Connecting Communities and Classrooms

By Elaina Loveland

In the landscape of education reform, connecting communities and schools is an integral part of many diverse approaches to improve K–12 education. Many reform initiatives support an innovative curriculum that moves beyond the traditional classroom to incorporate community involvement into students’ academic life. As a teaching method, “using the community as context” is adapted into many of these different reform models, some of which include place-based education, service-learning, environmental education, the creation of community schools and academically-based community service through university-school partnerships.

Though the models are different, they share a belief that K–12 education needs to include real-life experience and use the community as context for learning. This underlying common attitude echoes the words of nineteenth century educator John Dewey:

From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while, on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning in school. That is the isolation of the school, its isolation from life.1

A STREAMS student doing fieldwork for Crooked Creek Water Assessment.


Quite a few education reform initiatives seek to reconnect schools to real-life learning experiences, by using the community as context as a way to connect community and the classroom. Several organizations have emerged as leaders in this approach.

Service-Learning

Service-learning—when students serve others as part of their core education—is one of the better known terms in community-connected education reform. Activities such as volunteering and doing community service projects are key components of service-learning,

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Rural Roots contains stories that share the incredible variety of place-based work going on around the country, its successes and challenges. Stories on rural community development, individuals and organizations making a difference in education and community life, and practitioner interests are all highlighted throughout the year.

*Rural Roots* is published six times per year and is distributed to more than 6,000 constituents. We encourage stories that focus on groundbreaking place-based education projects, youth-adult partnerships, small schools and consolidation, economic development, conservation, the arts, and instructive resource guides geared to teachers, to name a few.

We publish stories ranging from 400 to 2,000 words. If you are interested in submitting an article, please e-mail the editor at editor@ruraledu.org or call (202) 955-7177. We cannot offer payment for articles.
GrantsWatch

**Grant: Teaching Tolerance**  
**Funder: Southern Poverty Law Center**  
**Deadline: Ongoing**

“Teaching Tolerance” grants of up to $2,000 are available to K–12 teachers from the Teaching Tolerance project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, a nonprofit group that fights discrimination. The grants are awarded for activities promoting diversity, peacemaking, community service, or other aspects of tolerance education. Requests should include a typed, 500-word description of the activity and the proposed budget. Application deadline: ongoing. For more information, visit http://www.teachingtolerance.org.

**Grant: Professional Development**  
**Funder: NEA Foundation**  
**Deadline: Ongoing**

The NEA Foundation makes $1,000–$3,000 grants to practicing U.S. public school teachers in grades K–12, public school education support professionals, and higher education faculty and staff at U.S. public colleges and universities. All applicants must read and follow the grant guidelines. Eligible applicants may submit a proposal at any time. Notification will be made within seven months of receipt of the application. For more information, visit http://www.nfie.org/programs/howtoapply.htm.

**Grant: Environmental Education**  
**Funder: PG&E**  
**Deadline: September 30, 2002**

PG&E National Energy Group is accepting applications for its annual Environmental Education Grant Program. Grants ranging from $5,000 to $10,000 will be awarded for innovative programs that encourage and support educating young people about the environment. Those eligible to apply for grants include elementary, middle and high schools and nonprofit organizations that are engaged in educational projects related to earth science, conservation and the environment. Teacher training programs with hands-on student activities that focus on earth science and environmental education projects also can qualify. Application deadline: September 30, 2002. http://www.neg.pge.com/grantFAQ.html.

**Grant: At Risk Youth**  
**Funder: Handspring Foundation**  
**Deadline: November 1, 2002**

The Handspring Foundation makes cash grants from $1,000 to $25,000 for projects that focus on preK–12 education or other issues directly related to at-risk children and youth. Preference is given to organizations with a strong underserved outreach component. The Foundation is particularly interested in programs directed toward literacy; mentoring and peer counseling; school-based programs that target high-risk youth; after school programs targeting high-risk youth that utilize arts, technology, and sports; services to children in foster care or juvenile facilities; prevention, education, and early intervention services related to children's health; direct services for children who have been neglected and/or abused; and homeless assistance programs for families with children. Applications are reviewed quarterly. The next application deadline is November 1 for notification by the 15th of the following month. Visit http://www.handspring.com/company/foundation/about.jhtml for more information.

**Grant: School Reform and Community Initiatives**  
**Funder: Braitmayer Foundation**  
**Deadline: November 15, 2002**

The Braitmayer Foundation supports organizations and programs from across the U.S. that enhance the education of K–12 children. The foundation is particularly interested in curricular and school reform initiatives, professional development opportunities for teachers, and local community efforts that increase educational opportunities for students. This foundation prefers to award seed grants, challenge grants, or to match other grants. Grant requests of up to $10,000 should be submitted by November 15. For more information, visit http://www.braitmayerfoundation.org./

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**Rural Trust Receives $115,000 to Promote Youth Civic Engagement**

Twenty-two rural high schools in Alabama, Ohio, Nebraska, Vermont, South Dakota and North Carolina will participate in “Project 540,” a national high school civic engagement initiative funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts. The Rural Trust is one of 10 grantees selected out of 72 proposals—the only totally rural and the only national program funded. The project, reaching 100,000 students in 250 high schools across the country, is part of Pew’s six-year effort to increase the civic engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 22. It brings students, teachers, and administrators together to explore how high schools can become better platforms for young people to get involved in the public life of their communities. Providence College will coordinate the initiative.

During Project 540, students will identify the social issues they really care about via student-led dialogue groups, and examine the current landscape in their high school for student civic engagement opportunities. Through dialogue, students will map out existing opportunities for everyone in the school to learn, understand and appreciate what their school and community have to offer. Then they will create recommendations to enhance their opportunities for community involvement. Online activities, including small group dialogues between students in different schools, will be facilitated by New York City-based Web Lab.

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Community Collaboration for Place-based Studies Celebrates Local Natural and Cultural History

By June LaCombe

Editor’s Note: In this article, author June LaCombe revisits a community-wide place-based education project undertaken in the rural Maine town of Pownal in 1995 to see what, if anything, remains of the exciting work done by teachers, students, and community members that year. Her findings, seven years later, show parts of the year-long project still in use in the K-8 school and other parts of the program now a permanent part of the school’s budget. Most importantly, she gains a new appreciation of the importance of the students’ work documenting a rural community’s culture, resources, and history—a record of a town that lives on even after the death of town elders, the crumbling of historic structures, and the other inevitable changes that come with time.

This is the story of a school-wide curriculum project in Pownal, Maine that fostered intergenerational learning, student-centered inquiry, community service, and place-based education. It was a collaborative effort by students, teachers, parents, and community members to learn about the natural and cultural history of their town. When a teacher proposed developing a community resources directory to a local school foundation, the process of developing the product became much more than anyone had anticipated and touched the lives of many in a rural community. This project may act as a model for other communities who want to venture beyond the walls of the classroom and reinforce academics with experience.

Though just inland from Freeport and 30 minutes from Portland, Maine, Pownal remains a small rural town with farms, forests and streams. It has a population of about 1,200 people and one school, grades K-8, with fewer than 160 students. A state park, wetlands and streams, abandoned feldspar quarries, historic architecture, and forests are within its borders. The rural environment has attracted naturalists, photographers, historians, poets and other valuable resource people to the community, and there is a depth of knowledge held by long-term residents and the large elderly population. Resources abound, but how do teachers access these resources and integrate them with ongoing academic studies?

A seed took hold with one teacher’s request to the local Pownal School Foundation to support a community resource directory. Recognizing the difficulty of funding school programs with taxes alone, this local foundation raises money for specific programs proposed by teachers and supported by the administration and school board. The Foundation’s guidelines favor innovative experiential education that impacts all grade levels, uses resources wisely, encourages student involvement, and improves community collaboration with the school. With hearty discussion all started to envision a demonstration project that would identify local resources and integrate the school and community as a learning center. Classes would venture into the community and actively study a range of local natural and cultural history topics applying academic skills and generate a directory as a result. A member of the Foundation volunteered to oversee the project, facilitate teacher workshops, and work with the school’s volunteer coordinator to orchestrate details.

Multifaceted objectives emerged from workshops with teachers: Students were to help define the areas of study and pursue areas of interest through self-directed inquiry projects. Each area of study was to contribute in some way to the community either through public service or research. Teachers would act as facilitators and co-learners as they explored new areas. Students were to develop an awareness and appreciation for their own community’s cultural and natural history through active hands-on field experiences. And resource people on both the state and community levels would share their knowledge and enthusiasm in their area of expertise with students.

The Maine Community Foundation awarded a $2,500 grant to the Pownal Foundation to pay stipends for guest instructors, supplementary curriculum materials, admission fees, bus drivers, substitute teachers, and other direct expenses. The teachers and students renamed the community resources project Pownal Presents! and finalized each grade’s area of inquiry. All topics supplemented the ongoing units of study for each particular grade. The exciting culminating event was a school-wide open house (replacing the science fair that year) in which...
the students shared information and resources with the community. The all-curriculum fair, Pownal Presents! celebrated the natural and cultural history of this small rural town.

The Maine Historical Society, Maine Audubon Society, Greater Portland Landmarks, and University of Maine helped identify state-wide resource people. They helped compile field experiences, research logistics and identify leaders and volunteers. Supplementary curriculum materials were gathered for each unit. Resource directory notebooks that could be expanded and revised were compiled for each class. The project coordinator conducted workshops on working with children outdoors and inquiry-based learning. But the project’s greatest strength became clear as the classes started involving local community members.

Community newspapers, school newsletters and notes to parents invited people to share resources and volunteer time to work with students. Townspeople were asked if they knew others who might be interested. As publicity continued, the list of participants grew. Wildflower enthusiasts invited children to walk through their woodlands and meadows. People who had attended Pownal’s one-room schoolhouses agreed to be “interviewed” by first and second graders. Those with mineral collections offered to bring them to the school and help lead geology field trips. Post-and-beam builders volunteered to do talks in some of Pownal’s barns.

For a month in the spring of 1995, the walls of the school dissolved. The following profile shows only a few examples of what each class did as a part of its unit with the help of local and statewide resource people.

**Kindergarten: Wildflowers**
- The Kindergarten class took wildflower walks in the community with the director of the New England Wildflower Society and local naturalists.
- For the open house students wore flower costumes with headresses and each adopted wildflower names.
- Community members’ collections of wildflower books and prints were on display along with student drawings of wildflowers.

**Grades One and Two: One-Room Schools**
- Multi-age classes visited Washburn-Norlands Living History Center, participating in a day of farm life from the late 1800s.
- Young students interviewed elders in the town about the games and lessons they remembered from Pownal’s one-room schoolhouses. One student recalled proudly: “My grandmother went to school in Pownal. She rode in a sleigh to school in the winter and had to walk the rest of the time.”
- Parent volunteers and students reconstructed a one-room schoolhouse in the hallway of the school and conducted “lessons” during the Open House. Visitors listened to recordings of the elders who had attended Pownal’s one-room schools. Recordings were later donated to the Historical Society.

**Third Grade: Pownal’s Birds**
- Mist-netting birds on the school grounds with an ornithologist from Bowdoin College was a highlight of the third grade study.
- Local naturalists led bird walks and showed slides of the region’s common birds.
- Students constructed birdhouses and established a bluebird trail on the school grounds. A year later a student excitedly announced: “A bluebird nested in the birdhouse we made.”
- Students quizzed their parents and visitors during the Open House and introduced lessons with slides and birdsong recordings. Sculpted birds hung from the ceiling and paintings of imaginary birds adorned the walls.

**Fourth Grade: Wetlands**
- The fourth grade canoed on Pownal’s Runaround Pond exploring beaver lodges and muskrat mounds.
- Students did a transect study of a local bog with the director of the Chenowenki Foundation. One student seemed to speak for the group when she exclaimed: “I loved going to the bog in Pownal … I never knew there was a bog in Pownal!”
- One group of students mapped the region’s watershed. Others mapped the various brooks, streams, and bogs of Pownal.
- Each student did a report and art project on a plant or animal from the wetlands.
- For the Open House they created posters on why wetlands are important and displayed reports and artwork of wetland wildlife.

**Fifth Grade: Geology and Quarries**
- The fifth grade visited feldspar mines with community members who belong to the Maine Mineral Society.
- They toured granite quarries with Frank Knight who had worked summers cutting granite while attending college 50 years before, and then visited the unique Cribstone Bridge made with Pownal’s granite between Orr’s and Bailey Islands. Later they recalled: “Going to that bridge was cool. They should have a sign that says that the granite was from Pownal.”
- Students collected photographs of buildings throughout the region made from Pownal’s granite.
- Students mapped the historic quarries and mines of Pownal and the maps were added to the resource files.
- A grandparent gave a granite-splitting demonstration at the Open House where student and community collections of minerals were on display.

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which aims to make students better citizens. As a teaching method, it has grown exponentially in the past decade. Since the Corporation for National and Community Service was founded in 1993, $43 million in federal funding has been awarded to school districts across the nation to incorporate service-learning into curricula.

The term “service-learning” was coined in 1969. Betsey McGee, director of the National Service-Learning Partnership at the Academy for Educational Development in New York City, calls service-learning “a pedagogy of choice” for both place-based learning and community schools. “By definition, service-learning is place-based since most service is done in the place students live,” she said.

The National Service-Learning Partnership, founded in 2001, currently has more than 2000 members. The partnership primarily supports leaders and advocates and aims to make service-learning a core part of every child’s education. The establishment of this organization is one more indication that service-learning is here to stay.

Expanding Environmental Education

In its eighth year, the State Education and Environment Roundtable (SEER) is a coalition of 16 state education agencies that has developed a model to improve student achievement called Environment as an Integrating Context (EIC).

The EIC model goes beyond what many people think of as traditional environmental education. EIC’s approach to learning is not designed only to incorporate environmental issues into the curriculum; rather, it is the impetus with which they engage students to connect learning to their local environment.

SEER Director Gerald Lieberman defines environment as encompassing both the “natural and community surroundings.”

SEER works with state education agencies to implement the EIC model in schools. This year, SEER has a total of 82 EIC schools in 12 states: California, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Maryland, Minnesota, Massachusetts, New Jersey, South Carolina, Texas and Washington.

Principles of Place-Based Education

Place-based education, as practiced by more than 700 schools associated with the Rural School and Community Trust, embraces the following six principles:

- The school and community actively collaborate to make the local place a good one in which to learn, work, and live.
- Students do sustained academic work that draws upon and contributes to the place in which they live. They practice new skills and responsibilities, serving as scholars, workers, and citizens in their community.
- Schools mirror the democratic values they seek to instill, arranging their resources so that every child is known well and every child’s participation, regardless of ability, is needed and wanted.
- Decision-making about the education of the community’s children is shared, informed by expertise both in and outside the school.
- All participants, including teachers, students, and community members, expect excellent effort from each other and review their joint progress regularly and thoughtfully. Multiple measures and public input enlarge assessments of student performance.
- The school and community support students, their teachers, and their adult mentors in these new roles.
did not stop there. Students also assisted in designing, funding and constructing a wetland on school property to reduce problems with storm water runoff in the community. They created and distributed a publication on household pollutants; started a school recycling program; and provided data for a county water-quality study. The students provided research and offered suggestions that resulted in a 50 percent reduction in food waste at their school as well as significant reductions in other district schools. One of the most recent STREAMS projects was the Sanding Stone Creek Water Assessment. This past April, the Huntington students earned a Presidential Environment Youth Award for their achievements. The STREAMS program and Environmental Club demonstrate what K–12 students can do given the opportunity—not bad for a program that started during study hall.

Community Schools

Establishing schools that bridge a student’s academic environment and a community’s social environment to serve as a dual center for learning and community enrichment is the goal of the Coalition for Community Schools in Washington, DC. The Coalition is an alliance of more than 170 education, youth development, family support, health and human services, and community development organizations including the Rural Trust, that promote full-service community schools where educators and communities collaborate to support student learning. Community schools typically combine the assets of a community and local school to provide better learning opportunities for families as well as students. Many community schools are open after normal school hours to provide additional services to students and families. Most community schools integrate community-oriented service-learning into the academic curriculum to enhance students’ education.

“We want build a united movement for community schools,” said Martin Blank, director the Coalition for Community Schools. “There are a variety of models of what a community school is, continued on page 8

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Periodicals

- “Place-Based Education: Learning to Be Where We Are” by Gregory Smith appeared in the April 2002 issue of Phi Delta Kappan.
- “Community Schools” by Ira Harkavy and Martin Blank appeared in the April 17, 2002 issue of Education Week.
- Community Service Journal is published three times a year in support of teaching practices that build community. It showcases innovative educational strategies, practices, and curriculum that involve teachers and students in meaningful work within their communities. More information about the journal is available at http://www.vermontcommunityworks.org/cwpublications/journal/cwjournal.html.

Books, Reports and Presentations

- Place Value: An Educator’s Guide to Good Literature on Rural Lifeways, Environments, and Purposes of Education by Toni Haas and Paul Nachtigal can be purchased for $12.00 from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. Order information is available at http://www.ael.org/eric/order.htm.
- 100 Days of Learning in Place: How a Small School Utilized ‘Place-Based’ Learning to Master State Academic Standards by James Lewicki is available for $5.00 from the Rural School and Community Trust and can be ordered by filling out an order form at http://www.ruraledu.org/pub_order.html.
- Learning In Deed: The Power of Service-Learning for American Schools is a report that was released in January 2002 by the National Commission on Service Learning. It is available on the Web at http://www.service-learningpartnership.org/.
- Inside Full-Service Community Schools by Sue Maguire and Joy G. Dryfoos is available at bookstores nationwide.
- “Contextual Teaching and Learning Strategies in High Schools: Developing a Vision for Support and Evaluation” was presented by Elliott Merdrich, Sarah Calerden, and Gary Hoachlander of MPR Associates at the Roundtable on Instructional Strategies and Structures for Improved Learning in High Schools in Washington, DC in July. Call (202) 973-0244 to obtain information on how to obtain a copy.

Organization Web Sites

- Corporation for National and Community Service: http://www.nationalservice.org
- Rural School and Community Trust: http://www.ruraledu.org/index.cfm
- The Orion Society: http://www.orionsociety.org
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but there are common underlying core principles. We want to promote community schools on a large scale and weave together the best aspects of different models.”

The Coalition of Community Schools emphasizes the development of programs and services in five areas: quality education, youth development, family support, family and community engagement, and community development. Service-learning is a key element at the intersection between quality education, youth development and community development.

One such school is the O’Farrell Community School for Advanced Academic Studies in San Diego, California, a charter school established in 1990. The school serves 1,500 sixth to eighth grade middle school students and features additional services beyond the traditional classroom setting that serve the community on-site. The school is open from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., much longer than the traditional school day to accommodate a variety of services for students and parents.

A unique aspect of the O’Farrell Community School is the social service wing on campus called Family Support Services, a collaborative effort between the County of San Diego, Heath and Human Services Agency, O’Farrell Community School and SAY San Diego. Twenty-five community partners come to the school to offer a wide range of services to families. Services include tutoring, mentorship programs, mental health counseling, parenting classes, job preparation classes and cooking classes to name a few. Family Support Services also provides 12-week programs for students focusing on self-awareness, self-esteem and personal planning.

“We focus on the whole child—their academic, emotional and social needs,” said Mary Skrabucha, family support services coordinator. “We realize that if we tell families to go somewhere else for services, they aren’t likely to do it. This way, kids and parents get everything they need emotionally and socially from the school.”

For students, O’Farrell Community School has as an active service-learning program within the community school. Students are required to complete 12 hours of community service per year outside of the regular school day. Students perform three different types of service (community service, school service and home services) and are expected to discuss their service-learning experiences and connect them to their role as citizens within their community.

Academically-Based Community Service Through University-School Partnerships

College-level academics and the effort to establish community schools have formed a unique marriage with the Center for Community Partnership (CCP), housed at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. The CCP incorporates the basics of service-learning (which enables students to study their community surroundings to supplement their academic curriculum) and the community school philosophy, but goes one step further to engage students as active problem-solvers within their communities as part of their academic work. CCP calls its approach “academically-based community service.” Dr. Ira Harkavy, director of CCP, and Cory Bowman help coordinate the university’s resources that support the overall effort and serve as liaisons to the Philadelphia school district.

While CCP’s program embraces service-learning and community schools models, “academically based community service is more than an aggregate of services or participating in a community service project,” said Bowman, codirector of the center. “We believe in linking active problem-solving to the core academic curriculum.”

Academically-based community service at the CCP is the key ingredient to involving the university’s students with local schools in West Philadelphia. More than 130 courses focused on academically based community service are available to University of Pennsylvania students (about 40 courses in a given academic year). Historically, most classes have been in the humanities and social sciences, but today, other disciplines such as the health professions schools and the sciences are joining the effort to combine academic work with community service.

Of the several CCP school and community initiatives, one of the most noteworthy is the Urban Nutrition Initiative (UNI), formerly called the Turner Nutrition Awareness Project. The project emerged from a partnership between Turner Middle School and an undergraduate anthropology seminar in 1990. Initially, college students began collecting dietary data on middle school children. Rather than the middle school children serving as “guinea pigs” in the project, they actively participated with the college students in research and data collection.
By 1994, students were beginning to realize that inner-city school-age children were not getting all the recommended dietary requirements due to poor access to fresh fruits and vegetables (caused in part by the lack of full-service grocery stores in inner city Philadelphia). As a result, students took action to improve nutrition in West Philadelphia. Today there are several student-run operations at three area schools to promote good nutrition in the community. These include an after school fruit and vegetable stand; a farmers’ market open on the weekends; school gardens; a community fitness program free to parents and community members; and an urban agriculture and micro-business development at the high school.

UNI connects University of Pennsylvania undergraduate courses with courses in an elementary, middle, and high school in West Philadelphia, creating a pre-K through 16+ curriculum focused on improving community health. The project is focused on researching and developing integrated approaches that will create substantial and broad community participation. Accordingly, changing the curriculum is at the core of UNI’s school-based school and community improvement approach. UNI has developed and implemented a curriculum that teaches core subjects (math, social studies, language arts).

“Many service-learning and community school initiatives are supplemental to the academic curriculum, often only an after school activity,” said Bowman. “These need to be linked to the core of the school day in order to have staying power.”

Bowman believes that one of the ways service-learning and community schools can succeed is to integrate the resources of local schools with local higher education institutions. In the past, many service-learning initiatives have been short-term projects rather than having a permanent place in the curriculum. Bowman said this is because “local schools don’t have institutional resources to support long-term service-learning.”

Bowman thinks program partnerships like the one between the University of Pennsylvania and local school districts may be the answer for instituting academically based community service on a larger scale. “Colleges and universities should be and can be an institutional anchor for service-learning and community schools projects,” said Bowman.

Today, CCP is a leader in the effort to expand university-school collaborations. Partnering with the National Center for Community Education, CCP has developed a training and technical assistance program on the higher education-assisted community school model with support from the Charles Mott Foundation. Three-day workshops are held each spring to promote higher education-community school partnerships. This past spring, 70 representatives from higher education institutions, schools and community groups attended.

**Funding Initiatives Using the Community as Context**

No matter which education reform model is used, programs that link communities and schools inevitably need funding. In order to support reform models like environmental education, service-learning and place-based learning, the Funder’s Forum on Environment and Education, nicknamed F2E2, has been educating grant-giving corporations and foundations since 1997 about place-based education and the funding opportunities that exist within the intersection of the environment and education.

Typically funders have priority areas for grantmaking such as “education,” “community service,” or “environment.” F2E2 aims to show funders the value of programs that combine traditional program areas. Today, there are more than 200 funders involved in the F2E2 network.

F2E2 serves as a clearinghouse of information for funders to think about what unique funding opportunities are available that best serve schools and communities. The network publishes a newsletter, hosts and listserv and sponsors briefings and conference sessions at the regional and national level. F2E2 challenges funders to “think outside the box” for programs that can make a real difference.

Jack Chin, founding director of F2E2, believes that funders are “putting resources out there, but [it] is not being done is such a way that it aggregates and integrates the assets that link school and community, which could add up to something more meaningful and have a greater impact.”

**Different Approaches, Common Benefits**

Although there are several approaches to use a community as context for enhancing student learning, most education reform models have a common desire for students to view learning as relevant to the world around them, to connect with their community and in the process, become concerned and contributing citizens of that community. Using community as the context for educational experiences allows students to reach out to the larger world and place real value in their education as they realize that they too, can make a difference in society. And these programs are getting results. Studies cite better student achievement, revitalized teaching, enhanced youth development, increased citizenship and improved quality of life as reasons to support and implement community-connected education programs. Clearly, it’s working.

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**Internet Addresses for Organizations Mentioned in this Article:**

- Center for Community Partnership
  [http://www.upenn.edu/ccp/](http://www.upenn.edu/ccp/)
- Coalition for Community Schools
  [http://www.communityschools.org/](http://www.communityschools.org/)
- Forum on Environment and Education
  [http://www.f2e2.org/](http://www.f2e2.org/)
- National Service-Learning Partnership
- State Education and Environment Roundtable
Community Collaboration for Place-Based Studies
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Sixth Grade: Architectural History and Barns

- After an overview of the town’s architectural history, the sixth grade measured and photographed some of Pownal’s largest barns. These documents were then donated to the Pownal Historical Society.
- Students were introduced to “seeing through the lens” by a local photographer who accompanied them to the barns. “A lot of the barns are falling down, but Pownal still has some of the biggest barns around here,” one student remarked.
- Different groups studied farm implements and tools.
- Timber framers gave post-and-beam cutting and construction demonstrations.
- The Open House featured models of barns and cupolas the students had made with the agricultural tools that were on display.

Seventh Grade: Natural History Interpretation of Bradbury Mountain

- The seventh graders arranged a number of tours of Bradbury Mountain State Park with local and state resource people. They focused on geology, forestry, edible wild plants, mammals, and hawk migration.
- Students worked in small groups and prepared in-depth papers that they donated to the park’s ranger to use in interpretive brochures.
- They completed volunteer work in the park under the supervision of the director.

Eighth Grade: Trails

- The class participated in an orienteering class offered by L.L. Bean’s Discovery Center.
- Students designed and cut a trail from the school to the State Park, securing permission from landowners. The results would be ongoing. In the words of one student: “I like having the new trail from the school to Bradbury Mountain. We can ski on it this winter.”
- Students volunteered for trail maintenance in the State Park.

The final goal of Pownal Presents! continued to be the development of a community resource directory. This was accomplished with great success. But the project became so much more, and parts were incorporated into the curriculum that remain today. Some directories continue to be revised and updated by teachers and are being used to contact resource people. Teams of teachers continue to create new thematic multidisciplinary approaches to learning. Field experiences have been incorporated into yearly units. For example, all fourth graders canoe the local beaver pond as a part of a wetlands study. Land use studies have been added to the upper school curriculum. Service learning is now a component of all students’ education while at Pownal schools. And, this year, a now-retired teacher is involving students and community in an ambitious archeology study at Bradbury Mountain State Park.

Some community members wanted to see Pownal Presents! become an ongoing school program. Students even started to say: “Next year, maybe we could study forestry. My father knows a lot about trees and he could help us.” But this project was large in scale, requiring eight months in preparation and countless hours and energy from volunteers and teachers. An ongoing program would require a paid coordinator and additional paid planning time for teachers, always difficult with a limited budget. However, in an ideal educational system, place-based education would serve as a foundation of support for an entire curriculum.

There was magic in these units of Pownal Presents! From eighth graders’ cutting new trails then exploring trail metaphors in their creative writing, to first graders interviewing elders on their memories of one-room schoolhouses, this was a wonderful series of educational experiences that involved every student in the school. And there was pride in the air during the school Open House as students presented slide shows, skits, and artwork, then quizzed their parents and other members of the community on local subjects and shared their new areas of expertise with other grades. The rewards of this project were immeasurable. This was a tangible opportunity for local people to contribute insights and expertise. It engaged people that had never been involved with the school before, strengthening the relationship between the community and schools and inspiring more active participation in both. Students realized that their academic and experiential knowledge had value for the community. The recognition that one has something to contribute, at any age, reveals the best of who they are and develops the awareness that they can make a difference in the world.

June LaCombe has lived in Pownal for over twenty years, is a former school board member, and founding director and former president of The Pownal Foundation. She served as the coordinator of Pownal Presents! as a volunteer. She formerly served as director of education for The Maine Audubon Society and chaired a cultural and natural history collaborative project that developed living history programs at a salt-water farm. June is currently an environmental studies student at Antioch New England exploring sculptural arts and environmental education.
Published by the Rural School and Community Trust

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Publications of Note
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selective introduction to understanding our urban youth and the Annotated Bibliography compiles publications on youth issues including careers, crime, culture, education, family relations, health, risk and protection, teen pregnancy, and technology. The complete publication is available online at http://srdc.msstate.edu/publications/228_rural_urban.pdf. To order a paper copy, send a request to Debbie Rossell at drossell@srdc.msstate.edu with the title and number of the publication and your name and mailing address.

One Kid at a Time: Big Lessons from A Small School

By Eliot Levine
Teachers College Press, November 2001

Through the lens of a remarkable urban high school, One Kid at a Time weaves compelling stories and a clear narrative into new possibilities for American education. All students at the Met School in Providence, Rhode Island, have a personalized curriculum and complete real-world internships based on their interests. Students stay with the same teacher for four years, and parents help to plan and assess their child’s learning. There are no classes, tests, or grades, but high achievement is expected of all students—regardless of their background. Every student in the Met’s first two graduating classes has been accepted to college, even though most will be the first in their family ever to attend. Based on the Met’s first four years, this book offers powerful ideas and sensible strategies for improving schools. Available directly from Teachers College Press, 1234 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10027; Telephone (800) 575-6566; Web site: http://www.tcpress.com. The cost is $18.95 for paperback (ISBN: 0-8077-4153-1) and $38.00 for cloth (ISBN: 0-8077-4154-X) plus $4.95 for shipping.

Rosenwald Schools Identified As One of America’s 11 “Most Endangered” Historic Sites

The Rosenwald Schools, schoolhouses founded to improve education for African Americans in the rural areas of the South and Southwest from 1913 to 1932, are among the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s 11 “most endangered” historic sites for 2002. Schools like the four-room Sweet Home Vocational and Agricultural High School in Sweet Home, Texas are in danger of disappearing for good, according to the preservation group.

The Rosenwald Schools were started when philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, CEO of Sears, became interested in Booker T. Washington’s mission to improve education for rural African Americans. More than 500 schoolhouses that ranged in size from one room to several rooms were built. These buildings held a special place in the community because schools and churches were the only places where blacks could meet in the rural South before desegregation. Individual school systems originally owned the schools, but after desegregation, schools were often closed or abandoned. Most of the remaining schools are 75 to 85 years old and have insufficient funds for maintenance.


Lights On Afterschool! Rally

On October 10, 2002, more than 5,000 sites across the country will rally to demonstrate the ways afterschool programs improve student performance, support working families and keep communities safe. To register as a Lights On Afterschool event site, find an event in your area, learn about how you can participate or to request a Lights On Afterschool action kit, please call (877) 759-9733, toll free.

Starting a Volunteer Project in Your School

Idealist.org recently launched a new resource center for any teacher who wants to start a school volunteering or service-learning program. The site provides nuts-and-bolts policies and procedures, useful definitions and articles, examples of schools that have successfully integrated community service or service learning into their curricula, classroom activities that can accompany student volunteering, online volunteer matching organizations, and information about how to find a volunteer center in your community. Visit the site at http://www.idealist.org/kat/volunteercenter.html.
Publications of Note

**High Stakes: Children, Testing, and Failure in American Schools (A Year in the Life of One Rural School)**

by Dale Johnson and Bonnie Johnson
Rowman & Littlefield, August 2002

The authors of *High Stakes* were college professors who left academe to work in a rural Louisiana school. In this richly informative text, the authors present the voices of students and teachers about educational reform issues such as high-stakes testing, school accountability and inequities in public school funding that can impede learning in rural areas with widespread child poverty. This book (ISBN: 0-7425-1788-8) can be ordered directly from the publisher for the cost of $69.00 via an online ordering system at [http://www.rowmanlittlefield.com/orderinfo/USorders.shtml](http://www.rowmanlittlefield.com/orderinfo/USorders.shtml) or at bookstores nationwide.

**A Handbook for State Policy Leaders-Community Schools: Improving Student Learning/ Strengthening Schools, Families and Communities**

Coalition for Community Schools, June 2002

The Coalition for Community Schools has released its new *Handbook for State Policy Leaders*. The handbook is designed to help state leaders to form vital connections between schools and communities to improve student learning. It is helpful to the work of policy leaders in cities, counties, local school districts, and philanthropy. An executive summary of the report is can be obtained free of charge by sending an e-mail message to ccs@iel.org or by calling (202) 822-9045. The handbook is available online at [http://www.communityschools.org/handbook.pdf](http://www.communityschools.org/handbook.pdf).

**Rural-Urban Connections**

Southern Rural Development Center,
April 2002

*Rural-Urban Connections* (publication # 228 in the Southern Rural Development Series) is a combination of three publications in one: *Key Issues Facing Rural Youth* by Daniel F. Perkins, *Urban Youth* by Anthony J. LaGreca and Annotated Bibliography: Youth Issues compiled by Ronald L. Mullis. *Key Issues Facing Rural Youth* examines the challenges and prospects of youth living in rural areas and provides a framework for youth to improve the rural communities in which they live. *Urban Youth* presents a

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