

**[00:00:00] Bonni Stachowiak:** Today on episode number 342 of the *Teaching in Higher Ed* podcast, I have the pleasure of speaking with Amy Sprowles and Matt Johnson about place-based learning.

**[00:00:14] Production Credit:** Produced by Innovate Learning, maximizing human potential.

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**[00:00:23] Bonni:** Hello, and welcome to this episode of *Teaching in Higher Ed*. I'm Bonni Stachowiak, and this is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to improve our productivity approaches so we can have more peace in our lives and be even more present for our students.

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As part of my ongoing series highlighting different faculty throughout the California State University, I have the pleasure today of speaking with Matthew Johnson, PhD, professor of wildlife and Amy Sprowles, PhD, associate professor of biological sciences, who are both recognized for their transformative work and creating supportive and welcoming environments for traditionally underrepresented students through place-based learning communities.

Johnson and Sprowles organized a collaborative network of faculty across HSU to deliver cohesive and linked curriculum within each learning community from chemistry to Native American studies to communication with a goal of

implementing high impact practices to support the success of first-year STEM students. Johnson and Sprowles developed several learning communities for students in the College of Natural Resources and Sciences and divided students into cohorts.

The Klamath Connection serves students majoring in wildlife, forestry and environmental science, Stars to Rocks serves students majoring in physics and astronomy, chemistry and geology, Rising Tides serves students majoring in marine biology and oceanography, Among Giants serves students majoring in biology, botany, and zoology and Representing Realities serves students majoring in Mathematics and Computer Science. Amy and Matt, welcome to *Teaching in Higher Ed*.

**[00:02:33] Matthew Johnson:** Thanks for having us.

**[00:02:34] Amy Sprowles:** Yes, great to be here. Thanks, Bonni.

**[00:02:37] Bonni:** I want to start out with a question that I already know isn't really a question, but will you work with me on this? [chuckles]

**[00:02:44] Amy:** Absolutely.

**[00:02:45] Bonni:** All right. Before you tell us the definition of what place-based learning is, I want to start with an initial question. Did you first in your teaching do stuff and then find out that the stuff you were doing had a name for it called place-based learning? Or did you first find out about place-based learning and what some other people were doing with it and then try to adopt it into your own teaching? Or I suppose there's actually a third option, which could be maybe you coined the term place-based learning? I don't know. Is it A, B, C or D other answer that I'm not thinking of?

**[00:03:21] Matthew:** Well, we didn't coin the term ourselves, that's for sure. I think for us being up here at Humboldt State University in Northwestern California, it's such a unique place. It's such an inspiring place and for a lot of our students, it's very different than the place they came from to come to HSU. I think the idea of using

and drawing on the power of place-based learning arose from where we are. Amy and I have lived in this place for a while and have grown to love it. I think we saw that as a really powerful opportunity to connect students to the place into the curriculum they're engaged in.

**[00:04:00] Bonni:** Amy, it sounds like it was option D, possibly, that there was another answer, which is maybe that you were inspired first by the place that you live and teach in. Does that sound right to you?

**[00:04:10] Amy:** Yes, I think we were inspired both by the place that we live and teach in and the students that we teach because as Matt described, Humboldt State is really unique and relatively isolated location. Most of the students that come here are actually from a place that's about 800 miles away. The majority of our demographic are students that arrive from Southern California and metropolitan areas. They are areas that are physically distant and really culturally distant.

The original idea was inspired in part by wanting to welcome students to their new home, their new place and really introduce it to them through our curriculum. Then as we began this work and started partnering with other people from our place, we became much more aware and knowledgeable about what place-based means to other people and other groups. It's really been a wonderful journey that's built community around not just where we are but the people who live here, the people who have always lived here and how they interact with the world around them.

**[00:05:14] Bonni:** You don't need to give us necessarily a textbook definition, but could you give us your definition of place-based learning?

**[00:05:21] Matthew:** Yes. To me, place-based learning really rests on the power of immersing students, faculty and staff for that matter in the place and recognizing the heritage, the culture, the landscape, the geography, the plants, the animals, the rocks, all those things and how those things interact with each other to illustrate to students how so many disciplines are interconnected.

The world is a challenging place, we've got social challenges, environmental challenges, economic challenges and higher education is pretty good at isolating those, but we all know that solving those complex challenges requires all the disciplines working together. By immersing the curriculum, embedding the curriculum and anchoring the curriculum around a place, it gives you the opportunity to explore how all those dimensions of that place interact with each other.

**[00:06:17] Bonni:** As you were just saying that, you're just igniting my imagination around this. Amy, would you talk-- Would you please just give us an example of this interdisciplinary aspect of place-based learning? Because I know there are some aspects of place-based learning that's like, "Let's take our STEM class and put it in the desert," but we're not also then bringing in other disciplines. Could you give us an example of an interdisciplinary example of place-based learning for you?

**[00:06:45] Amy:** Yes, absolutely. I think I'll go back to one of the very first experiences that we developed for our students. The programming here at HSU really started, gosh, I think it's five years ago and we spent a full year before then really planning. As Matt said, it's not simply about the place, it's bringing in different disciplines and it's really about involving the people in the conversation and the people of the place. It's certainly those of us from HSU when we developed a team of faculty, staff and even students that came together from different majors in different departments.

That ranged anywhere from wildlife and biology, which are our two home departments. We included chemistry, math, we included communications, we included art, theatre and art, and then we reached out to the scientists and cultural experts of the tribal communities of our place as well. When our first cohort arrived, we had developed a three-day experience that really focused on the environmental and social justice challenges of our local tribal communities, their epistemologies, the way in which they explore and study their place, how it relates to the culture, their culture and the culture of their ancestors. Then how our disciplines are able to complement and work together to help solve these really complex and challenging concerns.

**[00:08:12] Bonni:** When this community came together of students, what was it that they signed up for in the sense, did I sign up for a science class because I'm a science major and I signed up for a com class because I'm a com major and then I get to see how these disciplines intersect? Or did I sign up for a class and I would draw on lots of strengths from my own background and lots of knowledge that I have? How general is my sign up for this class as a student?

**[00:08:37] Matthew:** The program is a cohort-based learning community. That means all the students come in together and we designed our learning community for incoming first year students who have chosen to major in a STEM discipline. That learning community, those students are in a cohort and they take mostly the same classes together. When they signed up for a learning community, and the very first place-based learning community that we started was called the Klamath Connection, they took a bunch of classes together.

Those classes all touched on various aspects of the Klamath River, the Klamath ecosystem, the people of the Klamath, the water of the Klamath, the algae in the Klamath, the rocks in the Klamath, those sorts of things. That's one of the powerful synergistic benefits of a learning community is the students begin to see how those courses relate to each other. Also a little bit unanticipated for us is the faculty, we're beginning to talk to each other a lot more to and beginning to recognize, "Oh, that's what they're doing in communications. Oh, all my students are taking communications this semester. Wonderful. How can we combine?" It was those sorts of opportunities that really propelled the curriculum. What they're signing up for is this cohort-based learning community.

**[00:09:51] Bonni:** Oh, it's so much bigger than what I was initially thinking. This is just three days of the actual on-site in that particular example, but this is part of a much broader vision and a much broader idea that sustained over many, many years of their education it sounds like.

**[00:10:07] Matthew:** Yes, it's a first year program. I think you're referring to the first few days of the fall semester. We have what we call a summer immersion. The students would arrive a few days before the rest of the first year students arrive and they

would have this immersive experience. In the Klamath Connection, it was literally immersive and that they would go up to the Klamath River, get their feet wet, see what the river is like, but then they would be in this cohort of classes that they would take together in the fall. Then also some of the same classes together in the spring semester.

**[00:10:36] Bonni:** I want to hear about this. I know you have some statistical measures around the impact, but I'd love you to start from more of a qualitative standpoint. What have you heard from students after the fact? Just more anecdotally, what stories have you heard from some students after they're beyond that first-year experience as to the power of it for the rest of their education?

**[00:10:57] Amy:** I think that's a really great question. It's interesting because we have lots of antidotes than as Matt described, it's a first-year program. We spend a lot of time with the students in the first three days, and then they all cohort together in the same classes that first semester, they have their own freshman year experience. These are all high impact practices that they're traveling through together. The way in which they are related **[00:11:22]** in our program allows not only for students to travel together through various dimensions of their first year, but it also allows for the faculty to engage in the students in various settings and then the faculty and the building a community too.

We had lots of great antidotes from the students who were really excited about different dimensions of the programming during the summer, but also as they were able to see the different connections that were in place between their courses between the summer experience and the summer experience and then other social events that occurred throughout the year. It was great to see their community grow and then to also be part of that community in the first year. As they moved on in their classes, really they cohort together and that I think that continuity continued for the class as they entered upper-division courses, we would hear from upper-division faculty members.

Then as we saw them later on, sometimes they'd come back around as research students are in their upper-division classes. It was just nice to see that have that

familiarity and be able to build upon that relationship and really bookend the entire experience. I don't know if that answered your question [crosstalk]

**[00:12:33] Bonni:** It absolutely did. Now that we have explored some of the stories, I know this is not something that you only gathered stories on. You're interested in actually measuring the impact and you mentioned high impact practices. Place-based learning is among, I don't know, lots of types of deeply researched high-impact practices, where there's a lot of scholarship of teaching and learning around it.

You have a publication that I'll link to in the show notes from the journal of innovative higher education, I'll just read the title quickly and then we can talk through some of the effects that you were able to measure. It's titled *Effects of a Place-Based Learning Community on Belonging, Persistence, and Equity Gaps for First Year STEM Students*. What can you generally tell us that you were able to see happened in terms of a sense of belonging, persistence, and equity gaps for these first year students?

**[00:13:29] Matthew:** Well, we try to measure as much as we could in terms of the impact that this program might be having on students. We have a really great office of institutional effectiveness here on campus, that's the Office of Institutional Research and they were very collaborative with us. We were able to do surveys of students and focus groups.

Then, of course, very standard institutional measures like persistence, which is the percentage of students that come back after the first year to their second year, as well as great acquisition GPA and all those things. What we really hypothesizing and hoping that this program would do is increase students' sense of belonging. We hope that that then fosters a sense of community that might translate into greater academic achievement that might be measured in GPA and of course, acquisition and retention or persistence at the university. We were able to measure all those things.

In addition to hoping that we would see increases in all those things, the whole design of this, and one of the reasons that learning communities are designated high impact practices in higher education is that's been found in other situations and we, again, found it here is that these sorts of learning communities that can build community can narrow those equity gaps. It can shrink the difference between great acquisition or retention or whatever your measure is between underrepresented students or first-generation students or low-income students and students who don't have those presentations. We were able to document both of those effects. That is an increase in a lot of those different measurements, as well as a narrowing of equity gaps between.

**[00:15:04] Bonni:** I know that we-- None of us. I shouldn't say none of us. In many of our disciplines, we have to be careful about attributing causation to things, and generally what we often get are causation, especially in the social sciences. I don't want to ask you a question that you can't really answer, but do you have a hypothesis around what is it that most helped reduce those equity gaps? Let me just give you one quick example so you know what's in my brain. I've had a past guest on Eddie Watson and Eddie Watson did a study about these open educational resources. These are essential. I don't want to oversimplify it. I apologize to listeners who are experts in this, but free textbooks.

A lot of people would assume the savings of the free textbook is what made the biggest difference, but what his research found was actually the one biggest difference is everybody's starting the beginning of the term in the same place. Whereas in other circumstances, because they didn't have all the cash they needed to buy that textbook, they might not have gotten it until week three or four. It was more about the time delay for academic success than it actually was the money. Does that make sense? I'm wondering about this equity gap because it's so exciting for me to hear another example of that being measured, but well, what kinds of things do you think you can attribute it to based on your research?

**[00:16:31] Amy:** Well, there are a couple of different things. Again, our researches also begin in the scholarship, so we certainly aren't the first person to explore or the first team to explore many of these ideas and apply them. There is a couple of



things that motivated us. One, I think was this idea that it is a community. One would hope that if you bring new students to campus and engage them with faculty, with upperclassmen, with staff around the discipline, that they came to the university to study, then you immediately welcome them, you include them and you ground them with others that can support them as they move through. That was one piece that we hoped would help close equity gaps.

Especially for students from areas or backgrounds that haven't had as much experience with hands-on learning in the discipline that they're excited about. The other piece is also in the higher education literature, that if you can really motivate students by engaging them in curricular and co-curricular activities that really highlight the relationships between STEM, which is really about science, technology, math, which isn't really- it doesn't obviously link to the humanities, to the human experience.

If you can create activities and experiments and show that linkage so that students can really see how their personal and cultural values are impacted by and could benefit from STEM curriculum, then you can really improve motivation and engagement and hopefully, welcome people from all places to really excel.

**[00:18:15] Bonni:** I know there are totally a bazillion examples you could give me, but what each one of you just gives me one example of a surprising way- surprising from a student's perspective that you're able to, and your colleagues are able to show them of this connection between science, technology, engineering, and math and what some of them would consider their own lives. I realize that's an oversimplification, but like social issues and things that they care about, those connections. Would you just share an example that comes to mind, even though I know there's tons of examples out there?

**[00:18:47] Amy:** Yes, I guess there's two different levels to this. The welcoming students to HSU and grounding them in the social-cultural issues of our place. He's mentioned Klamath Connection. The Klamath River is the major geographic feature that really collects us all together. All of us being both the campus community and our tribal partners, it is home to four different tribal nations.

We collaborated with the scientists and cultural experts of those tribes to help introduce the students to the system and issues that water quality issues have on the people of that place. For the last 12 years or so, every late summer, there's been a major toxic bloom of microcystis algae that really dramatically impedes, not just the health of a river, but the ceremonial practices of the tribal people of the place.

By introducing the students to the cultural impacts, the scientific impacts, the environmental impacts, and then demonstrating how chemistry, math, botany can all help that are described and understand and contribute to a solution was really the first way in which we try to highlight the linkage between the people of our place and the basic science courses that the students would be engaging in their first semester.

**jj[00:20:17] Matthew:** This year, we did that same experiment that we've done multiple years and we have to be different this year because normally, that experiment happens with files and going to a lab and then having those files sit in the greenhouse for a while to grow algae. This year, because of COVID and everything being virtual, we had to transfer that whole experience into a kit that we can send for the students.

I just finished grading some of the students' responses that it was really rewarding and enlightening to read those because several students talked about, "I couldn't come to Humboldt this semester, but a little bit Humboldt came to me in these vials." Because we would send them vials that literally had some Klamath River water in them and then we would use some experiments to see if the addition of nutrients accelerated the growth of the algae inside those vials.

Then as Amy's describing, working with our travel collaborators and working with botany professors and math instructors, the students see how this one experiment which seems to be maybe very similar at first, connects to all of these other disciplines. Then a lot of students have this aha moment where they're seeing, "Oh, I thought maybe this was just going to be like experiment I did in high school, but now that I see that it's real, it matters to people that live on a river and have lived

on this river since time immemorial. We're doing this experiment to understand this algae and how it might be affecting these people."

That's part of the relevance of science to society that both literature suggest is very powerful to help close equity gaps that we certainly experience and see that ourselves as well.

**[00:21:56] Amy:** The last thing I would say is the other exciting piece is that it's an extremely relevant question in our community right now because the toxic algaecal blooms are a direct result of major hydroelectric dams that have been up for relicensing. There's a major initiative by our local communities to try and remove the dams. It's also students see how the power of science can also affect policy and move forward to catalyze major changes for restoration. That's exciting too.

**[00:22:28] Bonni:** I don't want to be projecting things that aren't there, but I can't help myself because you're talking about water quality. Instantly, we have a lot of listeners from all around the world so not everyone would get this reference so I'll explain it. We have a community in the United States called Flint Michigan. It's the foster child, would you agree that's the foster child what poor water quality can do? It's the most publicized one for what poor water quality can do.

My mind goes to that and all the devastation there. There's legal elements to it and political elements to it. If I were a student in your class, yes, I would definitely see the opportunities to deepen my understanding of another culture from mine. Or perhaps, it is my culture because I'm from there, but you said most of your students are not. Also, so many of our students do come from areas where water quality would be an issue. I don't want to, again, put something that's not there.

It just seems the next natural extension to you igniting my curiosity is, "Oh, so that's how this works here, but how will it work in the place where I'm from?" Do you have those kinds of conversations? Are they able to make those connections? Do they want to go home and measure their own water quality and things like that?

[laughs]

**[00:23:47] Matthew:** Exactly. What you're describing is environmental injustice, and that is the process by which environmental contamination or environmental problems land just proportionally on people of color or marginalized communities. This example that these students explore with their blue green algae in the Klamath River is an example of that and you are exactly right. Students, they recognize this process and this reality of environmental injustice and many of them have lived in their own lives.

Part of the place-based learning is to not just learn about this place, but to learn about this place as a way to learn about larger, emergent patterns or emergent processes, or emergent questions that applied to anywhere in the world. On the heels of doing some of the local place-based learning, we also then ask students to reflect on how some of these same relationships and complications and solutions might be operating on their own communities.

**[00:24:47] Bonni:** I've been so fortunate to be able to speak now to so many superb faculty members across the California State University system. I just love how the theme just carries across around this service learning opportunities, and so many different disciplines that I've spoke with, the idea of we do it together with the community. I'm thinking about the group of researchers who have the students learn about circuits through building these solar kits, and then they take the solar kits to the indigenous communities, for example.

They're not like, "Here, here's a present." [laughs] They're actually working together to learn how to build them. I just love that value really carries across so much from what I've been able to see of the California State University system.

**[00:25:32] Matthew:** That's right. In our case, the idea of cohorted-based learning communities has been around for decades. It's established high in practice. We chose to put the place-based signature on the learning communities that we have built here at HSU. Place-based learning is also been around for a while, mostly in the environmental education. It's also been criticized for not appropriately acknowledging the indigeneity of a place, the indigenous people of a place.

For us, I think what we've learned over the years, working with our colleagues in Native American studies is you cannot talk about the place without talking about the indigenous people that have been there since time immemorial. That's pretty conspicuous here in Humboldt County because we're a rural place with a number of important tribes that have been here since time immemorial, and still have very active practices in communities going on now.

Really, I think one of the lessons that the students learn in working with our Native American space collaborators, they ask the students to go to this website and putting in their hometown and learn what the tribe is that there is in their hometown. No matter where you are in North America, there is an indigenous community there that has been there for tens and thousands of years or longer.

That I think, that's also one of the emergent lessons that students receive from both the summer immersion as well as the co-cohorted experience over the first year. We certainly see that in surveys and focus groups with the students. A lot of them reflect on, "Boy, I've learned about Native American in fourth grade in my California whatever curriculum, but I never learned this." It's really powerful for them to hear more honest truth about the history several colonials and how has that affected their communities here and elsewhere.

**[00:27:19] Bonni:** Well, I want to ask one more question before we get to the recommendation segment. It's hard sometimes when you work at a place, or you're in a situation where you don't have a first year cohort program. You don't have a place-based program already implemented. It feels sometimes a little bit isolating. I wonder what ideas you might have for how do we shrink this down? I realize that I'm going to over-simplifying.

I like to think about, it doesn't have to be this giant thing that involves all these people and money to budget it and all these stuff. What are some of the small things someone might do just to begin to experiment on the smallest unit that you can think of around place-based learning?

**[00:28:08] Matt:** Well, there's a couple of ways to think about that. The smallest unit I think you can think of as being something that's place-based, or the smallest possible learning community. An individual instructor can certainly introduce place-based curriculum pedagogy into her/his class. I'm a wildlife biologist and so we do a lot of- in my classes, we do lot of work locally with field work. In many cases, collaborating with the city of Arcata in our case, here at Humboldt State.

Any time you're grounding the work in the community and out in the field, in my case, with students studying wildlife, it can really help galvanize the concepts in their own mind. Then in terms of the smallest possible learning community, really the academic literature defines. As long as you've got two classes that have some linked content across them and some shared students between them, that's enough for learning community because the students in that experience will be seeing the academic connections between those two classes. They'll also have build a community of people who are enrolled in those two courses together. There's benefits even for a learning community that's as small as that.

**[00:29:26] Bonni:** By two classes, you mean I'm in a cohort and together as a cohort, we took two different classes? Or you mean two different classes that are coming together to a larger group to learn together?

**[00:29:37] Matthew:** Well, I guess it could be either way, but most conventionally, two courses where the same students are taking two different courses with two different instructors.

**[00:29:46] Bonni:** Rather than thinking about I have to invent this whole cohort model and transform all of the first year experience, it could be I pair up either with myself because if I teach two different classes that happen to be in that first year map or curriculum progress for students, or I get a colleague and we figure out some way to do that together.

**[00:30:05] Matthew:** There's really cool stories. We've had benefit of going to some of these learning community institutes and training opportunities where we've heard stories from other faculty all over the country that have done learning communities.

Sometimes it's a music class and a chemistry class. Sometimes the combination seem like, "Oh, wow, how did you pull that off?" They can be really powerful because that's how students can start see some connections across discipline.

**[00:30:31] Bonni:** I was even thinking just in my own teaching, because I'm not in STEM, but how do you take it into a non-STEM. I'm going to give you an example that I don't think is place-based learning but I still want to mention it and see if you agree. [chuckles] I love getting students outside of the classroom. I would often, in the years of my teaching, we would go head down together. We're right by a nature preserve and it's beautiful. There are a lot of ecological things, but that's not why we're there.

[chuckles] We partner up and we listen to a podcast episode about whatever the topic is. It's about 15 or 20 minutes or something like that. It might be looking at discrimination in the workplace. We walk out, there's actually two different ways you can go. Pair up with someone and decide if you want the harder, on your legs walk, that's going to involve more heels. If you want to go with me where we're going to walk in pretty flat land. Then we come back and we discuss it on the way back.

To me, that's not place-based learning. It's in a place, and it's learning, [laughs] but it's not place-based learning because I'm not incorporating that environment other than just its beauty and magnificence and it's something different. The second example would be a really seemingly simple one and that is whenever I have guest speakers, I'll joke with them and be like, "Hey, could I invite myself to your company? Oh, by the way, my 20 students or whatever?"

Any time I can get them in the actual context that guest speaker might be speaking about that's a business person and so we're going to go learn from that business person in the context that they're going to be telling us if about it if that makes any sense. To me, that second one might qualify as place-based learning. Again, I know we don't need a ... or anything, but what are your thoughts on that shrinking it down?

**[00:32:10] Amy:** I think both are really excellent beginnings. As each of you stated earlier, I think there's ways to just bring in small piece to round up the place-based. Remembering that place isn't just location, but also involvement of people and the people that were from there and the history of the activities that have occurred there. When you take your class out for the ecological walk, just knowing, as Matt said earlier, there's a map you can look on and identify any place in the United States and what the history of the indigenous community is, whose land it was if there are still community members there.

Just knowing the history of what occur on that land. If it's a wildlife reserve now, what is the history? What happened there before? Honor that and how it moves forward. In terms of the business practice, I think similarly what's not- this is the business, this is what they're doing, but how is that impacting the community? Why are they doing these things? What are ways that others can help have a conversation or maybe guide the product or the business practices to the most beneficial to all?

I think that's another way to think about it. As long it's honoring the history of a place, the relevance to the people who live there now currently and finding different perspectives to understand it and make things better.

**[00:33:32] Bonni:** We'll actually, transition over now to the recommendation segment. I'm going to give my recommendation first and we're recording this a lot in advance when it's actually going to air. I'm not going to make a lot of mentions of what's happening right now. [chuckles] All to say that I think probably collectively people listening would understand sometimes we just need a little escape. I just needed a little comedic escape and I watched a comedian.

I'd heard his name before and I'd heard him on podcast, but I don't know a ton about him. His name is Mike Birbiglia. He did-- It's a hour an a half, they called it a one-man show but he's basically a comedy routine. It's called *The New One*. I really enjoyed it because he talks about his feelings about he didn't want to have children originally. That I won't ruin the surprises, but you can maybe predict what might happen when someone's so sure that they don't want to have kids. [laughs]



I don't want to give too much away. Some of the time he talks a little bit about them wanting to have children and then not being, oh, I just ruined the surprise. My gosh, I'm really not doing well at this, but I couldn't tell this part of the story without saying that. They did eventually want to have kids and then weren't able to. Just as someone who's gone through some infertility in my own life.

It is really fun to hear from someone else's experience the similar challenge to you because there really is some funny stuff that happens in the middle of awful tragedy like that. You just want to cling to, "That was a horrible, horrible season but my goodness, was that funny?" Then just to have somebody else where you're like, "Oh my gosh, I get that so much." It was just really, really fun.

It totally took me away from everything that was going on and just be completely absorbed in this guy's story and he's so, so, so very funny. I would really recommend that to anyone who wants a little escape. He's funny, but it also has such deep meaning, and I really loved it. Amy, how about you? What do you have to recommend?

**[00:35:29] Amy:** Since we've been on this place-based theme, I have a book that I was introduced to a few months ago. Matt and I have just spent the last six years of our lives developing place-based themes around where we live and bringing people here. I haven't spent a whole lot of time thinking about when I go to other places. I have a colleague, Hokulani Aikau. She's at University of Utah and then she and her co-editor, Vicuña Gonzalez wrote a travel book for Hawai'i called *Detours*.

Instead of being a classic travel book that supposed to guide you through your tropical paradise vacation, it's actually designed to help the tourist come to Hawai'i with the people and the place in mind. Understand all the different customs and then the issues that tourism has really brought to the islands. How to best support and behave so that your honoring the location and the people who live there. It's really a nice twist in a way it's written. She brings in lots of culture.

She brings a lot of different perspective. It's a really nice twist and it's really made me rethink the way I travel and navigate- sorry, I should say the way I will travel and navigate the world [laughs] once I'm able to do so again.

**[00:36:42] Bonni:** Oh, it sounds amazing. Thank you so much. I can't wait to check this out more. I've just have been there only one time. Even just the one memory that I have, it is so prevalent. It would have been nice to have had a better sense of some of the issues. Thank you so much. Matt, how about you?

**[00:36:59] Matt:** Recommendation I would have is the book that I've most recently read, it's called *The Home Place*. It's written by J. Drew Lanham, who's the author obviously and a poet, and a wildlife biologist, and a professor at Clemson University. I'm a wildlife biologist too, it was very relevant to me. It's a memoir about his life growing up in South Carolina. The subtitle is *Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature*. As a black wildlife biologist, he's faced lots of institutional barriers and personal confrontations over his life.

As a professor of wildlife over the last few months in particular, just increasingly aware of some of the challenges that our students face. I love this book. I love lots of natural history writing. I love this book because it really seamlessly, I always envy writing that seamlessly combines very different ways of making. In his book really it seamlessly combines personal testimony and describing the ripple ... in the woods, describing his own personal story of going to a white church for the first time.

To his own personal story of trying to get into Clemson University to study wildlife biology. The challenges he's faced sometimes bird watching, and how he can navigate all that in being able to quilt. That covers all of that is really impressive. It was a wonderful read. He's coming to campus in a few weeks to talk to some of our students who are really excited about that too. It was a fun and thought-provoking, and rewarding read. I really loved it.

**[00:38:39] Bonni:** I am so overjoyed to be connected with both of you. Just thankful to the California University system just for the opportunity to speak with you. As soon as I saw, I think got a sentence in to hearing a little bit about your work. I thought,

"Oh, such a thrill to get to talk to you, really." You've just done such a wonderful job to help translate some of this to because you're more interdisciplinary thinkers anyway for the rest of us that aren't necessarily in STEM that we can take a lot of way from your work as well. Thank you so much for your time today.

**[00:39:10] Matt:** Thank you so much, Bonni. It was a pleasure speaking with you.

**[00:39:12] Amy:** Absolutely, Bonni. Thank you. It's a lot of fun.

[music]

**[00:39:18] Bonni:** Thanks once again to Amy Spowles and Matt Johnson for joining me on today's episode number 342 of the *Teaching in Higher Ed* podcast with a focus on place-based learning. I am leaving our interview completely energized and just so inspired by everything that you do. I want to thank those of you who are listening. I hope that you will be able to take some nuggets away, whether they're small nuggets or big giant ones, and be able to start thinking about some things you might be able to do within your own context.

If you head over to [teachinginhighered.com/342](http://teachinginhighered.com/342), you can see the show notes for the episode. I'd love to connect with you on Twitter if you're there. I am Bonni, with no E, B-O-N-N-I 208, I would love to hear what you're thinking about as far as place-based learning. See you next time.

[music]

**[00:40:17] [END OF AUDIO]**

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