Place-Based Education

Classroom Resources

Place-Based Education (PBE) is an approach that offers children and teachers immersive learning experiences by connecting students to their surroundings. It encourages meaningful connection to nature, a sense of belonging to local land and waters, and making connections to the places where we live, work, and play. This approach can positively impact local communities and increase student engagement.

CORE ELEMENTS OF PLACE-BASED EDUCATION

1. Teachers and students turn to the phenomena immediately around them as the foundation for curriculum development.
2. Students are the creators of knowledge and over time their collaborations and ideas become refined and increasingly sophisticated.
3. Students' questions and concerns play a central role in determining what is studied.
4. Teachers act as experienced guides, co-learners, and brokers of community resources and learning possibilities.
5. Boundaries between school and community become more permeable.

From Smith, 2002

SAMPLE ACTIVITY 1: SINGLE SPOT OBSERVATION

Single Spot Observations are locations chosen by a child to regularly observe natural and seasonal phenomena. Throughout the school year, children return to the same spot to observe and document how nature changes over time, noticing changes, identifying patterns, and developing a sense of belonging to their chosen spot. This could be a weekly or monthly practice that a classroom participates in together, honing observation and inquiry skills over time.

Student Example:

Initial Student Observation: "I hear birds chirping, I think the plants are dying. I see leaves, I see houses, I see lots of trees."

Week 6 Observation: "Some plants I see are invasive, like the Himalayan blackberry bush that tried to take over the trees, but it failed its mission so it grew around it. The Scotch broom is trying to take over the Himalayan blackberry bush, but it has failed so it took over the rest of the land. I hear the sound of birds chirping in the east and west. I smell blackberries. Scotch broom is poisonous to animals. Ivy likes to sneak up on trees and choke them."

SAMPLE ACTIVITY 2: WONDERING WALK

A Wondering Walk is an open-ended activity in which students explore their local environment. During these walks, students observe their surroundings closely, ask questions, and reflect on what they see, hear, and feel. This allows students to develop a deeper connection to nature and enhance their observational and inquiry skills.

In practice, a Wondering Walk involves:

1. **Preparation**
   Set a theme or focus for the walk, such as noticing signs of seasonal change, identifying different types of plants, or listening for bird songs.

2. **Exploration**
   Walk through a natural area, such as a park, forest, or schoolyard, and pay close attention to details. Students might be prompted to look for patterns, changes, or anything that sparks their curiosity.

3. **Inquiry**
   Encourage students to ask questions about what they observe. These questions can be recorded in a journal or discussed with peers and teachers.

4. **Reflection**
   After the walk, students share their observations and questions, discussing possible answers and implications. This can be done through group discussions, individual writing, or creative expression.

Wondering Walks help students develop a sense of place and belonging and integrate learning across subjects.

Wondering Walk Observation Form

Date:	Weather:	Temperature:
What do you notice? (weather, air, sky, water, land, plants, animals)		
What do you wonder?	Evidence of life What evidence do you see of nonhuman animals?	
What other kinds of data do you notice?		

Adapted from Learning in Places Collaborative, 2021
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Take a Wondering Walk Together

Family Knowledge Sharing

Seasons greetings, classroom family!

In our classroom, we took a walk to get excited about what we might want to learn together. As we walked, we drew a picture of something we wondered about!

We would like to learn more about what your family notices and wonders about in a place during a particular season that is important to you.

As you go on a short walk in an important outdoor place, draw a picture of something that stands out and write down what it is you noticed (We noticed) and what you want to know more about (We wondered).

Please return this sheet by _____.

What you will need:	**Optional:**
▪ Pencil or pen ▪ Family Knowledge Sharing activity page ▪ 10–15 minutes	▪ Coloring supplies ▪ Photographs

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Take a Wondering Walk Together

Family Knowledge Sharing

Names:	Date:
Draw or paste your picture here.	
We noticed:	We wondered:

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