Washington State University  
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Will defend the dissertation on  
   Date: April 3, 2023  
   Time: 3:00 P.M.  

Vancouver Campus – VUB 311  
Zoom by request to gradstudies@wsu.edu  

Faculty, students and the general public are encouraged to attend  

PLACE-BASED EDUCATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF DEFINITIONS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND BARRIERS IN A SMALL K-12 SCHOOL DISTRICT  

Chair: Sharon Kruse  

Place-based education (PBE) combines experiential learning and connections between classrooms and the wider local area to raise students’ awareness of their communities and inspire them to make meaningful impacts upon their places. PBE has been shown to positively impact students’ engagement and enjoyment in the classroom. Additionally, as PBE remains a growing field, it has no set definition. Prior research has shown a PBE program requires significant time and effort from school staff to establish.

This study explored the experiences of staff members in a small school district in the Northwestern United States as they implemented PBE. It sought to determine (1) how school staff defined their experiences implementing PBE and (2) the barriers and opportunities they faced in doing so. This study utilized a qualitative methodological framework of semi-structured interviews to gather findings from school staff members of varied organizational positionalities and experience levels. Findings indicated school staff defined their PBE work as profoundly community oriented and demonstrated a mindset of continuous professional improvement toward PBE. Participants expressed the importance of leadership to their PBE efforts and were driven to utilize PBE for its perceived benefits to students. Further, participants expressed concern about staffing issues, reliable sources of funding, and tensions between the traditional structure of public schooling and the experiential nature of PBE. Participants in this study expressed pride and innovation in their stories of implementing PBE as professional educators. The purpose of this study was to explore practitioners’ perspectives in the growing field of PBE and how their experiences could inform future PBE research and practice.