

Place-based/ Community Learning, Exploring and Problem-posing: Possible Approaches and Activities

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These ideas are drawn from Evergreen programs – Local Knowledge, Community-based Research, Making Effective Change & various classes connecting to Evergreen’s Center for Community-based Learning & Action; plus ideas from “Fostering an Ethic of Place” conference, CBR workshop February 7, 2015

Walking, wandering, sitting, listening, observing:

Range of efforts to learn to pay attention, quietly, respectfully; blending observation with later planning, documentation, connection, engagement with community and eco-issues. This can be done in one place, or moving through a community, comparative learning across groups, exploring learning sites – ex. artesian well, library, along the Sound (East Bay), on the bus, at community organizations & gathering places. Doing ethnographic field-based documentation.

Participating/contributing/volunteering:

Connecting with organizations that have a strong community presence & commitment. Examples from the South Sound/Olympia-area: POWER (Parents Organized for Welfare & Economic Rights), Sidewalk (Bread & Roses), shelters/Quixote Village, Stonewall Youth, Fertile Ground, Climate Solutions, Deschutes Restoration, Green Pages, Olympia Food Bank. Some connect the ecological & social and identify sustainability as a key feature; some are more focused on key rights or a problem area. It’s the array and connectivity in the class, as students gain experience, that’s important. Example: issue of sustainability and shelter/”home” draws on a broad network of organizations and approaches. Salmon enhancement projects and shoreline management are good ways to learn eco-governance, local impacts, and community participation.

Street Life/ Street Action:

Students connecting, engaging, participating in robust-activist efforts – from Sidewalk supports to recent street demos in the post-Ferguson mode. Learning the politics, legal, strategic and interactional elements – learning how any one community compares/contrasts to other scenes. Connecting long-term strategies and organizations to vital real-time demos and actions.

Mapping it out:

Learning, borrowing, creating, applying mapping as a community process. Students can look at www.greenmaps.org for some inspiration and models – local to global. Mapping as cartography and/or as art. “Walking the map” – in Olympia, walking the water’s edge,

learning the port, Puget Sound's most southern reach. Climate Change walks that identify shifting shorelines & watersheds.

Walking tours/journeys/problem-posing:

Faculty or student-designed tours of sites. Various models – large groups, mini teams, cross-team collaboration, investigatory journeys with problem-posing and questioning. Focus can be on sites, organizations, street conversations, etc. Also – “flow” investigations – transport, foot traffic, refuse-recycle upstream/downstream, infrastructure (sewage, water, power). Recovering important places and moments in soc-eco history: ex., Olympia's Little Hollywood & Tacoma's Chinese-American Memorial. Multiple and different tours allow for more in-depth learning, questioning & documentation. DIY Fieldtrips -- since there's often limited in-class time and students have busy lives out-of-class, faculty and students can design focused, solo or small group community explorations that can be done more at the students' convenience. Building ties with community advocates and organizations is a valuable support for various types of tours and visits. Area eco-restoration sites can be important places to witness community learning, governance systems and eco-science. Food systems are an important lens – local farms, farmers markets, CSAs, gleaning projects, etc.

Discussing, interviewing:

Planned consultations and/or on-the-street interviews. Learning how to plan for interviews, as well as being ready for more spontaneous adaptations. The art of “asking the right question”, how to interview in teams, recording, documenting, posting on-line, etc. ETHICS of interviewing, approaching, risk-taking or risk-imposing, post-interview documents. Exploring/learning relationships of folks in the community to organizations that seek/pose/do represent them. Ex., homeless teenagers on the street & different orgs they might connect with. Faculty & students need to determine when the interviewing and exploration falls under campus guidelines re: Human Subjects Review.

Consulting, interviewing:

Talking with, learning from, interacting with “the powers that be” -- from City staff (Parks, Housing, Water Resources, Disaster Management) to elected reps on City Council. Learning from area advocates that work to effectively bridge official/elected/installed leadership and the community.

Policy/Governance/Legislated Frameworks:

Connecting with and observing governance at all levels and forms as related to the curriculum, from local to national and international, from elected councils to appointed commissions, etc. Since Olympia is the State Capitol and the county seat, students can connect with many layers of governance... across legislative, administrative/executive, judicial. Students can explore range of experience – observation of meetings, exploring govt docs (on-line or in relevant libraries – Public Library to WA Legislative Lib),

participating, preparing for and giving testimony, witnessing hearings, interviewing orgs and individuals who are lobbying govt and/or providing testimony. Many on-line resources – city, county, WA State – to explore for preparation and back-up. Govt docs can be a vital resource; college Research Librarians can offer skill development workshops.

Documentation/Logs/Witnessing:

Depending on the class, documentation skills and activities can be a central feature. How to keep a log of activities. Participant-observation. Oral histories. Film. Photography. Mapping (map collecting and map making).

Skill/practitioner development:

CBR type classes can have a number of skill features – for individual students or in groups - public speaking, testimony, debating, panels, how to prepare a Public Service Announcement or Press Release, street skits/drama, reporting, audio-video production.

Creating an atmosphere supportive of “Citizen Science”:

This involves learning about, supporting and critiquing efforts to connect lay/public knowledge with certified-science thru an array of projects, observations, data-gathering and creative ways to stimulate science literacy in the community. Good opportunity to link students who are science-oriented to those in community studies, humanities and writing. Good resources –

www.citizenscienceassociation.org

<http://rabble.ca/features/series/citizen-science>

www.scienceshops.org

STEM and distinctive learning pathways: In the community and classroom, STEM-based education can be adapted and enhanced for broad student learning – across a range of special needs and capacities. Local museums and eco-centers can be approached and engaged to be open to and respectful of diverse student learning.

Tracking local-to-global connections: Class can explore links between local-to-global food systems, flow of materials, trade activities, resource/energy systems, etc. WA State is the #1 most trade-dependent state and offers a powerful opportunity to study and connect with local-to-global patterns and challenges.

Featuring and prioritizing environmental justice: Through all this work, EJ as a formative ethic and concept could/should be prioritized. Disparate impact and movements to redress are essential to place-based learning. 2, of many, books that focus on EJ – Seth Holmes’ Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the US (with a focus on Western WA); Jason Corburn’s Street Science: Community Knowledge and Environmental Health Justice (focus on Brooklyn, NY)