



School's Out(doors)

Place-based Education (PBE) Responds to COVID-19 and Beyond

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Prepared for *A Park for Every Classroom* and the *Upper Valley Teaching Place Collaborative*, Fall 2020

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A PDF version of this document with active contact and resource links is available at bit.ly/schoolsoutdoors



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Education for Now!

Our entire system of education has been thrown into disarray by the COVID-19 crisis. Yet many educational decision makers are meeting the challenges with creativity, innovation, and determination.

Place-based education (PBE) has perhaps never been a stronger option. A fundamental practice of PBE is to take education out of the confines of the classroom and into the literally and figuratively wide-open learning spaces of the outdoors and the community. This is exactly what the science of coronavirus is telling us will be safer for our students.

Documented outcomes of PBE include academic, socioemotional, and health benefits for students; teacher engagement and satisfaction; and strengthened community partnerships for schools. Turn the page for more details!

While students may have limited access to indoor classrooms, they still likely have access to neighborhood natural and community resources. This makes a local, personalized, place-based approach even more relevant.

Ready for action? Need help?

- Email the individuals and click the resource links in this booklet
- Check out the [National COVID-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative](#) [1]
- Find online teaching and learning resources for environmental education at [NAAEE's COVID-19: Resources, Tips, and Support](#) page [2]
- Explore the solutions in the [Inside-Outside COVID-19 position statement](#) [3]



“If you ask any parent what they want for their kid, it is to be excited about something. That’s the selling point of place-based education.” - Director of Curriculum, Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union, VT



Benefits of PBE

With authentic learning experiences grounded in place, students learn better, teachers connect to their passion, and communities become stronger. [4]

Teachers

- Increased teacher engagement and satisfaction
- Greater student interest and enjoyment of learning
- *“I have become a champion in my school and community for place-based learning. It has renewed my sense of purpose as an educator, helping to redefine why I became a teacher to begin with.” - Teacher, Sharon Elementary, VT*

Communities

- Greater connections between school and community institutions and individuals
- Increased civic engagement, social capital, and community vitality
- Advocacy and engagement from parents and families
- *“Without PBE, our organization would not be connected to schools - teachers, students, and parents. We promote this type of education, because it engages learners of all ages and encourages curiosity and wonder, which leads to discovery, connection, and care for not only the natural world but for people in their local community as well.”*
-Dawn Dextraze, Sullivan County Conservation District, NH

“It’s different learning outside. When you are in the classroom, the teacher teaches the information. But when we are outside, we are teaching it to ourselves.”

- 6th grader, A Park for Every Classroom, VT

Students

- Increased academic engagement, critical thinking, development of real world skills, and academic achievement
- Socioemotional development in key areas such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and social skills
- *“When children are provided the opportunity to go deeper, into a skill, or content area, or concept, it is at that point when transfer of knowledge happens. That’s where the genuine problem-solving, communication, and perseverance skills come in. These are the real skills they need.”*
- Aaron Cinquemani, Principal, Charlestown Middle School, NH

Check out these summaries of evidence and practice

- [The Benefits of Place-based Stewardship Education](#) [4], Great Lakes Stewardship Alliance
- [The Benefits of Place-based Education: A Report from the Place-Based Education Evaluation Collaborative](#) [5]
- [What is Place-Based Education and Why Does it Matter?](#), Getting Smart [6]
- [Getting Out Gets Results](#), Boston Youth Environmental Network [7]



PBE and Equity

All our students should have the opportunity for positive learning experiences outdoors and in their communities. PBE can create these opportunities by helping them to apply their own ways of knowing to their own places.

“At the core of place-based education is the need for more equitable learning environments for all students—environments where students are seen, valued, and heard. In these environments, learning is designed with and for students as humans and individuals in the space. This is deep and complex work, but it should be at the core of why we choose to work with young people.” - Tom Vander Ark on ASCD blog [8]

“Place-based learning is a practice that informs, inspires, empowers, and initiates healing. I’ve learned that the work of increasing equity starts with place and the people in that place, before it can move on to other work such as building capacity or economic development.” - Victoria Martinez in Community Works Journal [9]

“Place-based science education is fundamentally transdisciplinary and cross-cultural, fostering scientific communication practices needed to address existing and emerging problems while truly involving stakeholders from diverse backgrounds.” - Coleman et al. STEM Teaching Tool #57 [10]





National Park Service rangers and education specialists at Salem Maritime National Historic Site, in partnership with local educators and university scholars, have dug in deep on the connection between place and racial justice. The result is a virtual tour called [Pathways in Freedom](#)* [11] that helps teachers, students, and the general

public explore slavery and its legacy. It provides an engaging, critical, and well-researched examination of primary historical documents about the lives of a married couple as they transitioned from slavery to freedom at the turn of the nineteenth century. For education specialist Maryann Zujewski, deep study of the history of their site brought new and powerful insight to the present moment. She says: *“Seeing so many legacies of slavery in our current world, we set to work confronting our own racist ideas and learning how to bring this history with its current day impacts to our audiences.”*

*This project was funded in part by Eastern National.

Parks can be incredible resources for school-based educators

- [National Park Service virtual tours](#) [12]
- [A Park for Every Classroom](#) case studies [13], parkforeveryclassroom.org
- Reach out directly to any or all of the experts in Salem: Maryann Zujewski, maryann_zujewski@nps.gov; Beth Beringer, bethb@essexheritage.org; Bethany Jay, bjay@salemstate.edu; Lindsay Randall, lrandall@andover.edu

“I did not know slavery had anything to do with Salem Maritime National Historic Site until now. Learning the truth complicates the story and the people we learned about in history books and in our classrooms. There’s a reason for the Black Lives Matter movement!”

- Pathways in Freedom youth participant, MA



*Burning purple flower,
The beginning of a new life.
Long flowering stems,
Signs of spring.
Colors of the world,
Heart of the eye.
What am I?
- by Asher, 6th grade, VT*



Deep Noticing

Power spots are a simple and profound way to get started.

Get outside and look around. This simple act has launched many great place-based education (PBE) projects. When Rob Hanson's 6th graders get outside, they often head for their "power spot," a natural location they selected for frequent visits to observe and reflect.

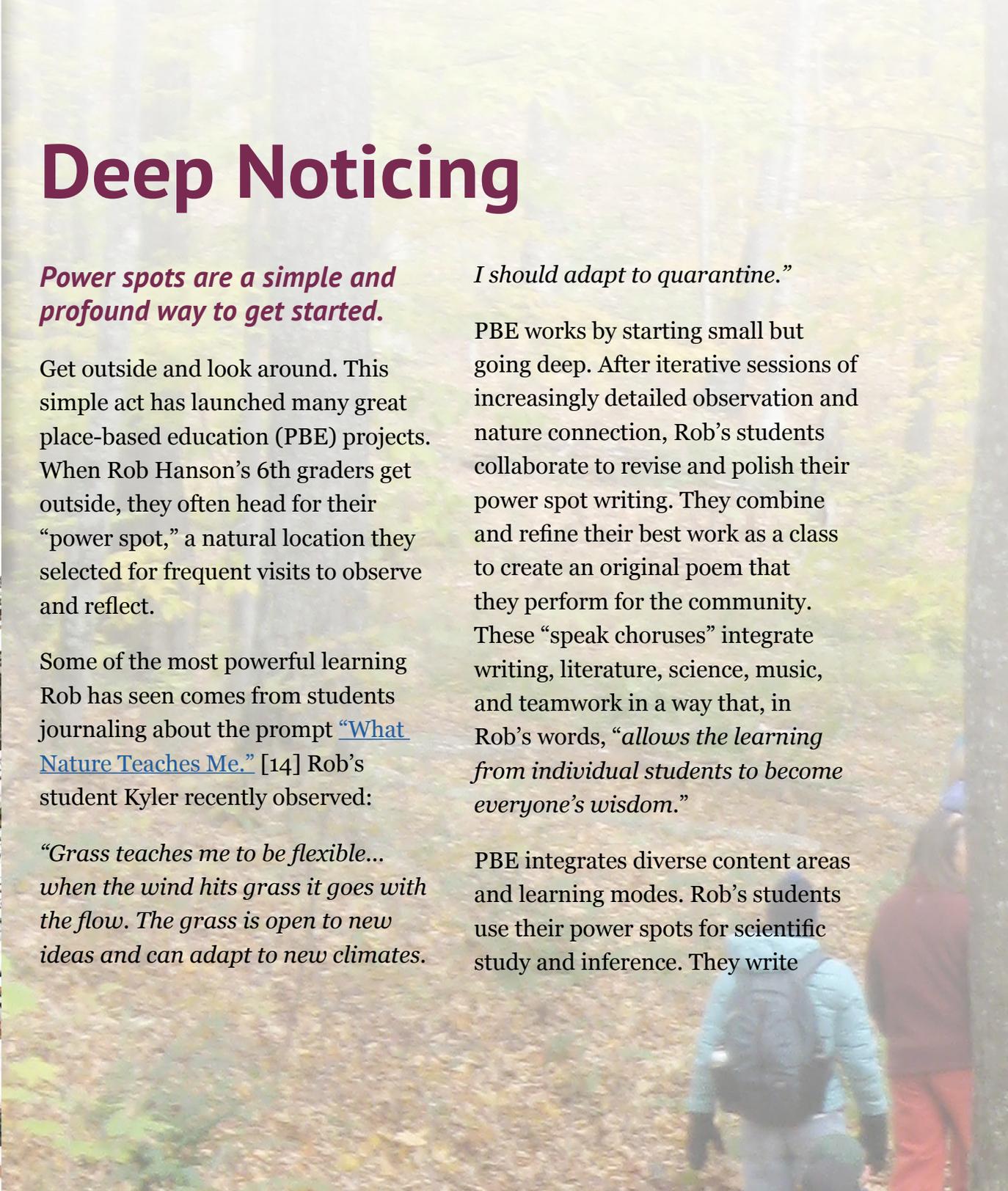
Some of the most powerful learning Rob has seen comes from students journaling about the prompt "[What Nature Teaches Me.](#)" [14] Rob's student Kyler recently observed:

"Grass teaches me to be flexible... when the wind hits grass it goes with the flow. The grass is open to new ideas and can adapt to new climates.

I should adapt to quarantine."

PBE works by starting small but going deep. After iterative sessions of increasingly detailed observation and nature connection, Rob's students collaborate to revise and polish their power spot writing. They combine and refine their best work as a class to create an original poem that they perform for the community. These "speak choruses" integrate writing, literature, science, music, and teamwork in a way that, in Rob's words, "*allows the learning from individual students to become everyone's wisdom.*"

PBE integrates diverse content areas and learning modes. Rob's students use their power spots for scientific study and inference. They write



poetry and create and perform art. Students explored the connection between social issues and place in Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming*. The resulting speak chorus incorporated their words and call to action with those of Woodson, Langston Hughes, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X.

PBE also connects students to their community. Rob partnered with the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park to create several new PBE programs, including Park Research Projects where rangers and teachers support students in deep exploration of essential questions about local habitats.

According to Rob, PBE is effective because *"It develops growth*

mindsets, grit, and the neurological pathways responsible for enduring understanding and deep caring. It's the diversity and richness of outside places in particular where we find the grist for powerful writing, science, meaningful mathematics, and living history. Placed-based learning helps students tie in, find their passions, and follow those. Their deep engagement drives growth, meaning, and, often, joy."

"The theme of persistence and flexibility comes up over and over" in his students' writing, says Rob. As we struggle with schooling in the midst of a pandemic, resilience is just what is needed. Rob wryly notes that this virus likes being *inside*, and so he encourages teachers and students to get *outside*, breathe deep, and take a good look around.

Talk to an enthusiastic place-based educator

- Rob Hanson, rhanson@wcsu.net
- Project resources recommended by Rob:
 - * [Power Spots lessons](#) [15]
 - * [Forest For Every Classroom](#) [16]
 - * [Mountains and Rivers Summer Camp](#) [17]
 - * [Horizons Observatory](#) [18]
- Contact any or all of these other PBE enthusiasts: vinsweb.org/school-programs/; vitalcommunities.org; Lisa Purcell, lisa@fourwindsinstitute.org; DavidSobelAuthor.com; Steve Glazer, steve.glazer@crossroadsacademy.org; Jennifer Kramer, jkramer@wsesdvt.org, Janis Boulbol, jboulbol@wcsu.net; Eliza Minnucci, eliza@forestkinder.org

Schools and Communities

PBE provides a link for resources and energy to be shared and mutually reinforced between students, teachers, and members of the surrounding community. [4, 5, 19]

School benefits

- Strong community, family, and parent relationships that help schools acquire the resources needed to provide all students with meaningful learning experiences
- Increased recognition of the students, teachers, and school in the community
- Strengthened social networks and relationships that support learning and create opportunities for students to engage with and contribute to their communities

Community and Community Partner Benefits

- Greater capacity to help fulfill their missions and connect with the community
- Increased access to teacher and student networks
- Access to professional development in place-based education, curriculum design, and promising instructional practices



Healthy Learning Outdoors

With feelings of anxiety and isolation at all time highs, the health benefits of outdoor and community-based learning have never been more timely.

Our shared human desire to go outside and to connect with others has been thwarted for many by the pandemic. As we begin to re-engage, now more than ever is the time to find safe ways to foster healthy connections. That the health of every individual is closely interconnected has never been more clear, and this understanding can be a force for good as our students reconnect with each other, with nature, and with their communities.

With plenty of fresh air and space for social distancing, learning outdoors reduces the likelihood of virus transmission. [20]

Back to school has always been a little stressful, but we've never seen anything like this. Outdoor learning in natural spaces can decrease stress and increase well being. [21]

Time spent outdoors has physical health benefits too! [22]



Getting Out This Fall

Teachers are finding and building outdoor learning spaces right now.

Northfield Middle & High School, VT used a summer professional development course to prepare for back to school amidst a global pandemic. Workshop teachers and the principal catalogued all the usable learning spaces on their not-so-green school campus, and assigned them to the various teams. All teachers in all grades will be able to take kids just out the door for anything from a 10-minute stretch break to a 90-minute lab, no advanced sign up required. Outdoor learning “classrooms” include the school garden, several different clumps of trees, tents in the parking lot, and even the drive through at the front of the school.

The first two weeks of school will focus on orientation, training, and building new routines, rhythms, and cultural norms. Teachers will receive additional resources, support, and in-service training in place-based and experiential learning to make the student learning experience safer, healthier, deeper, and more engaging.



**Talk to these resources
for ideas and support**

- Luke Foley, Northfield Middle & High School, lfoley@cvsu.org
- Christopher Asbell, Rochester Middle School, asbell.c@sau54.org
- Mathew Schlein, Walden Project at Vergennes Union High School, hdogwp@gmail.com
- Amy Butler, North Branch Nature Center, amy@northbranchnaturecenter.org
- Willowell Foundation, info@willowell.org, www.willowell.org

“We’re going to be really prioritizing time outside of the traditional classroom for the mental, emotional, and physical health and safety of our students.” - Luke Foley, Teacher, Northfield VT

The Orange County Parent Child Center in Tunbridge, VT reopened this summer under complex new guidance and safety requirements imposed by COVID-19. Hannah Nadeau, a lead preschool teacher, was undaunted. She asked herself, “When are my students happiest, most engaged, and naturally curious?” The answer: when they are outside. So she moved as much of her teaching practice outside as possible, where the children can be active, engaged, healthy, and happy.

Upon reopening this summer, her class has only been inside for meals and rest time. This fall she plans to continue beginning their day outside and is working on transitioning many of her classroom manipulatives to loose parts created from natural material. She is currently working with several community members to enhance their outside spaces both inside and outside the fence.

Ideas for getting our youngest learners outside

- Reach out to Hannah Nadeau: hannah@orangecountypcc.org
- Check out some of her favorite resources, [Muddy Faces](#) [23], and [April's Teaching Tree](#) [24]
- Participate in an early childhood nature-based play and learning Professional Learning Community, contact Emily Pals, emily@fwni.org



“Children learn from the concrete to the abstract, and what is more tangible than their immediate surroundings? Time in nature allows for a sensory-rich experience without creating sensory overload and offers many challenges that cannot be duplicated within four walls.”
- Hannah Nadeau, Teacher,
Tunbridge VT

References

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7. Getting Out Gets Results, Boston Youth Environmental Network, bit.ly/outbyen
8. The Power of Place-Based Education, ASCD blog, bit.ly/powpbe
9. Increasing Equity Through Place-Based Education, Community Works Journal, bit.ly/eqpbe
10. How place-based science education strategies can support equity for students, teachers, and communities, STEM Teaching Tool #57, Stemteachingtools.org, bit.ly/stempbe
11. Pathways in Freedom National Park Service Virtual tour, bit.ly/npspf
12. National Park Service Virtual Tours, bit.ly/npsvt
13. Park for Every Classroom Case Studies, bit.ly/npspc
14. What Nature Teaches Me prompt, Joseph Cornell, bit.ly/cornp
15. Rob Hanson's Power spots lessons, bit.ly/hanpow
16. Forest For Every Classroom, bit.ly/npsfec
17. Mountains and Rivers Summer Camp, bit.ly/npsmr
18. Horizons Observatory, bit.ly/horob
19. Coalition for Community Schools, bit.ly/adcomsc
20. What We Know (and Don't) About Catching Covid-19 Outdoors, Medium.com, bit.ly/19covout
21. Nature-Based Play and Learning: A Literature Review, PEER Associates, bit.ly/peernat
22. New Research on the Benefits of Nature, PEER Associates blog, bit.ly/peernew
23. Muddy Faces, bit.ly/actmuddy
24. April's Teaching Tree, bit.ly/aptree



WASH

SAINTE MARIE

Mountain Kingdom

CROWD



Take the Next Step Towards PBE

Are you an administrator in a school, park, or community organization?

- Start conversations with your colleagues or other stakeholders about what is good for kids. Ask how PBE can meet the social and academic needs you hear people talk about.
- Seek out PBE in action. For most people, seeing is believing. Witness a PBE project first hand. Reach out to any of the people listed in this booklet and ask them why they do PBE.
- Reach out for inspiration or ideas to school principals Aaron Cinquemani, acinquemani@sau60.org, Wayne Kermenski, wkermenski@marlboroschool.net, or John Hansen, jhansen@wscu.net.

Are you an educator working directly with kids?

- Reach out to coordinator@uvtpc.org or browse uvtpc.org or parkforeveryclassroom.org for great resources.
- Find another educator or community of practice to partner with. PBE thrives on teamwork.
- Keep these practical tips -your PBE Vow(els)- in mind when crafting your activities:
 - * **Appreciation**- Be a curious and enthusiastic mentor. How will you help students discover and express the “extraordinary in the ordinary” of their place?
 - * **Expectations**- Student self-efficacy can blossom when students explore their place. How will you scaffold and make guidelines crystal clear so students can learn on their own?
 - * **Innovations**- PBE offers authentic, complex challenges that test resilience. What problem-solving strategies will you incorporate to help students get themselves unstuck?
 - * **Organization**- The natural and built environment require different preparations. How will you co-plan with your students to make sure everyone has the resources needed for learning and doing “in the real world” (e.g., snacks, water, weather-appropriate clothing, sunblock, “bathrooms,” bus fare, maps, field guides, etc.)?
 - * **Usefulness**- Place teaches us how we are connected to our local eco- and social systems. How will you help students make useful contributions to the health of these systems?

Are you a PBE supporter or advocate?

- Contact info@PEERassociates.net or Joan Haley, jhaley@shelburnefarms.org, to create a customized version of this booklet that features stories, quotes, pictures, and contact information from your own region, community, or network.