

The Practice of Service Learning in Local School-Community Contexts

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In this article, the authors set out to examine the ways in which service learning is practiced, perceived, and sustained in school settings. Drawing on extensive qualitative case studies, the authors highlight three cases of schools at varying levels of integration of service into their curriculum. Their history of offering service learning is summarized. Participant perceptions regarding the role of service learning in student learning and concerns regarding the relationship between service learning and student academic achievement are explored. The authors conclude that service learning is practiced amidst a series of complex, and often times conflicting, assumptions regarding the aims of education and the proper formats through which student achievement should be assessed.

Keywords: *service learning; school-community relations; social capital*

The principal of “Garfield” Community School recalls a recent conversation he had with one of his teachers:

One of [my] teachers [said], “Well, this new curriculum coming down is going to require me to teach [specific content].”

And I said, “That’s all well and good, but you’ve got a principal, you’ve got a school board, and you have a superintendent who is going to back you if you

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spend time bringing kids out into the community . . . getting them to learn from their community.”

I don't believe that, if you [integrate service learning], it has to be divorced from standards and a mandated curriculum.

This principal holds certain convictions about the importance of an educational practice known as “service learning.” Backed by his school board and superintendent, he is in a position to support service learning as an integral component of his school's curriculum. Beginning in 1992 Garfield School commenced a series of highly successful service learning projects that included a student effort to survey the community, which, in turn, led to the creation of the *Garfield Gazette*, a student-produced community newspaper for their town. The school has gone on to build a strong history of collaboration on projects that link the school to the community: a schoolwide “Service Day,” garden projects, a nature trail, student to student mentoring program, and class projects linked to Garfield's natural environs and historical sites. A belief in the sense that the Garfield School is a “community” is spread through these service-learning projects. Considering students as “active contributing members of his or her community,” his school's culture has been carefully cultivated over a series of years by him in collaboration with teachers, students, school staff, and community members.

The above exchange between a principal and one of his teachers may strike the reader as out of sync with current trends within American public education. With the institution of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, public schools, and the principals who lead them, are feeling increased pressure to prepare students for high-stakes tests in an effort to meet rigorous academic standards. The exchange cited above appears to run counter to these trends. It is odd, after all, to hear a principal asking his teachers to make room in the curriculum for pedagogical practices that link students to the community, particularly if it means that specific academic content is to be sacrificed. Yet, even within this age of heightened accountability structures and high-stakes testing, schools are making room for community-based curricular activities such as service learning.

This article offers some suggestions as to why some schools, at least, have attempted to sustain and spread service-learning practices across the curriculum. As we shall see, the practice of service learning within the schools that we studied is carried out within the context of assumptions and discussions about the larger aims of education, and the relationship between student academic achievement and assessment.

Service Learning: Definition, Principles, and Practices

Service learning involves the integration of community service into the academic curriculum. The Community Trust Act of 1993 authorizing the allocation of federal money to support service-learning practices in American schools defined *service learning* as

a method whereby students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of the community; that is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institutions for higher learning, or community service program and the community; helps foster civic responsibility; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students, or the education components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled; and provides structured time for students or participants to reflect on the service-learning. (Corporation for National Service, 1993, p. 5)

Although other definitions of *service learning* exist (Jacoby, 1996; Wade, 1997), they all generally speak to an explicit link between service and learning.

Service-learning practitioners are quick to note the distinction between community service and service learning (Furco, 2002). Some of the essential characteristics that distinguish service learning from community service include the existence of a formal reflection component and a clear sense of reciprocity existing between service providers and those served (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989) within a service-learning experience.

The rise of the service-learning movement coincided with the groundbreaking work of John Kretzmann and John McKnight (1993), who helped to bring focus to community assets, through which communities are understood in terms of their strengths instead of their weaknesses. By appreciating the contributions that communities can contribute to the resolution of some of their own pressing social problems, communities and the individuals who comprise them are empowered to act on their own behalf. In the context of service learning within schools, a community assets approach implies an appreciation of the important role that communities play in the education of students that encompass not only financial assets (the school budget) but the wealth of knowledge and experiences of community members.

Thus, a crucial feature of any service-learning experience is a clearly articulate community partner. A partnering entity can be construed along two dimensions: institutional and individual. At the institutional level, community

partners are local institutions and organizations such as historical societies, town governments, libraries, state agencies, and the school itself. At the individual level, community partners are the people who comprise these groups: community professionals, senior citizens, younger students, and so on. As one can imagine, the ability to offer quality service-learning experiences are predicated, at least in part, on the availability of groups and individuals to partner with.

A second feature of any service-learning experience is the existence of a service to be rendered. This service is shaped by the capacities of the students themselves. Age-appropriate tasks need to be determined. Student skill level needs to be assessed and so on. The kind of services to be rendered are also predicated on variables such as time availability and transportation.

A third feature is the existence of learning objectives that accompany the service-learning experiences. Higher quality service-learning experiences have explicitly stated learning objectives for students and sometimes even community partners. These objectives can be tied to stated academic standards, as was the case in many instances in the study to be highlighted here.

A fourth feature of service learning is the existence of a reflective component used to facilitate the learning objectives. In the context of service-learning experiences, reflection can take many forms: written, oral, visual, even movement, in an effort to appeal to the multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983) of learners. Research has shown that when done well, reflection can help learners place their actions within the context of personal development and the cultivation of civic and social responsibility (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Practitioners also assert that formal, structured reflection can serve to connect and synthesize service experiences with specific areas of knowledge, providing essential evidence that a student is learning from his or her experiences. They believe that a well-executed reflection component is essential to the assessment process, ensuring that the academic value of the practice is high (Wade, 1997).

The fifth feature of a service-learning experience is duration. Quality service-learning experiences can range from being very brief to extending during long periods of time. The time dimension of a service-learning experience is often predicated on the services being rendered, the availability of the community partners and students, and the kind of learning objectives tied to the experience.

A sixth feature of service learning is the grade level of participating students. We have come across service-learning experiences that engage students within specific grades as well as extend across grades, in some cases even involving all of the students in the school.

Table 1
Percentage of Public Schools That Have Students Participating
in Community Service and Service Learning

	Weighted <i>n</i>	% With Community Service		% With Service Learning	
		%	<i>SE</i>	%	<i>SE</i>
All public schools	79,750	64	2.6	32	2.0
Elementary	49,350	55	4.0	25	2.9
Middle	14,398	77	2.2	38	2.6
High	16,002	83	1.3	46	1.9

Source: U.S. Department of Education (1999).

Research on National Trends in School Adaptation of Service Learning and the Impact of Service Learning on Student Learning and School Reform

Service learning is widely practiced in schools across the United States (see Table 1). A 1999 study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics found that “thirty-two percent of all public schools [in the United States] organized service-learning as part of their curriculum, including almost half of all high schools” (Skinner & Chapman, 1999).

These numbers suggest a substantive increase in the practice of service learning nationally, as a 1984 study found only 9% of all high schools offering service learning (Rutter & Newmann, 1989).

One cause of this growth is likely to be the availability of funds available to support service learning in schools from the federal government via the Corporation for National and Community Service and a host of private philanthropic foundations (Koliba, 1999). However, the availability of these funds has ebbed and flowed during the years. Schools have institutionalized service learning even after external funds have dried up. Why then, do schools continue to offer service learning?

The study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics asked schools this very question. It is clear from these findings that schools adopt service learning because they understand it as a way to help students become more active members of the community, to increase their knowledge and

understanding of the community, to meet real community needs, and to encourage student altruism or care for others (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). From these findings, schools do not undertake service learning because they feel that it leads to enhanced academic performance. This perception has yet to be refuted by any research, which to date has failed to identify a direct link between service learning and higher tests scores (Billig, 2002).

Research has been able to affirm the role that service learning can play in fostering a sense of civic and social responsibility in young people (Hedin & Conrad, 1990; Eyler & Giles, 1999). Advocates for service learning have suggested that service learning is an anecdote to what is seen as the continued decline in citizen engagement within the United States (Barber, 1992 and Battistoni, 1997, to name two of the most prominent proponents of this notion). Fueled by Robert Putnam's (2000) "Bowling Alone" hypothesis, educational leaders are looking to service learning as an important facet of a civics curriculum. There is a growing body of research to suggest that service learning increases civic and social responsibility because it aids in the development of positive forms of social capital (Campbell, 2000; Giles & Eyler, 1998; Hope, 1997; Koliba, 2000, 2003; Morgan, 2004; Musial, 1999; Putnam, 2001; Smyth, 2000; Toole, 2001, 2002) by supporting the development of social networks that can aid a student in establishing academic and social success.

Writing about the importance of shared leadership and trust between teachers, students and community members in the execution of service learning, James Toole (2002) observes,

At the very core of service-learning are the robust notions of youth, teacher, and community collaboration. Quality service-learning therefore asks people to redefine and strengthen a series of relationships at the center of education: student to student, teacher to teacher, student to teacher, student to their own learning, and school to community. (p. 57)

Toole asserts that service learning can serve as an integral component in the formation of trusting relationships.

Service learning as a school reform effort has been suggested as well (Bhaerman et al., 1995; Briscoe & Silcox, 1991; Gulati-Partee et al., 1996), amid claims that service learning is "the sleeping giant of school reform" (Nathan & Kielsmeier, 1991, p. 738). A link between service learning and the development of learning communities is being established through several recent research studies (Toole, 2001), including the research highlighted in this manuscript.

Despite the study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics in 1999, the reasons why schools pursue practices such as service learning still deserve further exploration. We found that the reasons why service learning gets adopted are entwined within complex systems of actors who act and interact within a decidedly local level. The research study highlighted here seeks to provide a deeper, qualitative look into how schools like, and unlike, Garfield employed service learning.

Case Study Research Undertaken

This article draws heavily on three of seven case studies conducted in rural schools across one New England state (see Table 2). Five of the seven (two of which highlighted here) have been consistently offering service-learning classes, projects, and programs for at least 7 years. The seven schools were identified through a selection process that included suggestions from the statewide service-learning coordinator and the head of a rural school network affiliated at the time with the Annenberg Rural Trust.

The case study design employed in this research project was geared toward obtaining a comprehensive view of service learning at each school, with special attention given to how people understood the relationship between school culture, school-community relations and service learning, and how factors such as leadership and policy affected the sustainability of service-learning practices.

The case studies represented herein adhere to the basic characteristics of case studies as laid out by Gerald Handel (1991). Our approach to qualitative research is decidedly phenomenological in nature—relying on constructing intersubjective accounts of common events and activities (Crossley, 1996). “Since the case study seeks to capture people as they experience their natural, everyday circumstances, it can offer a researcher empirical and theoretical gains in understanding larger social complexes of actors, actions, and motives” (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991, p. 8).

During the course of the 1999-2000 academic year, a trained researcher was assigned to each school and spent at least 14 full days on site conducting semistructured interviews with a large majority of the teachers, support staff, school administrators, and a cross-section of parents, students, school board members, and community members who have had some exposure and opinions about the school’s service-learning activities. Study participants were asked about aspects of their school’s culture, the relationship between the school and the local community, and the perceived impact that service learning has had on them. All totaled, more than 280 people were interviewed

Table 2
Seven Schools Participating in Original Study

School (Pseudonym)	Grade Level	Year First Commenced Service Learning
Peterson Elementary	K-5	1992
Garfield Community School	K-8	1992
Burrell Middle and Elementary School	K-8	1993
Thurber Academy	9-12	1993
Cantwell School	PreK-12	1993
Haddon Elementary School	K-6	1998 (1978 to 1983)
Curtis Hollow Elementary School	K-6	1998

as a part of the study. Researchers observed classroom settings, service-learning projects, and community events and celebrations. Members of the research team worked collaboratively to ensure the validity of their findings by participating in common trainings on interview methods and monthly debriefings in which issues pertaining to methodological challenges were addressed.

The analysis process was informed by a ground theory approach, in which the researchers allowed for meaning and theoretical interpretation to emerge from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Detailed accounts of each school's history with service learning were constructed through the analysis of interviews and the examination of artifacts (schools records, newsletters, letters to the editors, etc.). Interview transcripts were coded into 7 basic categories and 48 different subcategories. Each school's case study was written by the researcher assigned to the site. All members of the research team participated in a case-study writing workshop in which a common structure for all cases was set out. In addition to these case studies, some codes were pulled for closer analysis for this manuscript.

Definitional Challenges to Identifying Service-Learning Practices

Discerning service-learning projects from other efforts posed a descriptive and analytical challenge for researchers in all of the case study schools. We identified service-learning programs, projects, and initiatives that embodied fine examples of effective practices in all seven schools. However, each school

community adopted its own vocabulary to describe its practices, requiring us to expand our inquiry to encompass a broader notion of community-oriented practices.

In some cases, little or no distinction was made between service learning and community service. In other schools, *curriculum of place* or *personalized learning* either supplanted and became identified with service learning. Not surprisingly, we found community service projects that lacked some or all of the critical elements of service learning identified in service-learning literature. Not all school-sponsored service was connected to a clearly identified curriculum. Reflection activities may or may not have been incorporated into the experience.¹

Thus, we suggest that service learning, as it existed within these seven schools at least, existed somewhere along a continuum or even a series of continuum: from *no* to *a great deal of formal reflection* and from *clearly defined community needs to be addressed* to *none*. We have not attempted to situate each and every community-oriented practice found within these schools along such a continuum, although it would likely be a useful exercise. Instead, we have, similar to the practitioners in the schools we studied, blurred the lines somewhat by labeling any practices *service learning* if at least some kind of community need could be discerned and a desire to link the activity to student learning was expressed.

Overview of the Implementation of Service Learning Within Three of the Case Study Schools

Three of the seven schools have been selected to be represented in some depth in this manuscript. The selection of these particular schools for representation here was based on two factors: the need for a representation of the length of time and the depth to which service has been integrated into the curriculum, and some variability in school size. Although two schools in the study either included or focused solely on high school education, for the purposes of comparison three schools that encompassed the elementary grades were selected, two of which also included a middle-school component. (See Table 3.)

A brief history of each school's engagement in service learning is provided next, followed by an inventory of existing service-learning practices.

History of Service Learning at Garfield

The town of Garfield sits at the crossroads of three states and several lifestyles. Recent demographic shifts in the town reflect the changing

Table 3
Demographic Descriptors of Selected Case Study Schools

	Geographic Location	Grade Levels	Student Body Size	Full-Time Teachers	Year Service Learning First Introduced	% Student Body Engaged in Service Learning	% Teachers Using Service Learning in Classroom
Garfield	Rural bedroom community	K-8	225	23	1992	100	43
Burrell	Town	K-8	1,200	132	1993	21	6
Haddon	Rural	K-6	71	7	1998 (1978 to 1983)	44	42

nature of rural life in towns across the state. The number of family farms has decreased from 40 just after World War II to 6 in the year 2000. Approximately 75% of the town's residents now work outside of the Garfield town line. Garfield has looked more similar to a series of hamlets than a unified town during most of its history. Similar to most rural New England towns, it was once dotted with one-room schoolhouses. In 1957, these one-room schools were consolidated, helping to form the basis of a more unified community than had previously existed. A combined primary and middle school, Grades K-8, Garfield Central School had an enrollment of 220 to 225 students annually.

Of the three schools highlighted in this manuscript, Garfield School offered the most extensive menu of service-learning experiences to their students. As the matrix following demonstrates, all grade levels were exposed to at least some service-learning experience (see Tables 4 and 5).

Of these service-learning activities, the anchor activity is the *Garfield Gazette*, which is produced by the seventh and eighth graders. Through the years, the paper's organizational structure has become more standardized, with student roles having been clearly delineated. Students apply for positions in the editorial, production, business, or Web site development departments. Three to five editions are produced each school year. Articles about Garfield residents and issues affecting the town are written by students and community members. Student artwork and poems appear throughout each edition. School news is shared. The work of putting the paper together is linked to the language arts and social studies curriculum.

In the past few years, a service-learning initiative was designed to involve the entire school in efforts to link students to the community and promote civic responsibility through community service. A "service day" is offered in late May just before Memorial Day weekend. These days have become a tradition at Garfield Community School, with the entire school spending half a day tending to the school gardens, cleaning up local rivers and forests, fixing up local historical buildings and clearing and recording gravestones for the town's cemetery commissioner. The event culminates in an all-school reflection in which the entire school, including the adults, write a written or visual reflection regarding the day's events.

History of Service Learning at Burrell

Burrell Middle and Elementary School sits high in the hills overlooking the river valley where Burrell Center lies. The school is in the geographic center of a cluster of small towns that it serves, which have a combined

Table 4
Garfield Timeline for Offering Service Learning

Time	Event
1980s	Common perceptions of a school micromanaged by its board. Period of high administrative turnover: During the 1980s, the three-person school board took a very active role in running the day-to-day operations of the school. During this period of school board controversy and unstable school leadership, the community's perception of the quality of the middle school grades, particularly, was that the school was not meeting the needs of the town's seventh and eighth graders.
Early 1990s	New principal leadership focuses on school-community relations. A series of community meetings convened: Things began to turn around for the school when the current principal with a background in counseling was hired. Student enthusiasm, external funding, and a champion bring service learning to the curriculum: Grant funding was secured to hire a part-time school-community coordinator. He created an internship program for the middle school students.
Middle 1990s	Community survey surfaces community needs: A community newspaper is born. Partnership Advisory Board formed: It had a mission lying in "breaking down the distinctions and barriers between school and community, so that learning and citizenship are valued as a lifelong occupation by our young people." The Partnership Advisory Board was comprised of school board members, community members, parents, school teachers, and students. Summer Institute developed through collaboration: Participants included a number of community members and would, in subsequent years, involve students. School recognized for its achievements in fostering service learning: The school received a string of awards for its work in connecting students to the community.
Late 1990s	Summer Institute offered for four successive summers (from 1995 to 1998). School receives more recognition: In 1998, the school was designated a National Demonstration Site for Service-Learning by the Corporation for National Service.
Early 2000s	Social education initiative instituted: Under the leadership of the principal, a social education initiative has been instituted throughout the school. All classroom teachers agreed to have their students come to an agreement on the values and social behaviors for all members of the classroom. The nature of the process used to create these shared values is up to each teacher. Common expectations for student behavior in the hallways and cafeteria have been set.

Table 5
Service-Learning Offerings at Garfield School (2000)

Service-Learning Project	Grade Levels Involved	Community Partners	Services Rendered	Student Learning Standards and Learning Outcomes
Service day	Entire school	Variety of community organizations	Variety of services	Social responsibility standard
Oral history with elders	1-3	Local nursing home	Elders interviewed, stories of their lives written and given back to them	Tied to a unit on local history
Community garden project	1-3	School and parents	Gardens maintained on school grounds	Math, science, and language arts standards
Discovery trail development	4-6	School and local community	Local trail maintained	Science
Big buddy mentoring	4-8	Students in K-3	Younger students mentored	Sometimes tied to physical education standards
<i>Garfield Gazette</i>	7-8	Garfield community	Community paper distributed to all residents	Math, science, language arts and social studies standards
Energy audits	7-8	Taxpayers	Energy audits used to save money	Science standards
Social education initiative	Entire school	School	Students take on leadership roles to foster positive school climate	Social responsibility and personal responsibility standards

population of approximately 7,500. Within this area, there were farms and quarries. Over the years, communities developed around the quarries that provided jobs. The towns joined together in 1966 and opened a central Burrell Middle and Elementary School. The large, 1960s two-story building faces the train manufacturing plant just across the street, where new train cars are manufactured for high-speed public transportation. Centralizing the elementary and middle schools created a more diverse school population with a wide range of needs and problems. The student population at Burrell's Middle and Elementary School hovers about 1,200 children annually. The administration and staff have been consistent during the past few years.

The range of service-learning experiences offered at Burrell is more narrowly construed. Not all grades are exposed to service learning, with the majority of service-learning experiences offered to the middle school students (see Tables 6 and 7).

The anchor for service learning at Burrell has been the problem solving through literature (PSTL) course, an optional English curriculum for students in each of the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Every topic of study in PSTL has an activity that is based on academic considerations as well as personal exploration and involvement. An eighth-grade student explained the structure of the PSTL curriculum,

In fifth grade, you learn some of the skills necessary for CSL; in sixth grade, you have mentors for your projects; in seventh grade, you can choose to have a mentor; but in eighth grade, you don't. I like working without a mentor because they sort of make the decisions for you, and this way you can do it by yourself.

The success of PSTL has led to a series of spin-off projects, including the institutionalization of a student mentoring program.

History of Service Learning at Haddon

The poor, rural farming community of Haddon with a population of about 500 people hugs the Canadian border. One long-time town resident recalls, "The last time I counted, there were less than 21 families in the whole town of Haddon that were affected by farming anymore. . . . We have a transient population. . . . It turns over rather dramatically." Literally, the school is the center of the community. There are no other public buildings besides a small town clerk's office, a town garage to park the school buses, a church, and interestingly, a historical society. There is no general store or gas station, and most of the businesses in town are run out of homes. This places the

Table 6
Burrell Timeline for Offering Service Learning

Time	Event
Early 1990s	<p>New service-learning curriculum championed to serve gifted students: A classroom teacher and an educational consultant cowrite a thesis paper for their masters program entitled "Using Literature to Increase the Self-Esteem of Middle School Students." Problem solving through literature (PSTL) course is born.</p> <p>Grants secured to hire educational consultant and classroom teacher to offer PSTL.</p>
Middle 1990s	<p>Concerted attempts made to make service-learning efforts more visible: Community members learned about possible community service-learning projects by participating in a needs survey that students of PSTL administers every other year in November on Election Day. These community needs are tabulated and graphed by the math classes at the sixth-grade level and then the results are presented to various groups such as Rotary, selectmen, and the school board. These results often serve as the rationale for why students are engaged in their particular community service project: they must show a need for it. At the end of the school year, a celebration of all faculty, parents, mentors, and students who have been involved in community service learning is held. A former school board member said, "In my years at Burrell, there has probably been only one other event that came that close to rallying a community and those were band concerts." Training for faculty in service learning offered.</p>
Late 1990s	<p>Other service-learning projects take root: See Table 7 for details.</p> <p>Community service learning institutionalized: The educational consultant's position was funded in the school budget for the first time. Her roles include teaching PSTL and supporting other service-learning projects.</p>
Early 2000s	<p>New policy instituted requiring all new curriculum proposals to address the extent to which service learning can be tied to it.</p>

school as the center for all town activities, including town meeting day, and helps keep the community and the school connected. The school's population fluctuates from year to year. During the 1999 to 2000 academic year, the school had an enrollment of 71 students.

The least level of implementation of service learning of the three schools highlighted here was found at Haddon School. Service learning was once a

Table 7
Service-Learning Offerings at Burrell School (2000)

Service-Learning Project	Grade Levels Engaged	Community Partners	Services Rendered	Student Learning Outcomes
Oral history projects with elders	3	Local nursing home	Elders interviewed; stories of their lives written and given back to them	Language arts and communication standards
<i>Cyberpals</i> community newspaper	5	Burrell community	Community paper distributed to all residents	Math, science, language arts, and social studies standards
Problem solving through literature	6-8	Various partners identified by individual students	Various services rendered	Language arts standards
Student mentoring	5-8	Students in Grades K-4	Younger students mentored	Sometimes tied to social responsibility standards

vibrant dimension of the school dating back to the 1970s and early 1980s. More recently service learning has made a very modest comeback, in large part because of the school's participation in a number of externally driven school network collaborations (see Tables 8 and 9).

Service-learning activities at Haddon were anchored by an oral history project instated by the fifth- and sixth-grade teacher, designed as part of the Sixth-Grade Challenge and set out to meet the Vermont Standards for writing. Students chose a community elder, designed a set of questions, and interviewed them with a tape recorder. From the information gathered, each student crafted biographies of their chosen elder. As part of a job shadow day at a nearby restaurant, they helped prepare and serve lunch for the group who was interviewed. Other parts of the Sixth-Grade Challenge included a bulb-planting day, a job-shadowing day, and an activities project with other

Table 8
Haddon Timeline for Offering Service Learning

Time	Event
Late 1970s to early 1980s	Haddon Project connects school and community during the 1970s and 1980s: The Haddon Project was based on the principle that the school and the community are interconnected and can mutually benefit each other. An article in a local magazine proclaimed in 1981, "For a central point of interest, the community looks to the school. And for its new, expanded curriculum, the school looks to the community." The article states that the idea behind the project was to use history as a way to learn how to understand the present, explaining that "the project was developed to give each child a firm sense of himself and his relationship to others through contact with fellow townspeople in everyday situations. The children learned about themselves, their heritage, and the problems and possibilities of their society by working both inside the school and outside in the community." The projects were tied to the curriculum and helped develop and strengthen classroom skills such as reading, mathematics, vocabulary, writing, and reasoning.
Middle 1980s	Haddon Project ceases: The Haddon Project virtually ended by the mid-1980s in large part because the energy for the project was held by one community member who had to step aside.
Late 1990s	Haddon joins school improvement networks: The recent school commitment to service learning has been supported, at least in part, by the school's membership within two networks: the Rural Partnership and the Foundation for Excellent Schools.
Early 2000s	Service learning returns after several year of absence: See Table 9 for details.

sixth graders in the area who will be heading into junior high school the following year. This was designed for the students of these small, rural schools to get to know each other before entering into a very different educational environment.

With this historical background of how service learning came to be used within these three schools and an overview of the range of service learning undertaken, we are free to turn to addressing the question of why service-learning was practiced, what the perceived benefits of these practices were, some of the ongoing barriers to continued application of service-learning, and the elements important to sustaining it. As we shall demonstrate,

Table 9
Service-Learning Offerings at Haddon School (2000)

Service-Learning Project	Grade Level	Community Partners	Services Rendered	Links to Standards and Learning Outcomes
Nursing home project	4-6	Local nursing home	Elders interviewed, stories of their lives written and given back to them	Language arts and communication standards
Sixth-grade challenge	6	Various community organizations and groups	Various services rendered	Writing, communication, and problem-solving standards
Leadership center classes: miscellaneous projects	4-6	Various community organizations and groups	Various services rendered	Social responsibility, communication, and problem-solving standards

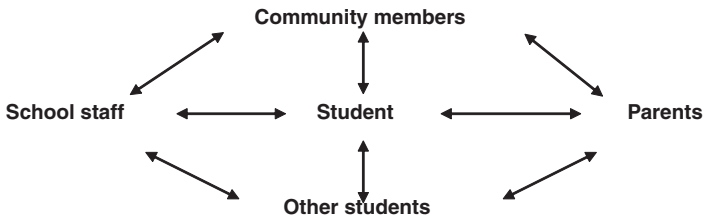
the implementation of service learning within these, and the other five schools in our study, was undertaken within a complex set of assumptions and discussions regarding the aims of education.

Practitioner Perceptions of How Service Learning Supports Student Learning

The practitioners of service learning that we interviewed articulated the ways in which the new relationships that students are provided and generate themselves through service learning aid them in their learning. Commenting on what makes service learning important to student learning, a Garfield teacher observes,

The idea of service learning in today's culture, for kids—it is crucial. You have to teach kids how to read, but you also have to make sure that they understand their place in the world. You can't have one without the other. Kids come to

Figure 1
Potential Teacher-Learning Relationships



school really disconnected. They're videoed out—they spend their lives in front of the screen—one kind or another. The connections they make to the community, the connections they make to each other, and feeling that they are a part of something larger than themselves . . . is so important.

Research has shown the importance of parent and community involvement to the success of student learning (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Croninger, & Lee, 2001; Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001; Morgan & Sorensen, 1999; Munn, 2000), the very kinds of connections that can be established for and by students through service learning. It became evident to us that experienced practitioners of service learning found these connections serving as the conduit through which service learning facilitates student learning. These connections are mapped in Figure 1, with the student placed at the center.

In essence, these social networks help to form the basis of a text through which a student may learn. A Garfield teacher perhaps best summarized the similarities between service learning and the experience of reading a book: "I think there is a lot of overlap. In some ways, you're trying to bring about sort of the visceral experience through text, that a community experiences can do similarly." This teacher goes on to add, "Your challenge is in the empathy, and what triggers the empathic thoughts." Thus, she asserts that service-learning experiences work well as a text, in large part, because students are able to form an affective connection to the enterprise. Because service learning relies on relationships through which learning is supported, the learning itself takes on an affective or emotional dimension.

Practitioners felt that service-learning experiences can provide a sense of immediacy and application of learning to a given situation. As one teacher commented, service learning is "really about seeing your impact on the community—having an impact on the community in a purposeful way, but also being able to see what your impact on the community is."

In analyzing the perceptions of teachers, students, administrators, parents, and community members about how students learned through service learning, two themes emerged: (a) service learning was capable of stimulating and supporting student motivation and empowerment as active learners and (b) service learning afforded opportunities for students to think about their learning. At all of the schools we studied, teachers and school administrators reported a high level of excitement for learning and an increased concern for their community from students who were engaged in service learning. They believed that service learning experiences can give students accomplishments that they can be proud of. The sense of purpose and meaning found in these projects leads students to take an active role in their learning. Community volunteer and writer Susan Bonthron claims,

The kids themselves feel some kind of empowerment, or at least they're knocked out of their normal channel of school behavior that is: "I'm doing this for the teacher . . . I'm just doing this because the teacher asked me to." Instead it's "Wow, somebody's asking me to do something that's going to affect the community, or be read by the community . . ." So it's powerful. (personal communication, 2000)

As we contemplate exactly what students learn through service learning, it is very important to note that the line between what they learn and how they learn begins to blur. Motivating students may be an explicit outcome of the learning process or it may be a necessary precondition for learning to occur. If this is how students learn through service learning, we are left to determine exactly what they learn, a topic that is, as we have found, not without controversy within the schools we studied.

Practitioner Perceptions of Service Learning as Social Education

What is not controversial about the service learning and student learning within these schools is the understanding and appreciation that students learn something about social responsibility through service learning. Extensive research studies have been able to affirm the role that service-learning can play in fostering a sense of civic and social responsibility in young people (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Hedin & Conrad, 1990). Summarizing the research literature on the development of social responsibility in youth, Sheldon Berman concludes,

Socially responsible people understand that the individual is rooted within a larger social network within interlocking communities that range from the local to the global (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Socially responsible persons are conscious of the ways one is influenced by the social and political world, and they experience a sense of connectedness and interdependence with others. The boundaries of their identity are not drawn tightly around themselves. (Berman, 1997, p. 12)

Given the role of service learning in supporting the development of social networks for students, it thus should not come as a surprise that service learning can support a student's sense of connectedness to her or his local community and the wider world. Within the context of the seven schools we studied, social responsibility had a prominent place within the state Framework of Standards, and many teachers who used service learning were able to connect student learning to this standard.

The interpersonal connections and resultant social capital generated through service learning also supported student's acquisition of problem-solving, communication, and personal-development skills, all three of which were also routinely mentioned as student-learning outcomes by teachers interviewed. Similar to social responsibility, these outcomes were a part of the state's Framework of Standards.

In addition to these outcomes, students were said to acquire concrete skills that were developed and refined within the context of the service-learning experience itself. In some of the more advanced service-learning projects, such as the *Garfield Gazette*, Burrell's PSTL, and Haddon's Sixth-Grade Challenge, students were required to complete a series of often complex, real-world tasks. Reflecting on the tasks associated with PSTL, the Burrell coprincipal observes,

I can't say enough about how much these kids learn about how to work with other people and other organizations. They learn how to schedule space. They learn about organizations, they learn about hierarchies, how organizations function, respect other parts of the organization needing to be informed of certain activities. If they are going to have something on Saturday, the custodial staff needs to be aware of that, they need to check with the lady in the office that manages the schedule and every organization has someone who does that, those kids have to go through all of that.

Discrete skills and tasks are required within all service-learning projects that require active student involvement. Although these tasks and skills varied from project to project and by developmental level of the student, in all

cases, the applied nature of service learning called on students to learn and apply skills that will be used throughout their lifetimes.

So far, our account of practitioner perceptions regarding student learning outcomes has touched on learning objectives that focus on the more social side of the academic achievement continuum. By providing students with the opportunity to learn and apply skills necessary in most work situations, practitioners felt that service learning can provide students with important communication, problem-solving, and organizational skills that will assist them in their later work lives.

Practitioner Perceptions of Service Learning and Academic Standards

In 1994, this New England state adopted its first comprehensive Framework of Standards, a series of 128 different standards in seven areas that were created through process that involved public input and teacher support. The Framework is divided into two sections: the Fields of Knowledge and the Vital Results—a set of standards that included social responsibility, communication, problem solving, and personal development that cut across the fields of knowledge encompassing math, science, reading, and social studies.

A recent survey of teachers across this state has shown that most 4th-, 8th-, and 10th-grade teachers find these standards a benefit to their teaching in general (Jennings, Swidler, & Koliba, 2005). Of particular importance to this study, the majority of these teachers found standards compatible with service learning and other forms of place-based education.

We found many examples of teachers tying service learning to the Fields of Knowledge standards.

These links were most visible at Haddon School, where the walls of the school are covered not only with student artwork but with written projects with headings such as “Meeting Standard 7.1.” Almost all of the Haddon teachers we interviewed believed that the present standards leave room for teachers to teach in using service learning. As one teacher remarked,

I think that the standards are expecting you to do more experiential things with them. I think the standards were written so that kids are having more rich and full lives. The standards are asking you to go further. . . . They really want you to shoot for the stars, really draw the kids out, and give them a really rich education—you can't do that by just sitting at a desk.

These findings were mirrored across all of the schools we studied, particularly among those teachers using service learning.

Claiming a link and actually assessing a link are two different matters, however. One Garfield teacher posed a question facing teachers in his school and, no doubt, many proponents of service learning, “How do you design a community service learning project so it also meets the standards?” He goes on to conclude, “And I don’t think that people have come up with [solutions to this question.] I think there’s still a lot of tension between those two things [standards and community service learning].” Indeed, across all of the schools we studied, structured reflection exercises for the students were not always built into the curriculum.

The inability to quantify learning through service learning, or any other form of experiential education for that matter, lies at the heart of the struggle about service learning and academic achievement in the schools we studied. One teacher who asks her students to conduct oral histories reflects on the struggles had with quantifying student learning: “Some of it is hard to quantify. How do you measure growth in a student? Are they talking about it? Do they talk about these activities with their parents? Are they excited about it?”

We did find a rich set of practices in which teachers worked with their students to link service learning to the standards through assessment practices. The kinds of assessments we found teachers using within service-learning projects were most often through a combination of teacher observation, classroom dialogue, and student written reflection. This said, we found several instances in which little to no formal assessment was attempted by the teacher. One teacher, capturing the role of observation in assessment remarked, “Knowing that they’re using those skills is an assessment for me. To see a kid who couldn’t problem-solve before have a conflict and be able to solve it on their own [is proof enough for me].”

Several teachers felt that the real key to successful assessment of service-learning students was classroom-based dialogue and discussion. A student in Burrell’s PSTL curriculum comments on the role of discussion in the reflection process,

We had to talk about two standards from each part of the learning and tell how we will address them. Then we do reflection ourselves and with the people involved. We survey the kids in the project to see how they liked it, and we can tell from their answers.

Instances of written reflection were the most prevalent form of reflection that we found across all of the seven schools. For example, students involved

in service-learning projects at Garfield are often asked to do pieces of reflective writing. The entire student body is asked to write an essay on what it means to be a contributing member of the community each spring. After community projects are completed during their annual Service Day, students, staff, and community volunteers are asked to complete reflection worksheets. Commenting on this schoolwide reflection activity, one teacher observed, “The whole building silently writing at the same time . . . that was amazing . . . and even sitting in classrooms and looking around at this mix of kids, ages, and everybody writing . . .”

The middle school students enrolled in the PSTL curriculum at Burrell are asked to complete reflection through journals they share with their teachers. Rubrics are created at each grade level and students are asked to complete their own assessments in collaboration with their teacher.

In some of the more advanced service-learning projects we encountered, including Garfield’s *Gazette*, Burrell’s PSTL, and Haddon’s Sixth-Grade Challenge, formal reflection was employed in a variety of ways that tapped students’ cognitive and affective sensibilities. Although the quality of reflection varied across many of the other service-learning projects found, it became apparent to us that the assessment of service learning, completed in a quality way, was a crucial factor in engendering ongoing support for service learning.

Social Versus Academic Outcomes: The Roots of Controversy?

What remains to be seen—and certainly not resolved through this research—is the extent to which service learning is perceived to support the academic achievement of students in certain academic content areas. Across most of the seven case study schools that we studied (including Garfield, Burrell, and Haddon), teachers attempted to connect at least some of their service learning offerings to specific content areas in the language arts, sciences, mathematics, and social studies. We will now highlight the extent to which this matter of service learning and academic achievement was understood in the three schools highlighted here.

Across all seven schools, we found teachers, administrators, and community members cognizant of the debates regarding the role of service learning in supporting student academic achievement. Because these debates were so prominent and, we believe, of great importance in the policy debates regarding the place and purpose of practices such as service learning in schools, we will explore the ways in which people within each of the three schools thought about these issues.

Mandates Causing Concerns, While a Small but Vocal Community Group Pushes “Back to the Basics” at Garfield

Recall the opening vignette, particularly the account of the exchange the Garfield principal had with one of his teachers. The school district and the school’s leadership have tried to strike a balance for teachers between state mandates for improved test scores and standards-based curriculum, the social education and service-learning initiatives and other creative projects. The Garfield principal comments,

One of my grave concerns, and I think . . . you’d hear this from a lot of teachers here, is that the whole standards movement, and the accountability and assessments are driving us towards getting content stuffed into the kids’ heads at the expense of, you know, real thoughtfulness and in depth understanding. You’ve got this [service-learning] program, you’ve got this content you’ve got to get in because you know they’re going to be tested. Does that leave time for reflection and real thoughtful teaching and learning?

Between the perception of an ever shifting set of state priorities and the values and priorities laid out collectively by the school staff and its leadership, some Garfield teachers are left confused, frustrated, and resistant to “taking on one more thing,” regardless of what that “thing” might be. “[Whose direction] is the most important, you know?” comments one teacher, adding, “When you work for [the] state . . . it’s kind of like, ‘Well, I have to listen to them once in a while, you know?’”

It is not just state and federal mandates that are calling for renewed attention to academic achievement. Despite the high level of community support for the school’s service-learning activities, there has been a vocal minority of Garfield residents who have expressed strong reservations about the directions that the school has taken in recent years. A small group called Concerned Citizens of Garfield (CCOG) has written editorials and spoken out during school board meetings and town meetings. Their concerns center around the size of the school budget, specific items in the budget, and the incorporation of community service-learning into the school’s curriculum.

“We feel that there is a lot of waste that is occurring in the school . . . We feel that there are a lot of aesthetic things . . . that quite honestly don’t improve the learning ability of our children,” comments one of the group’s members. In one letter sent in July of 1994 to the local newspaper, two members of the group wrote,

In their rush to incorporate this [community service] release time into the school day, these proponents are creating a situation in which Garfield middle school students, in particular, will be forced to turn their backs upon the mastery of their skills in the 3 R's, as well as in the learning of and exposure to subject matter in other areas.

According to CCOG's perspective, not only does community service-learning take students away from the "3 R's," but school-sanctioned service during the school day amounts to "involuntary servitude." They feel as if the Constitution's 13th Amendment is being violated and that "children should not be sacrificing their time when they go to school to give to the community; the community should be giving to the children . . . It's putting the cart before the horse."

The Garfield School Board and Supervisory Union actively support the positions that the school has taken in recent years to make connections to the local community. When opponents from the community voice their objections to some of these efforts, school board members, the superintendent, and other community members consistently offer their support to the school and its commitment to community engagement. However, the persistent voices of CCOG continue to provide opposition to the school's attempts to support activities such as service learning.

An obvious conclusion to be drawn from the Garfield and other two cases highlighted here concerns the competing visions of what schools are for and what they should be teaching young people. Garfield's administrative leadership, staff, and supporting community members feel that the social dimensions of learning that can be supported through service learning is of equal or even greater importance. Burrell's administrative leadership, on the other hand, place the academic dimensions of learning above the social, and look for the ways that service learning can support these academic aims.

Burrell's Coprincipals Discuss the Tension Between Social and Academic Learning Outcomes and Service-Learning's Place Amid These Tensions

Out of the seven schools studied, Burrell Middle and Elementary School appeared to have the most nuanced outlook on the relationship between service-learning and academic achievement.

One of the coprincipals at Burrell observes,

What will happen if it turns out that community service learning has more to do with psychological health in children than any other thing that schools do? If psychological health is a part of education, if that is true, then we really have

to rethink some of these other things. Then “1066 and the Battle of Hastings” [a piece of history that may be included in a social studies curriculum] doesn’t make any difference . . . cutting down on the time and resources to wonder about this stuff will make my path, my road map, clearer in regard to community service learning in competition with something like mathematics.”

He is still skeptical that service learning brings a great deal of value to student academic achievement. He sees service learning as an “either/or” proposition—pitting the psychological and social health and development of students against their capacities to digest academic content.

Likely responding to his colleagues concerns, Burrell’s other coprincipal asserts,

There is no conflict between community service learning and academics but we have to overcome the perception that there is. Sharing and communicating with people about the power of community service learning with regard to academics and its relevance is important. The relevance becomes more and more powerful and necessary. Academic doesn’t mean not real, not relevant. Academic just means that it is studied, it is good and solid research, it is quality. If middle schools wonder why they are having students with a hard time staying on task, they have to ask themselves to what extent they are providing relevant opportunities. Community service learning is the first example of a real opportunity for relevance, so academic and community service learning are not mutually exclusive.

This coprincipal is quick to add, however, where his school’s priorities lie:

We are a school who has made it very clear that our priorities for students at Burrell are to read well, write well, and think mathematically. To the extent that community service learning can be a vehicle through which students have a chance to do those things, it will continue to be a very fundamental part of Burrell Middle and Elementary School.

One of the original creators of the PSTL curriculum reflects her leader’s assertion by adding that community service learning will continue, “but it’s not going to put itself into the curriculum the way the study of nouns does if funding is scarce. Service learning is not an academic study but a process through which one can plan activities and academically learn.” Thus, at Burrell, as in the other two schools highlighted here, the relationship between service learning and academic standards is understood as a crucial element of any attempts to sustain the pedagogy. There appears to be very little ambiguity about this at Burrell.

The extent to which the rest of the Burrell school staff and supporting community members concur with their coprincipals’ perceptions was difficult to assess through our case study methodology. Being a larger school, it was

difficult to access a wider sample of people. This recognized, it was very apparent to us that Burrell's school board and the champions of service learning shared their leadership's perceptions here.

Testing Requirements Compete With Service Learning at Haddon, While Community and School Board Opposition to Service Learning Persists

There are some people in the Haddon community that feel that efforts such as service learning and Responsive Classroom are taking too much away from the teaching of the "basics" and that the school should not be focusing on any kind of social education. For example, the school board chair explained his rationale behind his opposition of experiential projects: "I'd like to see them be able to read and write and do math a bit easier. And a lot of the extra stuff [the service-learning and other social education initiatives like Responsive Classroom] . . . They have to convince me."

A majority of the Haddon school board reflects the sentiments of a few Haddon parents whose biggest concerns are about the school's role in socializing students. One community member whose children have already gone through the Haddon school stated,

Teach academics and leave the morals to the parents. . . . They're starting to drop the academics, pushing them on to other stuff, and the children are frustrated when they try to do things because they don't have the foundation of academics.

One particularly vocal parent opposed to service-learning projects claimed,

Service is to condition. It all sounds well and good to serve your community, but when the state is classifying the children as nothing but human resources, which is a Marxist term, and all's they want is production out of them, what they're doing is national socialism.

It is evident from these three cases that the practice of service learning within these schools gets situated within a series of complex considerations regarding the aims of education and the best ways to go about attaining these aims. Each school community possessed its own unique balance of ascribed learning outcomes and the place of service learning in achieving these outcomes.

In Haddon, opponents to service learning are more numerous and include some members of the school board. It was evident at the time of our study that this community had not yet achieved a clear consensus regarding this issue. It

is worth noting that ultimately, the Haddon school principal left the school, with her replacement emphasizing a return to the basics.

The two coprincipals at Burrell appear to possess the most nuanced understanding of this balance, which we found is also reflected in the attitudes of their teachers. Service learning must be clearly linked to academic achievement or it will not receive continued support.

At Garfield, the school's leader has made it clear that the social education of its students is as important as student academic achievement. That a vocal minority protests but has, to date, made little impact on the actual school practices is noteworthy. A majority of the Garfield community still appears to support the school administration's approach to educating its students with this emphasis

Despite these varied perceptions of service learning and its relationship to student learning, the three schools highlighted here systematically undertook an agenda that included the intentional integration of service learning across the curriculum. However, it is important to note that the sustainability of service learning in these schools is not a foregone conclusion. The persistent calls of the CCOG may, in the end, persuade enough people to seek a "return to the basics." A brief follow-up at Haddon reveals this is just what occurred. At Burrell during the past 3 years, the fate of the service-learning coordinator has hung in the balance. Facing declining enrollments and new budget constraints, the position is often one of the first places the school board looks to make cuts. If this were to happen, what would become of service learning at Burrell? Perhaps the answer, again, lies with the relationship between service learning and social capital. As the Burrell school board mulled over its budget cuts, parents, students, school alumni, and other community members have rallied to save the service-learning coordinator position.

Conclusion

The discussion about the place and purpose of service learning within our educational system is situated within a broader context regarding the aims of an education and the relationship between academic achievement and assessment. Our leaders in Washington D.C. and within state capitals across the country are often looked to for direction in this regard. What our study demonstrates, however, is that this question is one that can be (dare we say should be) a decidedly local one.

Nathan and Kielsmeier (1991), in an article they wrote back in 1991, boldly asserted that service learning was the sleeping giant of school reform.

Certainly, the advocates and practitioners of service learning who we had the privilege of interviewing and observing did not see service learning as the holy grail of school reform. Their practice was steeped in the pragmatic realities of published test scores, transportation and liability constraints, scheduling dilemmas, and the push to do just one more thing. They were not really thinking about the theoretical or philosophical aims of education nor were they thinking about the role of service learning within wider school reform. They were, in fact, mostly focused on trying to provide their students with meaningful learning opportunities that also did some good for others. This conclusion may sound a bit flippant, given the lengths we have gone to account for the range of practices found, the diversity of opinions surfaced, and the variability in the contextual realities encountered within each school.

Although our ability to render generalizations is limited by methodological constraints, we may be able to extrapolate some summary conclusions for researchers, school-based practitioners, and policy makers. Researchers need to do more to document a link between service-learning and social capital through network analysis and large-scale comparison of test scores, school climate data, and density of service-learning projects and curricula offered. Recognizing the difficulty in isolating the effects of service-learning, let alone defining it, researchers who focus on service-learning should seek to push beyond narrow definitions, seeking links to other forms of experiential education, such as placed-based learning, environmental, and outdoor education. More associations across these literatures are needed.

Practitioners should consider service learning within the context of wider school reform and renewal efforts, particularly those grounded in organizational learning and systems thinking (Senge et al., 2000) and the development of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). They should apply some of the principles inherent in service-learning to professional development opportunities, collaborative planning, and shared governance. Although it has not been the focus of this article to address the steps that each school took to sustain service-learning practices, an abbreviated inventory of their practices is provided in Table 10.

The effort of several of these schools to align mission, staff support, standards, financial resources, policies, and professional development opportunities to achieve a common objective should come as no surprise to most students of school reform. In the cases of Garfield and to a lesser extent Burrell, these common objectives encompassed the development of a community-centered mission with service learning playing a prominent role.

Policy makers need to provide incentives for schools to practice service learning, particularly within the context of a larger school reform and renewal

Table 10
Practices Employed to Implement and Sustain Service Learning

	Garfield	Burrell	Haddon
Articulated a school mission statement with a clear community focus	X	X	
Designated staff person to support service learning	X	X	
Intentionally linked service learning to academic standards	X	X	X
Secured outside funding to support service learning activities	X	X	X
Instituted policies explicitly directed toward supporting service-learning activities	X	X	
Provided professional development for teachers and others to support service learning	X	X	X

process. We found that each school's perception of the place of service learning was deeply informed by policy foci determined at the federal and state levels. The new accountability structures and grade level expectation put forth by the NCLB Act has led some to believe that innovative practices that embody democratic principles such as service learning are threatened by the mandates and vision of the aims of education embodied in this piece of legislation. Certainly, the emphasis placed on high-stakes testing and the learning outcomes measurable through this process may make practices such as service learning vulnerable. The impact of NCLB on these school practices are being tracked by us and will be the subject of subsequent analysis.

Twenty-three states mention service learning in either their state code or regulations, including their state board of education regulations (Torney-Purta & Vermeer, 2004). These states have enacted these standards in large part because they understand the value of service learning to promoting social responsibility—an acknowledgment of the link between service learning and social learning outcomes. Given this acceptance and the statistics collected by the National Center for Education Statistics, service learning appears to have established itself as a viable policy tool—a policy tool to achieve exactly what aims appears to be a question practitioners are having at the local level.

A link between service learning and academic achievement as demonstrated through test scores remains to be found (Billig, 2002). Teacher practitioners of service learning were often quick to assert that service-learning could be employed to achieve academic learning outcomes. Just what the communities that we studied understood as academic achievement is a

tension worth mentioning again. Practitioners and advocates of service-learning were pretty consistent in presenting a more comprehensive view of academic achievement—well beyond the narrow scope of knowledge that can be measured through high-stakes tests.

Clearly the tensions that surfaced within each school community highlighted here were shaped and informed by these wider policy issues. Although some might argue that a consensus around the aims of education has been achieved, that bringing young people back to the basics is a commonly held belief, our research calls into question such assertions. We found that the practice of service learning brings the tensions between social and academic learning outcomes, and the means for assessing these outcomes, to the surface at a decidedly local level. An opportunity exists, perhaps through the implementation of service learning, to build the social capital needed for communities to embark on coauthoring the next chapters to this dialogue.

Note

1. We found service-learning projects nested within the context of other community-oriented practices. Studies of the local environment were informed by projects in which students provided some sort of service to support the local environment, such as organizing green-ups, maintaining a hiking trail, or geographic information system mapping. Studies of local history were supplemented by oral history projects involving students and senior citizens. In other cases, service-learning projects lead to unanticipated studies of the local history or local environment. Many of the service-learning projects with the deepest curricular connections were those offered in concert with social studies and science units on local history and local environs. Some of the service-learning projects with the greatest community partnerships emerged from community service projects completed years before.

In other cases, although no discernible service was rendered, significant connections between the curriculum and the local community were made. Curriculum of place activities, represented in some community history projects and studies of the local environment, did not necessarily perform a service for a given population or community organization. Some personalized learning programs encouraged students to identify a community mentor to support them in a project of their own design. Most often, these personalized learning opportunities were offered as capstone experience for students. The student-initiated capstone project may or may not have had a service component.

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