

# QUICK START GUIDE TO PLACE-BASED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

GETTING SMART in partnership with edulInnovation & Teton Science Schools





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**#PlaceBasedEd**

“Learning & The Power of Place” is a year-long Place-Based Education project with a blog series, social media campaign, podcasts and publications to support implementation. For more information, see <http://www.gettingsmart.com/placebasededucation/> and for all of the blogs in the series, see <http://gettingsmart.com/categories/place-based-education/>

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The Teton Science Schools Kelly Campus is located inside Grand Teton National Park. Dorms and lodges house students and educators who visit the Kelly Campus for place-based learning experiences.

# THE FUTURE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

In the 2016 [Lifelong Learning and Technology](#) study from [Pew Research Center](#), researchers concluded that “America is a nation of ongoing learners.”<sup>1</sup> Specifically, 73 percent of adults surveyed considered themselves “lifelong learners.” 74 percent of adults are what Pew refers to as “personal learners.” These are people who participated in at least one of many possible activities in the past year to advance their knowledge about something that personally interests them—such as reading, taking courses or attending meetings and events. 63 percent of those surveyed are what Pew refers to as “professional learners” who have taken a course or participated in training in the past 12 months to improve their job skills or career-related expertise.

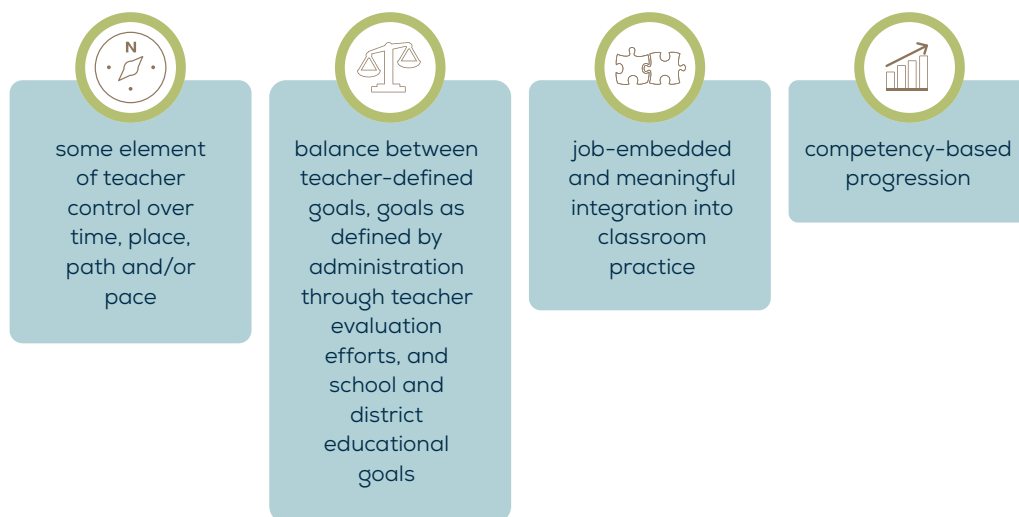
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1 Pew Research Center (2016, March). [Lifelong Learning and Technology](http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/03/22/lifelong-learning-and-technology/). Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/03/22/lifelong-learning-and-technology/>

The field of education is one in which both professional and personal learning are a priority. Professional Learning, or Professional Development, is comprised of the activities and experiences that educators participate in to improve their practice, strengthen or expand their knowledge base and grow as professionals. According to [Learning Forward](#)—an organization that designed [Standards for Professional Learning](#) in partnership with 40 professional associations and education organizations—“professional learning is the singular most accessible means [educators] have to develop the new knowledge, skills and practices necessary to better meet students’ learning needs.”<sup>2</sup>

In [Preparing Teachers for Deeper Learning](#), Getting Smart and Digital Promise review the current state of teacher professional development and highlight the disconnect between the current system and the future of education. Authors Karen Cator, Carri Schneider and Tom Vander Ark explain how the role of teachers is changing amid broader shifts to personalized, blended and deeper learning. In order for the current state of teacher preparation, professional development and accreditation to evolve accordingly, the authors recommend personalized, professional learning opportunities that mirror the same personalized learning opportunities that are best for students. They outline the attributes of next-generation teacher preparation and make recommendations to support the development of teacher preparation and development systems. Specifically, they call for professional learning for educators that reflects these four design principles.

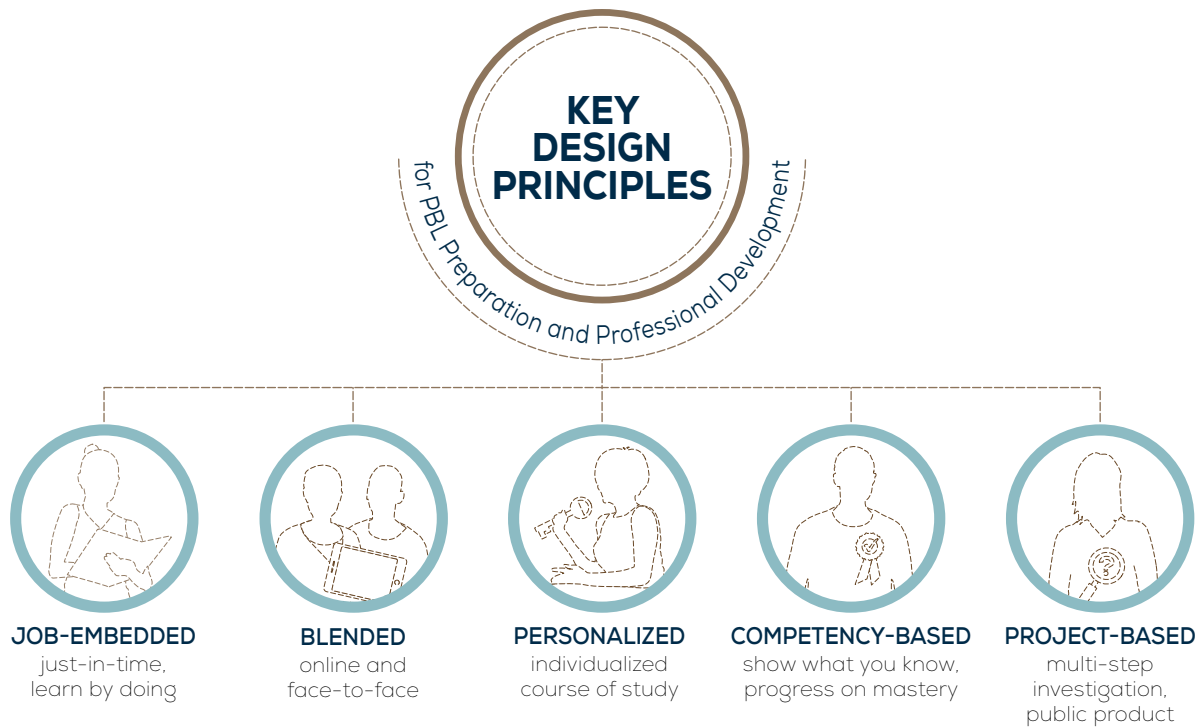
### Design Principles for Preparing Teachers for Deeper-Learning



As a follow-up to this report, in [Preparing Teachers for a Project-Based World](#), authors Emily Liebttag and Tom Vander Ark further explore how teacher preparation and professional learning can be aligned to—and modeled after—the types of deeper learning environments we also seek to create for students. They share a vision for preparation and teacher professional development that embraces the opportunity of personalized project-based learning (PBL). Liebttag and Vander Ark also raise the important point that the task is twofold when it comes to preparing and training today’s educators: “First, designing new learning environments, perhaps many different kinds with different approaches...[and] Second, preparing teachers to be successful in those environments.”<sup>3</sup> The report outlines the following five key design principles for PBL Preparation and Professional Development.

2 Learning Forward. Standards for Professional Learning. <https://learningforward.org/standards/>

3 Liebttag, E., & Vander Ark, T. (2016, Nov.) Preparing Teachers for a Project-Based World. Retrieved from <http://www.gettingsmart.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Preparing-Teachers-for-a-Project-Based-World-November-2016.pdf>



In the previously mentioned [Lifelong Learning and Technology](#), [Pew Research Center](#) concluded, “A large majority of Americans seek extra knowledge for personal and work-related reasons. Digital technology plays a notable role in these knowledge pursuits, but place-based learning remains vital to many, and differences in education and income are a hallmark of people’s learning activities.”

This research from Pew, as well as our own exploration into the potential of Place-Based Education suggests that “Place-Based” would be a worthy addition to the design principles for professional learning. In the sections that follow, we explore why and how.



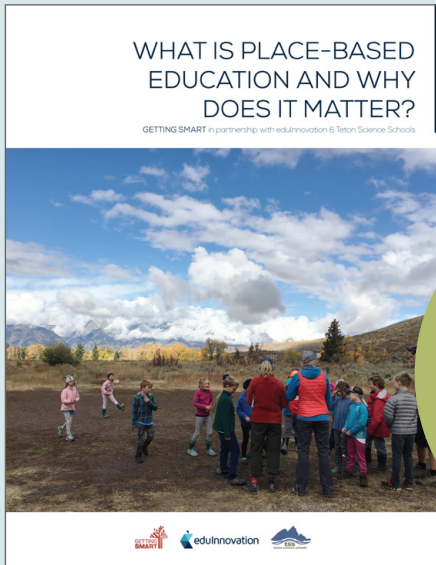


COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR PLACE-BASED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING | 104

# THE CASE FOR PLACE-BASED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING



*In the first publication of this series—**What Is Place-Based Education & Why Does It Matter?**—we provide an overview of Place-Based Education, including definitions, goals and benefits of Place-Based Education.*



*In the second publication of the series—**Quick Start Guide to Implementing Place-Based Education**—we highlight two implementation frameworks and provide practical advice as well as inspirational ideas to get educators started in their own classrooms, schools and communities.*



Visit  
[gettingsmart.com/  
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to download all the  
publications in the  
“Learning & The Power  
of Place” series.

In July 2016, Getting Smart [launched](#) a thought leadership campaign called “[Learning & The Power of Place.](#)” With Teton Science Schools as our expert partner, we set out to learn more about Place-Based Education (PBE) and to share what we learned through a [blog series](#), [social media campaign](#), [podcasts](#) and publications designed to support new programs in their implementation.

Through our work in partnership with dozens of contributors to the campaign through guest blogs and social media, we arrived at a new definition of Place-Based Education that situates PBE inside global conversations about innovative instructional practices that enable student agency, boost access and opportunity, prioritize deeper learning and personalize learning. Our exploration into the goals and benefits of Place-Based Education (see Exhibit: “[What Is Possible with Place-Based Education?](#)” on Pages 06-07) suggests that place-based learning is beneficial as an instructional model to students and to the educators who serve them.

In fact, as educators begin to think about how the community can be a classroom for students, it is important to develop their own sense of place, student ownership and long-term strategy to ensure effective implementation. The process can be transformative not only for the students, but also for those educators who are participating in the journey.



# EXHIBIT: WHAT IS POSSIBLE WITH PLACE-BASED EDUCATION?

## THE POTENTIAL OF

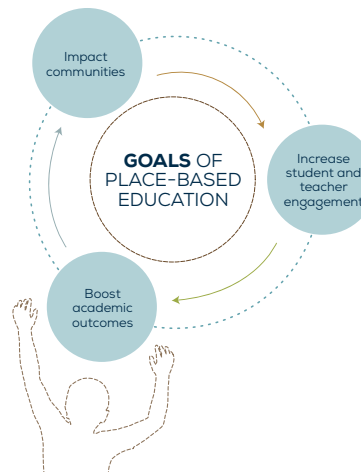


## PLACE-BASED EDUCATION

With next-gen tools and learner-centered approaches, Place-Based Education can sit at the heart of 360° educational ecosystems where learning is seamlessly integrated within community functions, serving as a rich foundation for an informed, participatory and democratic society.

Place-based learning can truly happen anytime, anywhere—in cities, in parks, in your hometown, on a field trip, in a rural village, in your backyard, in your school.

“Learning & The Power of Place” is a Place-Based Education project—with a blog series, social media campaign, podcasts and publications to support implementation—that is designed to explore and share more about the potential of Place-Based Education.



### PLACE-BASED EDUCATION (PBE)

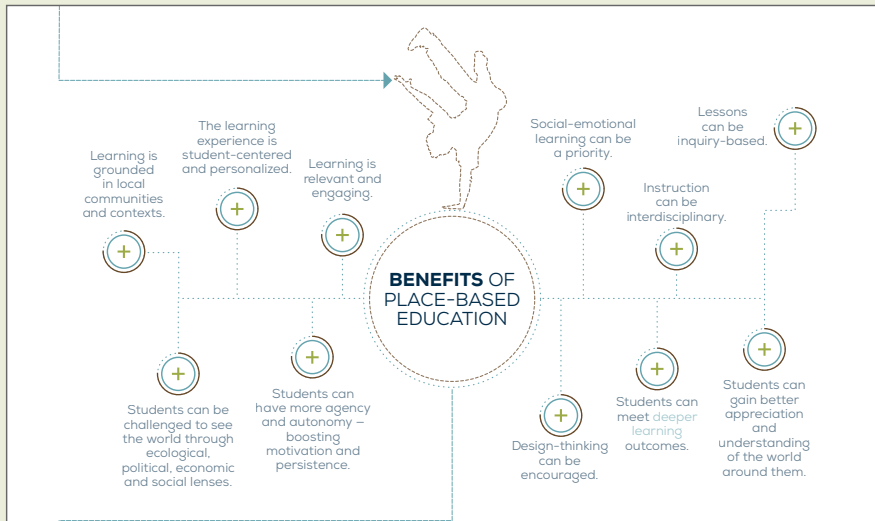
connects learning to communities and the world around us.



Place-Based Education is *anytime, anywhere learning that leverages the power of place*, and not just the power of technology, to personalize learning.

Place-Based Education enables personalized learning by:

- + Giving students “voice and choice” in determining what, how, when and where they learn
- + Tailoring learning to each student’s strengths, needs and interests
- + Ensuring mastery of high academic standards
- + Promoting student agency

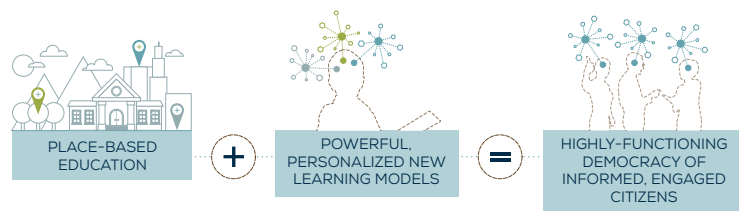


**PLACE-BASED EDUCATION DESIGN PRINCIPLES**

*This working set of place-based learning design principles from Teton Science Schools can inform the development of place-based learning in any setting.*

<p><b>LOCAL TO GLOBAL CONTEXT</b></p> <p>Local learning serves as a model for understanding global challenges, opportunities and connections.</p>	<p><b>LEARNER-CENTERED</b></p> <p>Learning is personally relevant to students and enables student agency.</p>	<p><b>INQUIRY-BASED</b></p> <p>Learning is grounded in observing, asking relevant questions, making predictions, and collecting data to understand the economic, ecological, and socio-political world.</p>
<p><b>DESIGN THINKING</b></p> <p>Design thinking provides a systematic approach for students to make meaningful impact in communities through the curriculum.</p>	<p><b>COMMUNITY AS CLASSROOM</b></p> <p>Communities serve as learning ecosystems for schools where local and regional experts, experiences and places are part of the expanded definition of a classroom.</p>	<p><b>INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH</b></p> <p>The curriculum matches the real world where the traditional subject area content, skills and dispositions are taught through an integrated, interdisciplinary and frequently project-based approach where all learners are accountable and challenged.</p>

With the emergence of project-based and personalized learning as the next step in school transformation, the time is right to take these approaches one step further by focusing the project and personalized learning on locally, regionally and globally relevant projects. With the increase in student agency, the students gain experience in the application of knowledge, and the community gains a massive resource in the human capital of willing and eager students wanting to improve the long-term health and well-being of the community.



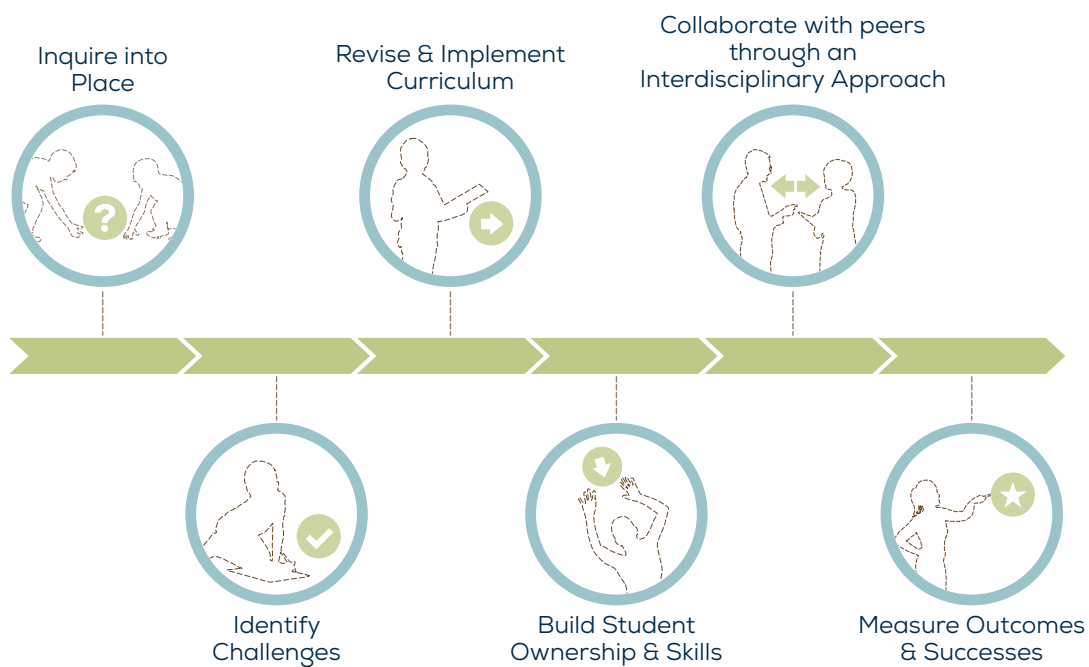
Our exploration into Place-Based Education revealed that teachers and communities are creating place-based opportunities for students in many different settings. Place-based learning is truly possible anywhere—from the most rural schools to the most urban ones and everywhere in between. We are just beginning to understand the possibilities for implementing and scaling place-based learning with the deliberate intention to boost equity, access and outcomes.





# SIX PHASES OF PLACE-BASED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Teton Science Schools (TSS) inspires curiosity, engagement and leadership through transformative Place-Based Education. As part of their mission, TSS supports the professional development of teachers to aid in the implementation of Place-Based Education through an intentional scaffolded progression described below.





## PHASE 1: INQUIRE INTO PLACE

The first shift is that educators themselves must develop a keen sense of wonder for their place—its function, history, economics, politics, ecology, social dynamics and future. Through a personal process of inquiry, educators begin to see the community as a potential classroom full of rich resources and possibilities. Practical first steps include reading local news, exploring resources, hiking in the parks or woods or talking to elders in the community. Educators can start by learning to authentically observe and ask questions around the ecological, social and economic components of a place.



## PHASE 2: IDENTIFY CHALLENGES

The second shift is to understand challenges that are faced by the community. Communities and places are always dynamic, struggling with change and adapting to new forces. Understanding these challenges allows educators to move beyond the obvious to the contextual. Educators must first accept that their students can be change agents. Design thinking is a way for students to systematically develop creative solutions to increase the community sustainability and vitality. With both phase 1 and phase 2 complete, educators can develop “resource guides” or “asset maps” for their communities. Over time, students add to these maps as they carry out place-based projects.



## PHASE 3: REVISE AND IMPLEMENT CURRICULUM (OR UNIT, OR LESSON)

Once educators understand their place, it’s time to connect their curriculum (one lesson, one standard, one unit) to the place in a variety of different methods. By linking the unit or lesson to a tangible component of the local place, learning begins with experiential previous knowledge. Educators need to begin with small steps in this redesign process, as it can be intimidating. Tools from project-based learning and problem-based learning can be introduced at this time. During this phase, it is also important to introduce risk-management to ensure safety for the students when you leave the classroom. Facilitating experiences outside of the confines of classroom walls takes attention and care, which eventually needs to be owned by students (see Phase 4).



## PHASE 4: BUILD STUDENT OWNERSHIP AND SKILLS

After success with one or more teacher-led place-based implementations, it’s important to next develop increased student agency **around both the inquiry and design-thinking component of the curriculum**. Over time, it is important that students begin to guide the experience with the core skills of inquiry and design, leadership competency and risk management. Educators need to specifically transfer this ownership through levels of inquiry and levels of design that lead to increasing autonomy in students. The emerging knowledgebase around learner-centered education is complementary to this phase.





## PHASE 5: COLLABORATE WITH PEERS IN AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

As educators become more comfortable implementing within their subject area or classroom, the next step is collaboration and cooperation with one another to build the capacity for interdisciplinary, place-based learning experiences. Because of the nature of place-based education, educators typically come up with many ideas. The challenges emerge around time and resource availability. The more collaboration with other teachers, the more flexibility needed in use of time and resources. Changes to structures, such the organization of schedules and courses, may be required. While introduced in earlier phases, leadership skills remain critically important during this phase. As the implementation of Place-Based Education deepens, there are many parallels between the increased levels of autonomy and agency that students have and the increased levels of autonomy and agency that teachers have.



## PHASE 6: MEASURE OUTCOMES AND SUCCESSES

The final area of development for educators is understanding and measuring the desired outcomes of place-based implementation. As we reviewed in [What Is Place-Based Education & Why Does It Matter?](#), these outcomes include increased engagement, improved learning outcomes and positive community impact. Additional benefits include [personalized learning](#), [deeper learning](#), social-emotional learning and improved motivation and persistence. Through survey tools measuring student engagement, designing pre/post assessment tools and comparing classrooms with and without the place-based approach, educators increase their capacity for research. Specifically, educators can design and execute [action research](#) projects around place-based education and report back to others who participated in the experience. Outcomes can also be evaluated through tangible change in the community that emerge from the experiences as reported by the students or those members of the community who have been impacted by the change.

### ASSESSING PLACE-BASED LEARNING

In [Guidelines for Assessment of Place-Based Learning](#), Gillian Judson argues, “Our challenge as place-based imaginative educators is to find evidence of both students’ learning of content knowledge and the emotional and imaginative dimensions of their understanding.”

She believes that “as educators concerned with our students’ emotional and imaginative engagement with the curriculum and with place, we need to ask ourselves some difficult questions...

- Do our assessment practices acknowledge the emotional and imaginative lives of our students?
- How are we determining if our students have fulfilled curricular outcomes through their place-based learning?
- How do we know if our teaching is supporting the development of their ecological understanding?”

Judson provides eight useful guidelines for assessment in Place-Based Education that offer a starting point to “create a context in which to make sense of and describe student place-based learning.”



# IMPLEMENTATION IDEAS

## PLACE-BASED, PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN PRACTICE

As a part of the “[Learning and the Power of Place](#)” effort, we invited educators and leaders to share their examples and perspectives on the power of place-based professional learning. The examples that follow range from formal training programs to informal experiences but have one thing in common: they leverage the power of place to ensure that the professional learning experience is authentic, meaningful and engaging.



## PROFESSIONAL, PLACE-BASED LEARNING AT TETON SCIENCE SCHOOLS

[Teton Science Schools](#) integrates professional learning experiences into different stages of educator development. For aspiring educators, the [AmeriCorps](#) program provides a three-month teaching experience with personalized community capacity projects in partnership with local non-profit organizations. Early to mid-career educators can enroll in the [Graduate Program](#), which offers a year-long academic and practicum program based on place-based education with transferable credits to partner universities. The [Teacher Learning Center](#) partners with K-12 schools and districts to offer Place-Based education curriculum development support; it hosts workshops on-site in Idaho and Wyoming, develops early-childhood continuing education credit programs, and consults with schools on program implementation. Blended place-based education professional learning experiences are currently in development.



Watch Teton Science Schools' [Power of the Teacher Learning Center](#) on YouTube






## SCHOOL VISITS AS TRANSFORMATIVE, PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Tom Vander Ark and the Getting Smart team have visited hundreds of schools. That’s because, as Vander Ark explains, “visiting schools gives you a chance to experience the culture and context in a way that the best video can’t convey. In the first minute of a visit, the sights, sounds and interactions give you a pretty good indication of the school culture. If you visit schools with other people and build in some time for reflection, you’ll see a school from several perspectives and learn even more.”



Vander Ark’s blog highlights the [Kansas City Great Schools](#) initiative ([#KCGreatSchools](#)) supported by the [Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation](#) that is designed to expose “community members to cities with concentrations of high-performing public schools serving a similar population of students as those in Kansas City’s public schools.” Participants get to see design-built schools and those still on a journey—each with their own unique structure, culture and curriculum with guided tours from education experts.

GETTING SMART



PODCAST

Listen to the Getting Smart Podcast [interview with School Superintendent Patricia DeKlotz](#) for more about the power of school visits as professional learning.



## THE POWER OF EDUCATOR EXCURSIONS



Director of School Leadership Julia McBride describes [place-based professional learning in the New Tech Network](#). She’s among the growing cadre of leaders who acknowledge that while “many recognize the power of place-based education for students...not enough schools create place-based professional learning opportunities for teachers and leaders.”

McBride’s contribution to the Place-Based Education [blog series](#) highlights several planned Excursions for teachers in the Network. “The goal,” McBride explains, “is to create the conditions for school and district leaders to reflect upon and learn to grow their schools as learning organizations in collaboration with

Network peers while capitalizing on the local landscape as a learning opportunity. This includes ‘Excursions’ to explore local community-school partnerships, case studies of nearby Network schools and connections with fellow Deeper Learning Network peers.”

In one example, educators visited [Belleville New Tech High School](#) to explore how this team used their district literacy strategy and New Tech Network College Ready Assessment. As part of this Excursion, participants engaged in classroom observations, heard from students and partnered with the Belleville New Tech staff through a [Consultancy protocol](#) to support their next steps. Another Excursion was a multi-stop tour of school-community partnerships in Detroit. The Excursion wrapped up with a visit with the Director of [Neighbors Building Brightmoor](#)—a group that organized a student-led neighborhood urban gardening effort. Participants grappled with questions, such as “What does it take to design learning opportunities like this? Why doesn’t it happen more often? What are the structures that can allow for learning opportunities like these to be the norm? What project ideas are coming to mind?”



## TAKING HOME AND APPLYING THE LEARNING

In [From 5 Kids to 25,000 Pounds of Fresh Fruit](#), Brandon Gillette highlights how a professional development program was the origin of a citywide partnership: “As part of a teacher professional development program through a local university, 50 teachers were charged with involving a small group of students from their school in an exhibition of science and engineering. Initially, most groups went to some of the more traditional science fair activities. However, one 6th grade teacher approached her students and decided to ask them what change they might want to see at their school and in their neighborhood. After some poking and prodding and lots of lists, the group of five students came up with creating an orchard, though not on the large-scale, profit-bearing nature you might imagine. At the time, no one involved knew much about growing fruit, but that didn’t stop the students. The teacher reached out to a local non-profit, [The Giving Grove](#), whose mission is to ‘improve local food security and strengthen communities by bringing together the resources to develop edible tree gardens.’ These gardens (mini-orchards) are seen as a sustainable food production and land management system that provides fresh produce while also offering an educational setting generally not found in an urban setting.”

Teacher Helen Ommen shares her reflection in [The Power of Place-Based Professional Learning](#). Her personal reflection details her professional growth as a result of place-based, professional learning. Ommen even shares examples of student work that grew out of her experience. She enthusiastically explains, “I felt validated, reinvigorated and challenged in both my teaching and my life.... I can’t wait to see what seeds are planted in their little hearts, as well as ideas that come to my mind that I can implement into my teaching in the future.”





## PLACE-BASED, PROFESSIONAL LEARNING RESOURCES



In addition to those already featured, the following organizations provide professional learning opportunities to support Place-Based Education.

- [Center for Place-Based Education](#) (at Antioch University New England)
- [Rural Schools Collaborative](#)
- [Shelburne Farms](#)
- [Our Curriculum Matters](#)
- [Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative](#)
- [National Park Service Stewardship Institute](#)
- [Hands On the Land](#)



## PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR PLACE-BASED, PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

As evidenced by the Six Phases of Place-Based Professional Learning we described, educators can undergo dramatic growth professionally and personally as they gain autonomy and experience greater agency through Place-Based Education. It's no surprise that professional learning experts and educators agree that reflection is perhaps the most important component of professional learning for the implementation of Place-Based Education.



### THREE TIPS FOR THE SHIFT

Jenny Pieratt's [Three Teacher Tips for the PBL Paradigm Shift](#) can be applied to the shift to Place-Based Education. Both require what Pieratt describes as "being responsive, flexible and open to new possibilities beyond what we can anticipate or even imagine." Pieratt's tips include:

- Understand your role.
- Commit to being a learner.
- Connect with your colleagues.

She argues, "No longer is the teacher the 'sage on the stage' because there is in fact great value in the power of equal. This shift in teaching and learning requires:

- Open-ended driving questions and project possibilities
- Voice and choice in topics of learning, final products and project paths
- Non-traditional research methodologies to explore what is happening in real-time
- The comfort and ability (and sometimes adventurous spirit) of the teacher to relinquish control and say 'I don't know, but let's find out.'"



## QUESTIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL REFLECTION

In [23 Questions to Cultivate Deeper Learning Mindsets](#), Bonnie Lathram offers a convenient list of questions for professional learning and self-reflection that will be useful to any educator wishing to implement Place-Based Education or similar methods that prioritize deeper learning.

- How effectively does the staff meet to create a strong sense of community? Is each staff member valued as a learner and a contributor to the overall mission of the school/organization?
- How and when do you collaborate as a professional learning community?
- Do students see this collaboration? And importantly, are students invited to staff meetings and/or to meaningfully contribute when wrestling with all school issues or decision making?
- Do students have an opportunity to help adults with genuine problem solving?
- How are students involved as schools leaders?
- Are students seeing adults that are intellectually engaging with—and wrestling with—complex problems?
- What’s my vision for this school year? This quarter? This month?
- What are my specific goals related to my vision?
- And, how am I going to get there? What projects do I need to be working on to accomplish my goal?
- How can I make my own learning plan public so that students can see my vision, goals and projects and support me in my own growth?
- If and when you have the opportunity to learn something new, what’s your approach?
- When is the last time you learned a new app, program or technological solution? How did you share that new learning with students?
- When reflecting on something that you have learned recently, what kind of impact has it had on you and, by extension, your students?
- In what ways do your own statements about learning support a growth mindset? How do you know? What can you say to students about their work that supports a growth mindset?
- What resources, materials and/or curriculum are available for use at your school that supports a growth mindset?
- In what ways can you share with students your own struggles and successes with your current and/or previous work?
- What stories can you share with students about how something you have learned has created depth or has been relevant to who you are now as a person?
- What concepts, knowledge and wisdom gained through your own school and life experiences might be relevant to your students? What books have you read that have been particularly impactful?
- How can students connect the dots between what they are learning now and their own experiences? How are you helping them to see those connections?
- What’s the connection between what I am currently learning and my role as an educator? What else do I need and want to learn?
- In what areas can I continue to be a learner? What am I personally and professionally interested in? How can my professional learning opportunities be more relevant to my own needs as a learner?
- How can I share what I am doing in my professional learning with my students? What sort of impact could this make?
- What projects that I am taking on could I involve my students in? How can I learn alongside my students?



Photo Credit: Joe Weiss, Powerful School-Community Partnership Brings Learning to Life

## CONCLUSION

Let's take a giant step back and accept that place-based education is **not new**. In the midst of project-based, problem-based, deeper learning, experiential learning, and all of the other acronym-ready methods that challenge teachers and students to think about approaches different from the industrial model, place-based education lives in the background, patiently waiting to be uncovered once more.

For most of history, education has always been embedded in place. Out of necessity, lack of other resources, and simply the need to pass on cultural, political and ecological information, place was used to teach about food sources, land ownership, leadership and governance, history, art and stories. In our recent history of industrialization, we removed the context of place and inserted a one-size-fits-all model to teach all students in the same way with the important goals of reading, writing and math literacy for all students. In the process of doing so, however, we decreased relevance, agency and impact in schools to such low levels that many students (and teachers) were left behind.

A changing world requires changing the education paradigm—to one where “place” is once again relevant. The Place-Based Education approach can engage, challenge and offer opportunities for students to thrive in a 21st century education system. This transition will take re-learning on the part of teachers and thoughtful implementation to ensure success.





## FOR MORE INFORMATION

This guide is the third in a three-part publication series from Getting Smart. For additional publications in the series, including “What Is Place-Based Education & Why Does It Matter?” and “The Quick Start Guide to Place-Based Education,” see: <http://www.gettingsmart.com/placebasededucation>. For a collection of all the contributions to the “Learning & The Power of Place” campaign from educators all over the world, see: <http://www.gettingsmart.com/categories/series/place-based-education/>

Check out the hundreds of examples of Place-Based Education in action and share your own using #PlaceBasedEd on social media.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We are grateful for your openness and willingness to share your stories, your insights and your examples to help us reach our goal of raising awareness to the potential of Place-Based Education.

All images taken by Getting Smart unless otherwise noted. Cover image photo credit: Julia McBride, [Place-Based Professional Learning in the New Tech Network](#).

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