



## An Evaluation of Four Place-Based Education Programs

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Program Profile	
<b>Program Description:</b>	The Place-Based Education Evaluation Collaborative (PEEC) provides evaluation support to member organizations with the goal of improving place-based education program models and evaluation techniques. PEEC has several member organizations all of whom have programs focusing on sustainability. The four PEEC programs evaluated were the CO-SEED Project, the Community Mapping Program, the Sustainable Schools Project, and A Forest for Every Classroom Program. CO-SEED and the Sustainable Schools Project are whole school improvement projects focusing on sustainability. The Community Mapping Program and A Forest for Every Classroom Program are professional development programs. For more information about the collaborative and these member programs visit <a href="http://www.peecworks.org">www.peecworks.org</a>
<b>Program Goals:</b>	<p>The goals of PEEC are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>To serve as a learning organization for program developers and to fuel internal growth and program development for the individual organizations;</i></li> <li>2. <i>To develop, identify, and disseminate evaluation techniques, tools, and approaches that can be applied elsewhere; and</i></li> <li>3. <i>To contribute to the research base underlying the field of place-based education and school change.</i></li> </ol> <p>Common goals for the PEEC member programs are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Enhanced community and school connections,</i></li> <li>• <i>increased understanding of and connection to place,</i></li> <li>• <i>increased understanding of ecological concepts,</i></li> <li>• <i>enhanced stewardship behavior,</i></li> <li>• <i>increased academic performance,</i></li> <li>• <i>improvement of schoolyard habitats and their use as teaching spaces, and</i></li> <li>• <i>increased civic participation.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Program Funding:</b>	The Wellborn Ecology Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Society serves as the fiscal agent for the collaborative. All member programs contribute funds to the evaluation effort. Each program derives its own program funding from a variety of sources.
<b>Program Links:</b>	<a href="http://www.peecworks.org">www.peecworks.org</a>

<b>Evaluation Profile</b>	
<b>Evaluation Goals &amp; Questions:</b>	Individual evaluation plans were developed for each of the participating programs based on their goals and expected outcomes. Common cross-program questions were: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Evaluating process strengths and challenges: What are the greatest strengths and challenges of each program model? How can these programs learn and grow from one another?</i></li> <li><i>Measuring teacher practice change: How does participation in one of these place-based education programs change teachers' teaching practices?</i></li> </ol>
<b>Evaluation Methods:</b>	The cross-program analysis used qualitative methods. At the beginning of the process, the evaluators helped the organizations create logic models for their programs. Subsequently, the evaluation questions were developed through a consensus process including the evaluators, program staff, and a panel of advisors. The primary form of data collection was semi-structured interviews and focus groups with teachers, students, administrators, community partners, parents, and program staff. This data was supplemented by observations and program documents. The collected data were reviewed for key emergent themes. Pattern matching was used to understand trends in the data and address the evaluation questions.
<b>Evaluation Instruments:</b>	All evaluation instruments and reports are available through the Place-Based Education Evaluation Collaborative website ( <a href="http://www.peecworks.org">www.peecworks.org</a> ).
<b>How were results used?</b>	This article reported on the first evaluation cycle (2002-03) of many. Each year since, programs have used the evaluation findings to modify and develop their programs, generate new evaluation questions (both individually and across the programs). The evaluation team (PEER Associates) meets with the collaborative three times each year to discuss evaluation findings, provide progress reports, stimulate cross-pollination among program staff on new program developments, discuss new research in the field, strategize for subsequent evaluation cycles, plan for dissemination, etc.
<b>Evaluation Cost:</b>	The budget for this round of evaluation was approximately \$60K. However, the work was more substantial than what was covered by the budget that particular year, there were graduate students and PEEC-related expenses not covered by the budget.
<b>Evaluation Insights:</b>	<p><b>What worked well?</b> The idea of these organizations coming together as a collaborative was fantastic, and the collaborative has persisted well beyond this study. Having program data that came from a variety of programs who meet regularly, discuss findings, evaluation approaches, program development, etc. helps this (and subsequent) evaluation work to be truly utilization-focused.</p> <p><b>What were important evaluation “lessons learned”?</b> In the end the budget did not cover the large scale evaluation that was conducted.</p> <p><b>What could have been done differently?</b> We have pursued many new approaches in subsequent evaluation cycles, including developing a system of survey questions organized into Modules, Indices and Items. These questions cover a broad (but specifically selected) set of outcomes determined to be important to some or all of the PEEC programs. So we have since tested and reported on a lot of approaches that built upon this first research project. See <a href="http://www.peecworks.org">www.peecworks.org</a> for more about this.</p>
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