

Bringing Benefits of Partnerships to Light: Illuminating Symbiosis through Evaluation Practice in Teacher Preparation and Museum Education

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Abstract

Relationships between museum education and teaching are fairly well-known, as is the application of evaluation in both contexts, but how often are they brought together? A unique program exists that unites all three: the Vermilionville Education Enrichment Partnership (VEEP), an academic service learning collaboration that has existed for over eight years. VEEP involves Vermilionville, a living history museum and folklife park, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (UL Lafayette), and the Lafayette Parish School System (LPSS). Through VEEP, and under the mentorship of UL Lafayette faculty and Vermilionville staff, preservice elementary and secondary social studies and English language arts teachers prepare and implement interdisciplinary lessons with LPSS students. Evaluation capacity building work has been a part of VEEP over the past two years, and these efforts have illuminated the importance of joining forces and having informed, ongoing conversations across varied contexts for mutually beneficial relationships across all of these fields.

Current Model Overview

VEEP began in 2012, and emerged from extant relationships with local teachers. As this program moved forward, there was a much more intentional focus on recruiting partner schools with the greatest needs. Many elementary and secondary students that have participated in VEEP would very likely not have had any field trip or cultural excursion experiences if their schools had not been a part of this program.

Through VEEP, preservice elementary and secondary social studies and English language arts (ELA) teachers:

- ◆ explore Vermilionville and its artifacts, while learning about the cultures they represent and reflecting on myriad aspects of relevant history;
- ◆ plan interdisciplinary lessons through their content methods courses and with support from UL Lafayette faculty and Vermilionville staff that incorporate best practices in teaching, the use of primary and secondary sources, content-specific standards, and promote active engagement for students with their learning;
- ◆ implement these lessons multiple times over the course of a single day, or “VEEP Day,” in the Fall and Spring semesters, with area elementary or secondary students and their teachers;
- ◆ reflect on the lesson planning and delivery processes; and
- ◆ refine the lesson plans, to be shared on the Vermilionville website for use by educators, both regionally and nationwide.

Program Benefits

There have been a great number of benefits resulting from the VEEP program. Below, just a few of the many benefits of the partnership itself and its impacts are highlighted.

Partnership

- ◆ Brings together multiple perspectives to approach the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of the program.
- ◆ Enhances both teacher preparation and museum education through ongoing conversations as part of VEEP, which in turn benefits local students and their teachers.
- ◆ Develops cross-curricular, hands-on educational resources.

Impacts

- ◆ As of October 2020:
 - ◆ 2,829 elementary and secondary LPSS students, as well as their teachers, have participated in VEEP Days; and
 - ◆ 498 UL Lafayette preservice elementary and secondary social studies and ELA teachers have designed, delivered, implemented, and evaluated their lessons.
- ◆ An additional 32 elementary and 25 secondary teacher candidates are currently engaged in VEEP in the Fall 2020 semester.

Best Practices

The following are a small sample of the numerous best practices that have emerged through VEEP’s first eight years.

- ◆ VEEP Day is analogous to a typical teaching day, in which the same lesson is taught multiple times and changes must be made each time to best meet various – and varying – students’ needs.
- ◆ VEEP participation helps teacher candidates become much more familiar with pedagogical practice in context, including interdisciplinary lesson planning and delivery, and the incorporation of formative and summative evaluation and assessment strategies.
- ◆ The VEEP program enables preservice teachers to gain awareness of alternative instructional methods and assessments, build professional collaborative competencies, integrate and enhance museum education, and ultimately design and implement more powerful lessons, both for VEEP Day and in their teaching careers.

The Beneficial Role of Evaluation

Formative, summative, and developmental evaluation processes have been a part of VEEP since its inception.

- ◆ Data include:
 - ◆ informal observations of the preservice teachers’ lessons by UL Lafayette faculty and the Vermilionville Education Coordinator;
 - ◆ questionnaires completed by LPSS students and their teachers at the end of each VEEP Day;
 - ◆ end-of-day questionnaires, written reflections, lesson plans, and focus groups from the preservice teachers; and
 - ◆ discussions among the VEEP team, comprised of UL Lafayette faculty and Vermilionville staff, during debriefing meetings at least twice per semester.
- ◆ Over the past two years, evaluation capacity building efforts have been underway with VEEP, and were initiated due to a desire to support the program as it continues to grow. This has led to:
 - ◆ more data-informed discussions;
 - ◆ an ongoing development of a logic model for the program; and
 - ◆ a revision and implementation of revised questionnaire instruments, including versions specifically for online lessons being developed during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ◆ As a whole, the incorporation of evaluative practice in VEEP develops formative and summative evaluation capacity with the teacher candidates, and helps them to be reflective practitioners and responsive professionals both now and in the future.

Future Goals

- ◆ Continue to develop this program to best meet the needs of elementary and secondary students and their inservice teachers through effective teacher candidate preparation.
- ◆ Support the transition to online learning being a common element of teaching due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ◆ Work on incorporation of Universal Design principles to address all students’ needs, including those on the autism spectrum or those needing special accommodations, by developing and using lesson plan templates that are inherently inclusive.
- ◆ Continue to share VEEP as a model partnership that incorporates community resources, local history, and various sources of expertise, and supports education across multiple content areas.