Project Title:

E3: Empowering the Learner, Engaging the Local, and Extending the Reach

Team Members:

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Abstract
(150 Word Count)

Grounded within IU South Bend’s Strategic Plan are two specific strategic objectives: (1) IV – Increase high-impact educational practices including student research, learning communities, internships, service learning, international experiences, and other experiential learning opportunities; and (2) V – Strengthen and expand scholarship and creative activity among both faculty and students (including faculty-student collaborations).

When interpreted through the blended perspectives of education, sustainability, psychology, and history faculty, these objectives resonate outward and form the basis of E3: (1) Align specific course content - one course per E3 faculty - to pedagogically promote place-based education; (2) Create a blended cohort of students to experience “place” through organized and intentional weekend field trips focused on historical challenges within urban settings; and (3) Develop guidelines for a collaborative research project focused on weekend experiences as each person considers outcomes of social justice and activism while answering the broader question, “What does this story mean to you?”
The Vision 2020 grant proposal titled, “E3: Empowering the Learner, Engaging the Local, and Extending the Reach”, investigates one’s identity as being defined through the lens of civic involvement, self-worth, and connection. How might our students experience what it means to live well ecologically, politically, economically, or spiritually or communally? What role do our courses have to play in shaping these transformative experiences? Five IU South Bend faculty members have come together to seek answers to these and other questions in an attempt to improve the students’ sense of place value.

The Philosophy of Place

Place-based education, or PBE, is a pedagogical approach that seeks to connect the learner to her locale. While this is a relatively new term, the concept is far from new. One of the more prominent proponents of PBE is none other than John Dewey. His stance on localized instruction, specifically as to how the school might respond to its community and the social needs of its students, significantly ranks him as a leader in the early days of place-based instruction. He also saw benefits of using the community as a sort of incubator for problems that would lead the learner on a quest towards a solution, and thus, a deeper connection with the experience. In How We Think, published in 1933, Dewey explains, “Thinking begins in what may fairly enough be called a forked-road situation, a situation that is ambiguous, that presents a dilemma, that proposes alternatives” (p. 122). In other words, he believed that “students moved outward in all directions” (Elfer, 2011, p. 85) through firsthand experiences.

The study of one’s place can be potentially significant as people are reeducated on the art of living well right where they are. With this in mind, there must be a distinction made between inhabiting and residing. According to David Orr, a resident is “a temporary occupant, putting down few roots and investing little, knowing little, and perhaps caring little for the immediate locale beyond its ability to gratify” while an inhabitant “dwells in an intimate, organic, and mutually nurturing relationship with a place” and “bears the marks of their places” (1922, p. 130). I am certain that, based on this definition, and based on the goals and objectives outlined in IU South Bend’s Strategic Plan, it is the desire of our University to move students beyond that of resident and into that of an inhabitant.

When Philosophy is Put into Practice

At the heart of place-based education is the ability to structure curriculum around authentic investigations unique to the community. In designing place-based curriculum, there is a level of complexity in orchestrating the experience with people, places, and things. This process plays into and works through the team’s belief about what is possible.

According to Amy Demarest, the “breadth of ways in which we can understand a place is enhanced by [the] idea that places hold stories” and that these stories invite exploration and
interpretation and “ultimately to take away one’s own personal meaning” (2015, p. 8). Much of our formal learning often has to do with another’s story. There isn’t much opportunity to cross the lines of race, social class, and cultural background when a personal connection is absent. Place-based education offers a better approach by asking the student, “What does this story mean to you?” Paulo Friere, a Brazilian educator and philosopher, reminds us to read the world and to hear its story so that we can see the inequities and the opportunities all around us.

**Improvement in Learning Through Place-Based Education**

The Place-Based Education Evaluation Collaborative (PEEC), since forming in 2001, has documented the efforts of ten place-based educational programs representing more than 100 schools and covering twelve states. Their results involve more than 1,000 adult interviews, 250 student interviews, 900 educator surveys, and 2,700 student surveys. Their findings, in a nutshell, are clear: PBE “fosters students’ connection to place and creates vibrant partnerships between schools and communities. It boosts student achievement and improves environmental, social, and economic vitality, while energizing the teachers and transforming the school culture” (Retrieved from [http://www.peecworks.org/PEEC/Benefits_of_PBE-PEEC_2008_web.pdf](http://www.peecworks.org/PEEC/Benefits_of_PBE-PEEC_2008_web.pdf)).

These demonstrated results by other institutions link back to IU South Bend’s Strategic Plan, specifically the two previously identified within the E3 Abstract. We believe that E3 will garner similar outcomes.

**Proposed Project Goals**

Through the financial means provided in E3, Drs. Hebert, Bailey, Bryant, Heller, and Tetzlaff will use Year One to accomplish three goals:

1. Align specific course content - one course per E3 faculty - to pedagogically promote place-based education (Hebert: E328; Bailey: B399; Bryant: B190; and Tetzlaff: H190)
2. Create a blended Cohort of students to experience “place” through organized and intentional weekend field trips focused on historical challenges within urban settings; and
3. Develop guidelines for a collaborative research project focused on weekend experiences as each person considers outcomes of social justice and activism while answering the broader question, “What does this story mean to you?”

The emergent stories will be the basis of a Cohort/Faculty research project shared with the larger community.

The Cohort will consist of no more than 25 students ranging in academic standings, as it is our belief that a diverse population with varying experiences enhance the overall learning experience.
Year 1: Goals and Timeline

(1) Identify potential off-site locations and community members within each place. Establish the anticipated dates and times of each field trip, as well as logistics (i.e., bus transportation, meals, and guiding research questions).

The E3 team will identify community members who are willing to share in the telling of our place’s history. These perspectives will assist in the team’s understanding, and help in determining how best to utilize the stories. It will also support the blended cohort learning design.

(1) Stop One: South Bend, Indiana - we will learn about the history of the Civil Rights Heritage Center and participate in a walking tour of the neighborhood.

(2) Stop Two: Chesterton, Indiana - we will experience the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore and hear about her struggle between industry and the environment. The documentary, Shifting Sands, will be shown while there.

(3) Stop Three: Chicago, Illinois - we will learn about ongoing initiatives seeking to eradicate persistent inequalities surrounding hunger, while promoting the civil rights of all its’ citizens.

(2) Determine the selection criteria and dates of application and selection for the first Cohort of participating students.

The E3 team will formulate the selection criteria for the first Cohort of participating students. Some may include: (a) Enrolled in at least one of the courses taught by the E3 team; (b) Availability to visit all scheduled sites; (c) Committed to participating in the Stories Research Study; and (d) Willing to serve as mentors and research collaborators to the second round of cohort participants.

(3) Determine the guidelines for Cohort/Faculty research project.

The E3 team will collaborate with pre-selected community members to parse out potential research topics representative of the places visited and the history connected to each one.

Year 2: Goals and Timeline

(1) Select and announce first Cohort of participating students. Meet to provide: (1) Details about each site visit (including dates and locations); and (2) Overview of the research proposal (including criteria and methodology).

(2) Visit each site. Upon conclusion, debrief and parse out stories heard. Provide “next steps” for the related research work.
(3) E3 team will submit two presentations on place-based education strategies used in the redesign of previously-identified courses: (1) for the IU South Bend faculty offered through UCET; and (2) for the Regional Faculty attending the Annual SoTL Conference.

(4) E3 team will submit at least one research proposal to either a regional and/or national conference and at least one journal manuscript.

(5) E3 team will begin planning for the next round of site visits by repeating Steps 1 and 2 of Year One.

Year 3: Goals and Timeline

(1) Repeat Steps 1 - 4 described in Year Two.

(2) At the conclusion of Year 3, E3 team will evaluate entire place-based initiative for outcomes defined in the Assessment section of this proposal, specifically in the subheading, “Expected Outcomes by the End of Year 3”.

Assessment

Yearly assessment will involve a revisit by the E3 team to the Proposed Project Goals section with specific questions emerging out of them:

(1) How well did we align our specific course content to pedagogically promote place-based education (Hebert: E328; Bailey: B399; Bryant: B190; and Tetzlaff: H190);

(2) How well did the creation of a blended Cohort of students create an environment conducive to experiencing “place” through the field trips; and

(3) How is the Cohort/Faculty research project progressing and what has been the value of asking the broader question, “What does this story mean to you?”

Through the use of informal student evaluations (offered at the mid-point of the semester) and formal student evaluations (offered at the conclusion of the semester), E3 team members will ascertain the pros and cons of course realignment. Opportunities for continued course improvement will, in time, fine tune the place-based educational approaches used by each faculty member.

The Cohort/Faculty research project will rely on qualitative methods, specifically ethnomethodology as it seeks out interpretations of the “circumstances of everyday life” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994, p. 264). Ethnomethodology’s goal is to note the methods and practices through community members make sense of their world. Rather than analyzing the community, the process examines its procedures which create social order. In this case, the E3 participants will listen to each of the stories, process the information as meaning is made, and interpret the broader question, which brings the meaning home, so to speak. How might we understand the social order occurring in urban neighborhoods, and allow that understanding to move us into activism resulting in social justice? In response to our findings, the Cohort/Faculty research project hope to have as its emergent products presentations and publications. These will be assessed through the acceptance of each proposed product to submitted journals and conference strands.
Expected Outcomes by the End of Year 3

Expected outcomes by the end of Year 3 include:
(1) Complete redesign of previously-identified courses taught by the E3 team aligned with place-based instructional strategies.
(2) The E3 team will have submitted at least two proposals for conference presentations.
(3) The Cohort/Faculty research project will have submitted at least two manuscripts for possible publication.
(4) The E3 team will seek additional funding to continue the experience.

Budget for Year 1

Summer Salary for Hebert ($950 + $256 fringe benefits) $1206.00
Summer Salary for Bailey ($950 + $256 fringe benefits) $1206.00
Summer Salary for Bryant ($950 + $256 fringe benefits) $1206.00
Summer Salary for Tetzlaff ($950 + $256 fringe benefits) $1206.00
Office Costs (printing, paper advertisements, thank you notes, etc.) $ 176.00
Total for Year One $5000.00

Budget for Year 2

Travel for Cohort Student Group (Cost of bus and driver, entrance fees [if required], and meals) $2000.00
Travel Funds to Support E3 Team and Cohort Research $3000.00
Total for Year Two $5000.00

Budget for Year 3

Travel for Cohort Student Group (Cost of bus and driver, entrance fees [if required], and meals) $2000.00
Travel Funds to Support E3 Team and Cohort Research $3000.00
Total for Year Three $5000.00
References


