

The Impact of Place-Based Learning

A research proposal created by Joshua Krakos and Ethan DeMunbrun that looks at the effectiveness of Place-Based Learning through Bridge Builders STL's St. Louis-Dupree Exchange Program.

The research is done in collaboration with, Dr. Kim Kleinman, Dr. Kate Parsons, Dr. John Buck, Dr. Bruce Umbaugh, Dr. Danielle MacCartney, and Dr. Paul Moriarty.

Aims

Place is where community happens. Places are full of meaning with richly specific pasts and histories. These two points are the foundation upon which this research will be built. People working together create a community. Everything from living together to simply participating in an open dialogue is part of what makes a healthy community and this allows people to form interpersonal relationships and a culture, specific to them. When this happens, a place has been made. You can see it in things like cuisine, dress, and tradition, but more importantly, you can see it in history. Places never stay the same, people change, they change each other, and important events within communities will change a place. Just knowing about the culture of a place is not sufficient if you want to understand it. In order to know about a place, you must go to it and participate in it.

Bridge Builders STL is a 501(c)3 organization that would be an opportune place to develop and put into practical application the theory of *place-based learning*. Bridge Builders STL plans and carries out a two-week exchange program with young adults from St. Louis, MO and Dupree, SD on the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Reservation. BBSTL's website www.bridgebuildersstl.org indicates what is the build of the exchange programs. It says "Bridge Builders STL promotes intercultural competence and leadership development through exchange programs that bring young adults from diverse communities together to engage in cultural immersion, leadership development, and community service projects." Bridge Builders STL can explore how *place-based learning* affects the development of our exchange team members.

BBSTL interviews potential participants to select an engaged community of young adults to interact in cultural learning that is based on the history, culture, and contemporary social issues in the two places. To that end, BBSTL is committed to removing any barriers including financial to the possible participation of team members.

BBSTL also works directly with Webster University faculty on designing a curriculum of readings, presentations, and discussions that are meant to expand upon this style of learning. The exchange program can be a controlled space to test *place-based learning* theories and curriculum development.

The BBSTL exchange will integrate *project based discovery learning* drawing on constructivist learning theories from Bruner and Papert with *place based learning*.

Research

1. Design

Data measuring what students have learned about the interrelationship between place and community and this will be collected via an interview process and surveys. This data will be compared to the learning of students in a classroom setting of Dr. Kleinman's place-based freshmen course to form a conclusion about the effects of place-based learning.

2. Description

The responses of people who are selected to attend Bridge Builders STL's program will be compared to students in the classroom setting. The exchange program members are selected through an application and interview process. These applicants are selected by a team of former exchange program alumni, who are looking for compatibility with the program.

3. Data collection

Before team members enter into their learning environment, they will fill out a survey about the information that they already have obtained about the place in question, the survey will also measure the amount of knowledge the team members have over the learning objectives included below. They will also fill out the same survey immediately following the exchange program in order to best display the scope of what was learned. Then, after a short period, given so that the exchange team members and students may have time to reflect upon what was learned, they will be interviewed about their experience and how it affected them. This interview will be seeking IRB approval to focus on neutrality of experience, and to measure the learning objectives and the effectiveness of place-based learning.

4. Analysis

In our analysis of these questions, we will be looking for patterns between our exchange program members, and our control group through Dr. Kleinman's class. The patterns we are looking for are based on the three tenets proposed by Dr. Kleinman about place-based learning. Our hypothesis is that the exchange program members will have a better grasp of these ideas after two weeks then the control group does after a full semester.

5. Ethics

In our research, we are aiming to be especially mindful of our interview and survey questions affecting different communities, in different ways. According to Rodolfo Mendoza-Denton, there is strong research to support the idea that standardized testing affects the test scores of a white population versus marginalized students. Since our exchange program is also working with marginalized communities, we are especially mindful of how our questions can be perceived by different communities of exchange program members. In addition to this, we are also working with Dr. Danielle MacCartney on how best to create questions that can receive objective answers to the best of our ability. Another focus is to also rely on an Ethics of Care as described by Virginia Held in *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* to create an environment for interviews that are not alienating but clear.

Timetable

Research will be collected over the next five years of Bridge Builders STL's St. Louis-Dupree Exchange program.

Learning Objectives:

At the competition of this program, participants will:

1. **Explain** how their cultural identity and place relates to other cultures.
2. **Construct** a notion of community, integrating mutual empathy and care.
3. **Express** a notion of ethnocentrism and illustrate how it affects communities.
4. **Practice** responsible leadership skills as a result of the experience of the exchange program.
5. **Formulate** an expanded, non-paradigmatic view on community and place, seeing them as rich in history, traditions, and culture.
6. **Demonstrate** good stewardship within communities by avoiding paternalistic practices.

References

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