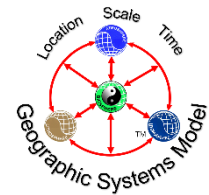# Personal Learning Activated by Youth (PLAY)

AppGeog TP-
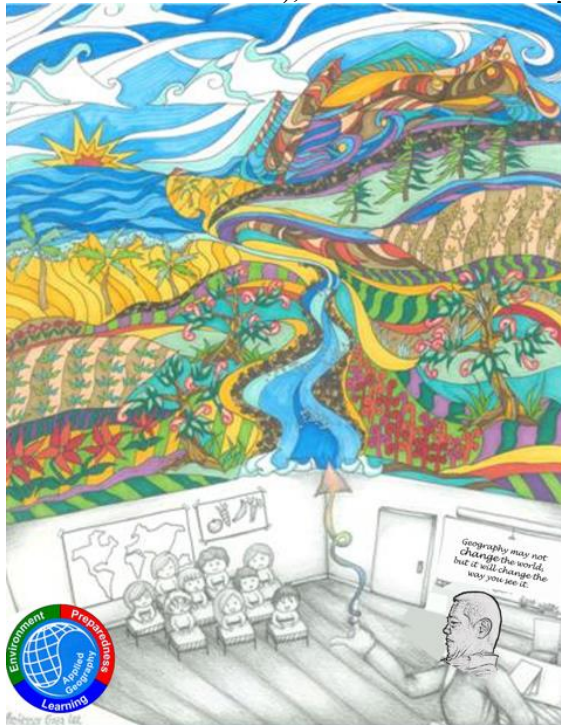© 2024, G. K. Lee. All rights reserved.

Applied Geography Education: the path to a more sustainable future.

Applied Geography (AppGeog) Community-based Education is an informal grassroots education model based on the basic ideas: 1) curiosity is the driving force for learning; 2) people learn what they want to learn; 3) Learning is facilitated when it is fun and relevant to the life of the learner; 4) Nature is the free library and classroom available to everyone; 5) learners are the source of AppGeog C-bE curriculum development which links learning to the local job market; 6) learning, whether it is formal or informal, conscious or unconscious, is still learning. Sugata Mitra's "*Hole in the Wall*" experiments convinced him elementary students can teach themselves through a process he called "self-organized learning." Mitra is convinced elementary students don't need teachers. With the rise of AI, in a conversation Mitra had with Arthur C. Clark (the noted science fiction author), Clark stated that any teacher who can be replaced by a computer should be.
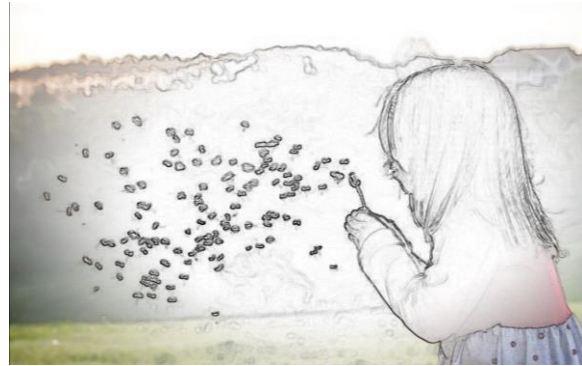
Graphic based on an image from Freepik

The illustration on the left is adapted from the original by Sara Walter for the Rural Training Center-Thailand contrasting a traditional boring classroom to Nature's vibrant outdoor classroom library, and laboratory available through community-based education'(C-bE). AppGeog has adapted and enhanced the earlier community-based education method from the RTC-TH.

Personal Learned Activated by Youth (PLAY) is a supplement to Personal Learning and Natural Teaching (PLANT) a concept of the AppGeog C-bE method. PLAY is freeform, unstructured learning with minimal adult/parental guidance. The primary adult functions are safety, security, and fostering, nurturing, protecting, and encouraging a child's curiosity. They facilitate learning by reducing frustration and encouraging exploration. Offering choices based on the child's interests develops decision-making and learning.

As cognitive skills and reading ability rise, curricular development is more structured. It follows the science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics integrating Nature and geography (STEAMING) curricular development process. [**Note**: STEAMING is the AppGeog enhancement of the STEM/STEAM.] Unlike the typical top-down curricular process in traditional schools, the learners' curiosity drives the process. AppGeog C-bE is truly learner-centered.
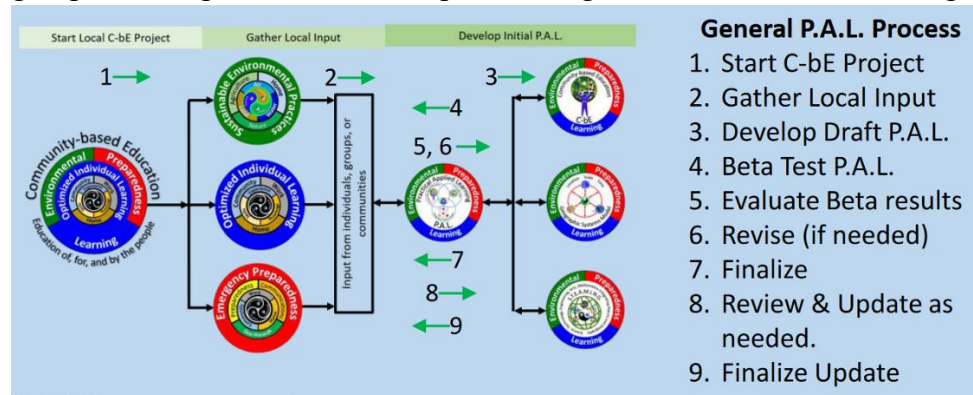

Adapted from the original artwork by Sara Walter prepared for Prof. Greg Lee during his tenure with the Rural Training Center-Thailand which used his Geographic Systems Model.

The formal AppGeog C-bE curricular development process is shown below for a typical training program to produce Practical Applied Lessons (PAL) used in businesses, schools, and community groups. To adapt it to PLAY, the process Begins at #3 based on observing the child's curiosity and.

General P.A.L. Process
1. Start C-bE Project
2. Gather Local Input
3. Develop Draft P.A.L.
4. Beta Test P.A.L.
5. Evaluate Beta results
6. Revise (if needed)
7. Finalize
8. Review & Update as needed.
9. Finalize Update

interests. The geographic systems model (GSM) helps to identify the knowledge areas for content to match the student's topic of interest. The topic and activity are then viewed in the context of the STEAMING framework. This is an iterative process involving #3-7 repeated as needed depending on the student's interactions during play (which can be solo or with others). Much of PLAY is learning by trial and error. This is the same process nearly all children use when learning to walk. The key difference is PLAY is less formal than PAL. In both situations, no exams are used. Practical demonstration serves as proof of mastery of the topic. During PLAY, the repetition of completed actions is deemed a success. For children, the litmus test is a sense of accomplishment and building confidence. For learners in PAL sessions, success is completing projects and activities, often as teams. This encourages interpersonal communication skills, cooperation, and peer learning reinforcement. Brainstorming and debriefing methods instill discussions free of judgments, creativity, and experimentation to test ideas all using the STEAMING framework. Introspection and reflection are consistently encouraged by open-ended questions without a clear right/wrong context. For example, after a learning activity, a question "What did you think of that?" eliminates the pressure and anxiety of having to come up with the right answer.

Debriefing is a non-judgmental way to assess learning activities and encourage self-learning. We adopted Bill Crawford's debrief format of five questions: 1) What happened? Be sure to stick to the facts and chronology without playing the blame game. 2) What went right? 3) What didn't go right? Again, stick to the facts and avoid pointing fingers and blaming someone. 4) Why? Stick to the facts to get to the cause of the problem (often a procedural or policy deficiency, need to improve training, etc. but don't focus on blaming someone). The goal is to prevent future mishaps. 5) What was learned? This is an effective way to learn from mistakes and failures. Consider this tuition for the school of hard knocks.

The diagram on the right shows the AppGeog C-bE and its four key components, the GSM, STEAMING (the AppGeog enhanced STEM/STEAM curricular model, PLAY, and PAL.

Summary

PLAY is a way for children to learn what they want to learn, when and how they learn, and develop learning habits early guided by curiosity and encouragement not by a top-down curriculum that is relevant to their lives. 🌐