicago, School Methods Publishing Co., 1922), 4.

⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, The Aims of Education. (New York, 1964), 115.

⁷ Sir John Livingston from 1944 entitled: Education for a World Adrift (London: Macmillan, 1944), 28.

⁸ Ted Sizer. Horace's Compromise: The Dilemmas of the American High School, Houghton Mifflin, 1984.

⁹ William Glasser. Control Theory in the Classroom.(New York:Harper & Row, 1986), 63.

¹⁰ W. Glasser. Control Theory in the Classroom.(New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 84.

¹⁰ William Ayers. To Teach: the journey of a teacher. (Columbia University: Teachers College Press, 1993), 129.

¹¹ William Ayers. To Teach: the journey of a teacher. (Columbia University: Teachers College Press, 1993), 137.

¹² John Maguire, Report to The Institute for Education and Transformation. (Claremont Graduate School, 1992), as quoted in Andrea Martin. EdVisions Forum discussion. Posting #106 of 150 <www.edvisions.coop> (6 February, 2003).

¹³ Thomas Sergiovanni. Building Community in Schools. (Jossey-Bass, 1999), 13.

¹⁴ W. Glasser. Control Theory in the Classroom.(New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 84.

¹⁵ W. Glasser. Control Theory in the Classroom.(New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 84

¹⁶ Dean Lind. EdVisions Forum discussion. Posting #42 of 150 <www.edvisions.coop> (29 January 2003).

¹⁷ Anonymous. An Essay Concerning Critical and Curious Learning, (London, 1698) Publication #113, Introduction by Curt A. Zimonsky. (William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, UCLA, 1965)

¹⁸ Michael Fullan. Change Forces: Probing the Depth of Educational Reform, (London: Falmer Press, 1993), 46.

¹⁹ Thomas Sergiovanni, Building Community in Schools. (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass,1999), 4.

Chapter 10 Seven Personal Discoveries about Place-based Education

¹ Carl Glickman. Reviewing America's Schools: A Guide for School-based Action. (San Francisco, Josey-Bass, 1993), XII.

² Howard Gardner. The Disciplined Mind. (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 275.

³ Howard Gardner. The Disciplined Mind. (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 24.

⁴ William Glasser. Control Theory in the Classroom. (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 84.

⁵ Robert R. Rusk. The Philosophical Basis of Education. (London: University of London Press, 1929), 20.

⁶ Robert R. Rusk. The Philosophical Basis of Education. (London: University of London Press, 1929), 63.