

Achieving Effective Stewardship by Making the Shift from Traditional to Collaborative Education Program Development

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THIS DISCUSSION ADDRESSED ACHIEVING EFFECTIVE STEWARDSHIP by making the shift to developing collaborative education programs from traditional approaches. The panel consisted of NE Region Education Program Manager, Cris Constantine, NPS expert on place-based service learning (PBSL) Delia Clark, and Parks for Every Classroom Coordinator, Maryann Zujewski. The main goal is to engage young students in projects that uphold cultural and environmental values that invite the community to learn as well as develop a love for the land in stewards of the next generation. The concept of PBSL required being open-minded and exploratory in concepts that help support education by connecting teachers with park partners and sites, all the while co-acting to incorporate evolved ideas that make education opportunities up-to-date. Clark led with a question that made everyone look into the future, “In 50 years, 2066, what do you see?”

The business-as-usual approach of education consisted of field trips emphasizing on formal, didactic presentations since the goal was to enhance audience knowledge. The traditional approach only addressed biology and environmental science in schools, whereas PBSL is cross-disciplinary with the active partnership of schools’ teachers and the NPS. A Venn diagram illustrated that where place-based education and NPS learning met in the middle was how PBSL is going to help make students gain a self-identity in an environment and be aware of environmental quality of a place used by the community. After personally participating in pilot programs in their respective national parks, Constantine and Zujewski shared their overwhelmingly positive experiences at Lava Beds National Park, Saugus Iron Works NHS and Essex National Heritage Area. Teachers were energized; students were able to learn intuitively as school culture was transforming to connect schools and communities to encourage future environmental stewards in natural, cultural areas.

Six “Aspirational Principles” were touched upon conveying the goals and gains of PBSL from which promote keeping a place grounded while being real, empowering, collaborative, integrated and rigorous in curriculum. Keeping a place grounded meant that a particular place had multiple attributes that attracts the community to learn the values of the local and previous residents, natural landscapes and resources, cultural heritage and resources and social, political and economic dynamics as well as for people to meet physically and intellectually. The traditional approach’s

Citation: Weber, Samantha, ed. 2016. *Engagement, Education, and Expectations—The Future of Parks and Protected Areas: Proceedings of the 2015 George Wright Society Conference on Parks, Protected Areas, and Cultural Sites.*

Hancock, Michigan: George Wright Society.

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primary focal point was limited to a site story and did not make any relating topic connections to the people that visited. Jamaica Bay was an example used in which water quality was deteriorating quickly because Indian rituals called for sending pots, silk flags and fruits down the river that eventually spilled into the bay.

With an abundance of debris visible all over the bay, students, teachers and park partners collaborated to think of creative solutions to the environmental disaster all the while trying to show multiple perspectives of this ecosystem. One of the projects the school groups achieved was with the planting of golden rod seeds in clay pots that would be released along the river to boost restoration in the bay. The aspirational principle of being real in PBSL engages students, teachers and NPS to address authentic, relevant, community issues and look for opportunities that support sustainable communities, cultural vibrancy and economic livelihood that can be linked to other geographical regions. Additionally, empowering students to develop a meaningful role in planning these park projects are meant to pull in communities while focusing on the experience and engagement of the students to this specific place. PBSL also uses integration and rigor to use a park project as an extension of the classroom learning experience to make an educational lesson be learner-centric, using skills and practices that take place across multiple disciplines effectively.

Reflection

The session was enthralling and innovative in addressing twenty-first century educational skills that can be applied readily. I was inspired that programs like Parks for Every Classroom are created as a new age approach of connecting young students to natural areas by teaching them the relevancy they have to this place. I was given a cumulative list of examples of pilot programs held at other NPS spaces that have been proved to be successful or found areas of improvement for the best results.