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A Phenomenological Approach to Examining Perceptions of Middle School Students and Their Educators about Their Service-learning Experiences

McCafferty, Anita J. Stewart McCafferty
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Anita Stewart McCafferty

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Dr. Frank Besag, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. Teresa Dillard, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

David Clinefelter, Ph.D.

Walden University
2011

Abstract

A Phenomenological Approach to Examining Perceptions of Middle School Students and
Their Educators about Their Service-learning Experiences

by

Anita J. Stewart McCafferty

MA, University of Maine, 1998

BS, University of Maine, 1994

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Teacher Leadership

Walden University

August 2011

Abstract

A primary purpose of public education is to ensure that all citizens have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to participate in a democracy. Service learning is a democratic, constructivist, instructional strategy that connects academic learning with community needs. This phenomenological study described: (a) how youth, their educators, and community partners who experience service learning perceive its effects on themselves, their schools, and their community lives and (b) how professional-development opportunities need to be structured in order to encourage high quality civics education instruction. The problem this study addressed was how to solve youth civic and political disengagement. This study relied heavily upon in-depth interviews of nine middle school students, six middle school educators, and one community partner from a rural community in the northeastern United States. In addition, participant journals and grant documents were reviewed. Rubin and Rubin's guidelines and Tesh's eight step coding process were used to analyze each transcript, journal, and document. Results showed that service learning promoted the application of academic content, motivated students, appealed to various learning styles, built relationships, encouraged collaboration, and provided leadership opportunities. By better understanding the benefits and challenges of service learning projects as described by participants, this study could facilitate positive social change and improvements to current civic education instruction, including higher quality service-learning projects. By working collaboratively, youth, educators, and community partners can address the problem of youth disengagement from civic and political life, thus ensuring the continuation of a healthy democracy.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to rural, young adolescents for the hope they inspire in me and the promise of a world made better through their contributions, compassion for others, and commitment to making a difference in their communities, both locally and globally. I would also like to dedicate this study to middle-school educators who work tirelessly to provide meaningful, learning experiences for their students and who advocate unceasingly for young adolescents. Their modeling of what giving back to one's community looks like inspires me every, single day. *Thank you.*

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family, husband, dear friend and colleague Larry, my school family, Dr. Duane Richards, and my church family for their unwavering support, prayers, and encouragement during my doctoral program. I owe a great debt of gratitude to God for His strength and for the blessing of being surrounded by such amazing family and friends. As one of my favorite songs says, “I have been blessed with so many things. God’s been good to me. I have family and friends to share in all I do” (Joy Elms, songwriter, *He’s the Only Reason I Live*). How could one ask for more?

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Background of the Study

We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all students are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are an education that would ensure life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

(Glickman & Alridge, 2001, p. 15)

A democracy of the people, for the people, and by the people presupposes that those people be informed, willing, and able to be involved in ruling (Glickman & Alridge, 2001, pp. 13-15). A healthy democracy is dependent upon the education of its citizenry and the involvement of its citizens in public life (Billig & Root, 2006; Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002). Public schools have civic purposes and have a responsibility to educate their citizens (Dewey, 1897, 1916). According to the Civic Missions of Schools report (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement [CIRCLE], 2003), Americans have shared the values of the importance of an educated, democratic citizenry who are knowledgeable and actively involved in “civic and political life” for over 250 years (p. 8). It has long been held that a primary goal of public education since inception in the nineteenth century was civic in nature. The vision of the importance of public educational systems promoting “civic literacy” is “embedded in 40 state constitutions,” and 13 of these states declared that the primary goal of their schools is to encourage good citizenship and democracy (CIRCLE, 2003, p. 11). Educators are responsible for empowering and equipping all students with the knowledge

and skills to be able to voice their informed opinions on civic and political issues and to become engaged in solving problems in their communities, locally and globally.

In order to gauge the success of public education in creating involved citizens, one could look at civic participation rates, such as volunteering and voting.

Unfortunately, research shows that there is less participation by our youth than there is by older generations (CIRCLE, 2003; Keeter et al., 2002; Lopez et al. 2006). This study addressed the local and national problem of youth disengagement from civic and political life by examining the perceptions of middle school students, their teachers, and community partners surrounding instructional methods, such as service learning, in providing civic opportunities and involvement. A more detailed discussion will follow in section 2.

Problem Statement

The problem this study addressed was how to solve youth civic and political disengagement. This study sought to describe: (a) how youth, their educators, and community partners who experience service learning perceive its effects on themselves, their schools, and their community lives and (b) how professional-development opportunities need to be structured in order to encourage high-quality civics education instruction.

Many institutions, researchers, and educators are concerned about recent national trends that have reported fewer young Americans voting, declines in involvement in civic organizations or regular volunteering, a lack of knowledge about current events and

public issues, and the disenfranchisement of many of the country's youth and minorities (Andolina, Keeter, & Zukin, 2003; Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2005; CIRCLE, 2003; Keeter et al., 2002; Lopez, 2004; Zaff & Michelsen, 2001). Research showed that in 2002 57% of youth were "completely disengaged from civic life" (Keeter et al., 2002, p. 27). A majority of young people (58%) was "unable to cite two forms of civic or two forms of political engagement that they have done"; these youth are counted in the literature as "disengaged" (Lopez et al., 2006, p. 9). Volunteering and voting rates have been linked as indications of engaged citizenship (CIRCLE, 2003; Keeter et al., 2002). When one examines voting and volunteer rates among the youth, civic and political disengagement becomes apparent. For instance, in spite of a recent upward trend in youth voting rates in the previous two U.S. presidential elections, the voting rates among the youth have generally declined over the past three decades even when voting rates for older generations have not declined (Keeter et al., 2002; Lopez et al., 2006). In addition, youth are far less likely to be regular volunteers in comparison to older generations (Keeter et al., 2002; Lopez et al., 2006).

There are many possible factors that contribute to the problem of youth disengagement from civic and public life. One such factor might be the lack of opportunities to engage in democratic experiences, practice citizenship skills, and enhance these lifelong skills in ways that will empower youth to make positive differences in their communities (CIRCLE, 2003, 2007). In order to foster the development of competent and responsible citizens, civic education programs should

promote and increase civic knowledge, community participation, political action, and civic virtues (CIRCLE, 2003, 2007).

National organizations such as The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement and the Carnegie Corporation of New York have “called for new strategies that can capitalize on young people’s idealism and their commitment to service and voluntarism while addressing their disengagement from political and civic institutions” (CIRCLE, 2003, p. 4). The 2003 CIRCLE report stated that it is imperative that civics education “provide skills, knowledge, and encouragement for all students, including those who may be otherwise excluded from civic and political life” (p. 10). Service learning is an approach that may address the needs of civic education for all students, including marginalized or disadvantaged youth. Service learning is defined as an instructional strategy that connects the classroom curriculum with the needs of the community (Billig, Root & Jesse, 2005; Karasik, 2006; Kleiner & Chapman, 2000; Monsour, 2002; Schauffler, 2005; Seitsinger, 2005), thus providing opportunities for students to engage in democratic experiences. Benefits of high-quality service learning include academic, civic, ethical/moral, career, and personal and social outcomes (Furco, 2007). This study was designed to contribute to the body of knowledge needed to address the problem of youth disengagement from civic and political life by examining the perceived effects of service-learning experiences upon youth.

Although more than a third of all public, secondary schools reported that their students are involved in service-learning projects (Stagg, 2004, p. 2), research has shown

that service learning often falls short of achieving the benefits associated with service-learning projects (Stagg, 2004, p. 2). Research has suggested that this shortcoming is because students are often not engaged in high-quality service-learning projects (CIRCLE, 2003; Stagg, 2004). High-quality service-learning projects incorporate the following elements: student ownership or youth voice, genuine or authentic community needs, a strong connection to standards and the classroom curricula, ongoing reflection, investigation of the problem and possible solutions, design and preparation for the project, action or implementation of the project, appropriate duration and evaluation of the project, and a public demonstration or celebration of the project and the learning that occurred as a result (Billig, 2002, 2006; Kaye, 2004; Klopp, Toole, & Toole, 2001; Schauffler, 2005; Zaff & Michelsen, 2001). The 2003 CIRCLE report found that a majority of teachers and students participating in service learning reported the projects as being one-shot deals, meaning the duration of the project was often only one day and often lacked deep reflection about the connections between academic content, the project, and the learning that occurred. In other words, the projects were often not of high quality. In order for youth to benefit fully from their service-learning experiences, those experiences must be of high quality. This study examined teachers' perceptions of what makes for high-quality service-learning projects and of which professional development methods may be most effective in helping teachers improve their knowledge and application of the instructional strategy of service learning.

Nature of the Study

This phenomenological study was designed to discover how rural, middle-school youth and their educators who experience service-learning projects perceive their effects to be on their school and community lives. This study relied heavily upon in-depth interviews of nine middle-school students, six middle-school educators, and one community partner from a rural community in the northeastern United States. In addition, participant journals and grant documents were reviewed and participants were observed engaging in service-learning events.

The qualitative data collected from the interviews added “rich, thick description” to the data collected from other sources, such as observations and reflection journals (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). The outcome of the qualitative study was an increased understanding about the perceived effects of service learning on rural youth and the kinds of professional-development approaches needed to improve the effectiveness of service-learning projects for students as perceived by teachers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of engaging rural middle-school students in service-learning projects. One goal of this study was to examine the perceived effects of participation in service-learning projects and determine if such participation helped to solve the problem of youth civic and political disengagement. A second goal of this study was to understand better the perceived

effectiveness of various professional-development approaches used to improve educators' understanding of service learning.

Research Questions

This study explored the perceptions and experiences of rural middle-school students and their educators around service-learning projects. The phenomenological study explored the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of service-learning projects on rural middle-school students?
2. How do service-learning experiences impact students' views of their roles in schools and society?
3. What kinds of professional-development opportunities will educators need to effectively engage their students in high-quality service-learning projects?

Conceptual Framework

This study uses two theories as its conceptual framework: Dewey's Theory of Democracy and Constructivist Learning Theory. The remainder of this section describes more fully each of these theories and their relationships to service learning.

Dewey's Theory of Democracy

The main purpose of public education is to prepare our youth to take on their roles as educated members of our society; Dewey (1916) stated that "education, and education alone, spans the gap...from those members of society who are passing out of the group life to those who are coming into it" (p. 3). Dewey (1916) asserted that our "chief business" with our youth was to provide training for them to "share in a common life" (p.

6). Dewey (1916, p. 7) believed that education must be purposeful and experiential and that without formal education, it is impossible to transfer the essential components of one's culture, especially in instances of a complex society. In other words, the survival of our democratic society requires public education. Dewey (1897) declared that in order to prepare our students for their future in a democracy we must "put him in complete possession of all his powers" and train the child to be in "command of himself" (p. 78).

According to Dewey's theory of democracy, democracy is not merely a political structure but rather is a way of life (Dewey, 1937 & 1939). While Dewey maintained that universal suffrage was crucial to a democratic society, he asserted that simply doing one's civic duty by going to the polls each election is not enough to perpetuate democracy (1939). Democracy is a habit of thinking and is a personal, individual way of life "controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature" (p. 3). Dewey's theory of democracy stated that individual freedoms lead to a habit of open communication and cooperation with others in order to resolve conflicts and controversies (1937 & 1939). In this way, democracy becomes a moral idea and is both a means and an end. Dewey (1939, p. 5) believed in the importance of creating a society in which all members contributed and of which all were able to partake. Dewey's theory of democracy is anti-elitist and unequivocally advocates for the inclusion of all members of society to participate in a democratic way of life (1937); this "democratic faith in human equality is belief that every human being, independent of the quantity or range of his

personal endowment, has the right to equal opportunity with every other person for development of whatever gifts he has” (1939, p. 3). Thus, Dewey’s theory of democracy is a personal way of life that must be experienced by all citizens, regardless of race, gender, or background; marginalized citizens are invited into the public conversation and are given a voice as citizens work toward the common good (1937 & 1939).

It was within this democratic theoretical framework that I placed service learning as a means to combat the problem of youth civic and political disengagement and to achieve the civic goals of public education in helping to maintain a democracy. The exploration of the civic and political effects of curriculum-embedded service-learning projects fits into Dewey’s notion of democracy; this civics education approach includes all students, not just an elite few or those who might be inclined to voluntarily sign up for a course that required service learning as a component. By embedding service learning into a course, educators are assured that opportunities are provided for all students to experience democracy in action. Through this form of experiential learning, all students are invited into the public discourse and left empowered to engage in a personal democratic way of life through learning by doing.

Constructivist Learning Theory

The theory of constructivism asserts that learners construct their own meanings rather than simply having the meanings given to them. Learners require “multiple exposure to and complex interactions with knowledge” (Marzano, 2003, p. 112).

Constructivists recognize that learners have prior knowledge and experiences that influence their learning and make learning an individual as well as a social process. Because learners are individuals with unique experiences and backgrounds, learning takes on many different forms and has varied outcomes. Constructivists emphasize the importance of social interaction and inquiry. Self-reflection and self-assessment are encouraged as integral to the learning process. Recent advancements in brain research support constructivism (Walker, 2002). Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1995, 2004), Silver, Strong, and Perrini's integrated model of multiple intelligences and learning styles (2003), Marzano's work on motivation theory (Canter, 2005), and Wolfe and Brandt's work on enriching the classroom environment (1998) support and add to founding constructivist theorists work, such as Dewey (1906,1916), Piaget (1955, 1962), and Bruner (1965).

I placed service learning as an instructional method within this constructivist framework. Service learning concerns both Dewey's theory of democracy and constructivist learning theory, emphasizing both the individual and social process of learning as well as the experiential, active nature of learning.

Definition of Terms

Service learning: is an instructional strategy that connects the classroom curriculum with the needs of the community (Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2005; Karasik, 2006; Kleiner & Chapman, 2000; Monsour, 2002; Schauffler, 2005; Seitsinger, 2005).

High-quality service-learning projects: are defined as such by their adherence to these eight components: meaningful service, link to curriculum, reflection, diversity, youth voice, partnerships, progress monitoring, and duration and intensity (National Youth Leadership Council [NYLC], 2008).

Curriculum-embedded service-learning projects: are those that are required for completion of a course.

Community service: is “an activity that engages people in addressing needs of their schools and communities” (Schauffler, 2005, p. 7) “without formal ties to the curriculum” (Blanchard, 2008, p. 1).

Volunteering: is a form of civic responsibility, which involves the giving of time or labor without the expectation of monetary compensation; volunteering allows citizens the opportunity to share their skills and talents as well as to learn new skills while helping those in need of assistance (Seif, 2008).

Civic engagement: is making informed and reasoned decisions and acting responsibly on one’s knowledge and convictions (Morris, 2008).

Civic education: is designed to “help young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens” (CIRCLE, 2003, p. 10).

Competent and responsible citizens: are informed and thoughtful; participate in their communities; act politically; and have moral and civic virtues (CIRCLE, 2003, p. 10).

Civic activities: “generally focus on improving ones’ local community and helping individuals” (Lopez et al., 2006, p. 6).

Electoral activities: “concentrate on the political process and include activities such as voting, persuading others to vote, or volunteering for a political campaign” (Lopez et al., 2006, p. 6).

Assumptions

This research study was founded upon the following assumptions: One of the main purposes of public education is to prepare youth to take on their roles as educated, active members of society. The strength of a democracy is dependent upon the education and involvement of its citizenry (Keeter et al., 2002). Learning is both an individual and social process. Social interaction, inquiry, and self-reflection are important elements of the learning process. Service learning is a democratic, constructivist approach to teaching and learning. It is a viable civics education instructional strategy. Practitioners and researchers can learn from listening to, valuing, and giving voice to participants’ experiences with service learning.

Limitations

I confined the parameters of this study to interviewing middle-school students and educators from one rural middle school, as well as one community partner, all of whom have participated in service-learning projects. Due to the limited sample size, the results of this study are not generalizable to all middle-school students, educators, or community partners who have participated in service-learning projects. Another limitation of the

study was that the data collected were self-reported, and as such some participants may have reported socially acceptable responses as opposed to their true feelings or intentions. The quality of the data collected and the analysis of the data were limited by the skills of the interviewer.

Significance of the Study

This phenomenological study has contributed to the body of knowledge needed to address the problem of youth disengagement from civic and political life by examining and describing the perceptions of rural youth concerning their experiences with high-quality service-learning projects. This study could likely be significant because there is a deficiency in the literature about the effects of service learning on civic efficacy, civic and political knowledge and skills, and the intention of youth to volunteer and vote. The study has contributed to the research literature on civics education and service learning. Although the academic benefits of high quality service-learning projects have been well documented (Billig, 2002; Billig, 2006; Strage, 2004), the research on the civic and political benefits to students of participating in service-learning projects has not been documented or studied as well.

Another gap in the research on service learning is the limited number of studies that represent rural populations, as most of the larger studies have been conducted in an urban or suburban setting. This study was significant in that it sought to address this gap by researching an understudied group (i.e., rural youth). The study was also significant because it contributed to limited research exploring service learning from participants'

viewpoints to determine how effective service learning is in promoting civic efficacy and encouraging civic and political engagement among youth. The study examined the perceived effects of service-learning projects, especially as they related to youth's civic and political roles in schools and society.

This study also added to the literature on teacher learning. While working to improve student achievement and equity, educators need to have a wide spectrum of professional-development opportunities available to them, all of which are teacher-driven, collaborative, job-embedded, and inquiry-based (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Dantonio, 2001; Little, 2001; Lomax, 2005). This study examined the perceived effectiveness of various professional-development approaches, such as professional learning communities, study teams, including lesson study groups, and collegial coaching, from participants' viewpoints in improving educators' knowledge of high-quality service-learning projects that address the need of increasing youth engagement in civic and political life.

Summary and Transition

A primary purpose of public education is to ensure that all citizens have the knowledge and skills to participate in a democracy (CIRCLE, 2003, 2007; Dewey, 1916). However, over half of American youth have reported being disengaged from civic life (Keeter et al., 2002, p. 27; Lopez et al., 2006, p. 9). High-quality service-learning projects appear to be one instructional strategy educators can use to improve civic efficacy, including increased voting and volunteer rates. Educators can help empower and equip

students to participate fully in a democratic society by ensuring that ample opportunities are provided for students to construct their own knowledge and to practice their citizenship skills by engaging in civics education programs, such as high-quality service-learning projects. In order for teachers to implement high-quality service-learning projects in their classrooms, they need to be provided with quality professional-development opportunities in which they (a) learn more about high-quality service learning; (b) examine effective strategies for engaging their students in service learning that increases student learning; (c) analyze current implementations of service-learning projects; and (d) challenge the thinking and instructional practices of one another with the purpose of increasing student learning (e.g., academic achievement, civic engagement, and personal and social development).

In section 2, I review the literature around youth civic disengagement, democratic learning, constructivism, service learning, and professional development. Through an examination of the professional literature, I will establish the need for teachers to prepare all students to participate fully in a democracy. In section 3, I discuss the research methods used in the study, while in section 4, I share results of the study, and in section 5 I share summaries, findings, and recommendations for further study.

Section 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This section includes a review of the professional literature concerning civic disengagement among American youth; it establishes the need for teachers to prepare all students to participate in a democracy. I examined the professional literature to explore the following questions: What are the effects of service-learning projects on rural middle-school students? How do service-learning experiences impact students' views of their roles in schools and society? What kinds of professional development opportunities will educators need to effectively engage their students in service-learning projects?

The review of literature included in section 2 includes content on democratic learning, service learning constructivist learning theory, civic education, youth volunteering and voting rates, professional development, and service-learning methodology. The review of literature in section 2 is organized according to the aforementioned topics. In completing the search for literature, I used Walden University's library extensively, accessed EBSCO and ERIC as primary databases, and used service learning, civic education, civic engagement, community service, professional development, democratic learning, constructivist learning, and teacher learning as keywords in my searches.

After examining the literature on democratic learning, constructivism, service learning, and professional development, I found that (a) in the interest of promoting a democratic citizenry, public education has a responsibility to foster informed and

involved citizens; (b) service learning is an instructional strategy that has been repeatedly shown to impact the following in statistically significant ways: (1) academics by improving grades, overall engagement with school, and attendance; (2) civic education by improving civic responsibility and sense of agency; and (3) personal and social development by improving persistence, bonds with adults, and concern for others (Billig, 2005); (c) educators can help empower and equip students to participate fully in a democratic society by ensuring that ample opportunities are provided for students to construct their own knowledge and practice citizenship skills by engaging in civic education programs, such as high-quality service-learning projects; and (d) in order to help improve student achievement and equity, professional development opportunities need to be teacher-driven, collaborative, job-embedded, and inquiry-based.

Youth Disengagement in Civic and Political Life

A healthy democracy depends upon the education of its citizenry and the involvement of its citizens in public life (Billig & Root, 2006; Keeter et al., 2002). Public schools have a responsibility to educate all citizens (Dewey, 1897, 1916). Schools and other public institutions are responsible for empowering and equipping all students with the knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, intentions, and actions to be able to voice their informed opinions on civic and political issues and to become competent in solving problems in their communities, locally and globally (Billig & Root, 2006).

Many citizens are concerned about voter apathy among youth despite recent upturns in youth voting; a lack of civic involvement in organizations or volunteering; a

lack of knowledge about current events, public issues, and the workings of government; and the disenfranchisement of many of the country's youth and minorities (Andolina et al., 2003; Billig & Root, 2006; CIRCLE, 2003; Keeter et al., 2002; Lopez, 2004; Zaff & Michelsen, 2001). Keeter et al. (2002) showed that 57% of youth were "completely disengaged from civic life" (p. 27); while the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation report indicated that 58% of youth were disengaged (Lopez et al., 2006, p. 9).

Volunteering and voting rates have been linked as indicators of engaged citizenship (CIRCLE, 2003; Keeter et al., 2002). Voting rates among the youth have declined generally over the past 3 decades even when voting rates for older generations have not declined. Young people aged 18-25 made up only 8% of the voters in the 2000 presidential election (CIRCLE, 2003, p. 19). The youth (18-25 year olds) turnout rate in the 2004 presidential election rose 10 percentage points; and although this news was good, most young people still did not vote in 2004 (Lopez et al., 2006, pp. 15-16). Youth voting has declined 15% since 1972; however, it is important to note that there has not been a decline among voters 25 years of age and older (Keeter et al., 2002, Lopez et al., 2006). "Young people age 20 to 25 were much less likely than their adult counterparts (age 26 and above) to report they were regular voters (26% to 56%; Lopez et al., p. 15). In 2004 there was a "20 point gap in voting rates between 18 to 24 year olds and those above the age of 25" (Lopez et al., 2006, p. 15). Too few adolescents have had opportunities to engage in democratic experiences, practice citizenship skills, and

enhance these lifelong skills in ways that have empowered them to make positive differences in their communities (Battistoni, 2006; CIRCLE, 2003, 2007; Farris-Berg & Granofsky, 2008). The compounded effects of disengaged youth on communities and the nation as a whole may be devastating to a democratic way of life (Billig & Root, 2006). One problem I concentrated on was how teachers could address the civic disengagement of youth by engaging students in high-quality learning experiences that encouraged civic engagement through active participation in civic and political experiences.

The Need for Educators To Be Informed about High Quality Service Learning

The 2003 CIRCLE report stated that it is imperative that civic education “provide skills, knowledge, and encouragement for all students, including those who may be otherwise excluded from civic and political life” (p. 10). There is no one best civic education approach that will fit every school and every community’s needs, but researchers and experts have generally agreed that all effective approaches had the following characteristics:

a deliberate, intentional focus on civic outcomes; explicit advocacy of civic and political engagement; active learning opportunities that offer students the chance to engage in discussions of issues and take part in activities that help put a real-life perspective on what is learned in class; an emphasis on the ideas and principles that are essential to constitutional democracy and how they influence our schools. (CIRCLE, 2003, p. 21)

High-quality service learning incorporates these characteristics. According to the National Commission on Service-learning Report (2002), research supported service learning as a “way for American schools to address the problems of academic and civic disengagement among young people” (p. 16). The National Commission on Service-learning recommended that all elementary and secondary schools participate in high-quality service learning every year. The 2003 CIRCLE report claimed the most effective service-learning programs for civic education are ones that additionally

encourage teachers and administrators to use them as a way to consciously pursue civic outcomes... allow students--especially older students--to pursue political responses to problems,...and see this approach as part of a broader philosophy toward education, not just a program that is adopted for a finite period in a particular course. (pp. 25-26)

Service learning is a strategy that can address the needs of civic education for all students, including marginalized or disadvantaged youth (CIRCLE, 2003, p. 10). Service learning is an instructional strategy that connects the classroom curriculum with the needs of the community (Furco, 2007; Karasik, 2006; Kleiner & Chapman, 2000; Monsour, 2002; Schaffler, 2005; Seitsinger, 2005; Stagg, 2004). Service learning is high-quality teaching and learning. Educators know that students learn best when the curriculum emphasizes learning over teaching; engages students as active participants in the learning process; is student-centered; promotes the development of students’ higher-order thinking skills; focuses on making connections among disciplines; connects new knowledge to

what students know by having students construct meaning; is meaningful and/or of interest to students; is brain-based and socially constructed; and is practiced and used (Furco, 2007; Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock, 2001). Service learning done well does all of these things.

As pedagogy, service learning is authentic, active, collaborative, constructivist, personalized, and empowering, and it expands boundaries (Furco, 2007). Many teachers, however, do not understand the basic underpinnings of the service-learning pedagogy. For instance, researchers have found that a majority of teachers and students participating in service learning reported the projects as being one shot deals, meaning the duration of the project was often only one day and often lacked deep reflection about the connections between academic content, the project, and the learning that occurred (CIRCLE, 2003; Stagg, 2004). In other words, the projects were often not high quality. In fact, Stagg (2004) found that “a full 80 percent of principals claim one-time events are very or somewhat common in their school” (p. 6). In order for the benefits of high-quality service learning to be enjoyed by students, teachers, and communities, educators need to be informed about the components of high-quality service learning.

Review of the Literature

Democracy and Democratic Learning

According to the Civic Missions of Schools Report (CIRCLE, 2003), Americans have shared the value of the importance of an educated, democratic citizenry who are knowledgeable and actively involved in “civic and political life” for over 250 years (p.

8). It has long been held that a primary goal of public education since inception in the nineteenth century has been civic in nature. In fact, the main purpose of public education is to prepare youth to take on their roles as educated members of society. In 1916, Dewey stated that “education, and education alone, spans the gap...from those members of society who are passing out of the group life to those who are coming into it” (p. 3). Dewey (1916) further asserted that education’s “chief business” with youth was to provide training for them to “share in a common life” (p. 6). Glickman and Alridge (2001) declared that “the goal of public education is to enable students to become valued and valuable citizens of a democracy, to learn to be free, to have and make choices about their future, and to self-govern themselves individually and collectively” (p. 15). Dewey (1916) believed that education must be purposeful and that without formal education, “it is not possible to transmit all the resources and achievements of a complex society” (p. 7). In other words, the survival of a democracy requires public education (Glickman & Alridge, 2001).

According to Dewey, democracy is not merely a “political structure of a self-governing society” (1939, p. 1) but rather a way of life (Dewey, 1937, 1939). While Dewey (1939) maintained that universal suffrage is crucial to a democratic society, he asserted that simply doing one’s civic duty by going to the polls each election is not enough to perpetuate democracy. Democracy is a habit of mind and is a personal, individual way of life “controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature” (p. 3). In his theory of democracy, Dewey (1937, 1939) stated that individual freedoms

lead to a habit of open communication and cooperation with others in order to resolve conflicts and controversies. In this way, democracy becomes a moral idea and is both a means and an end. “The task of democracy is forever that of creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute” (1939, p. 5). Dewey’s theory of democracy advocated for the inclusion of all members of society to participate in a democratic way of life (1937). This “democratic faith in human equality is a belief that every human being, independent of the quantity or range of his personal endowment, has the right to equal opportunity with every other person for development of whatever gifts he has” (1939, p. 3). Thus, Dewey’s theory of democracy is a personal way of life that must be experienced by all citizens, regardless of race, gender, or background. Marginalized citizens are invited into the public conversation and are given a voice as citizens work toward the common good (Dewey, 1937, 1939).

Glickman and Alridge (2001) declared that democracy was not only the purpose of education, but explained the concept of “democracy as education” (p. 16). Democratic learning occurred when students were (a) actively working with problems, ideas, and materials; (b) given individual and group choices within teacher guidelines; (c) responsible to themselves and the school community for using educational time wisely; (d) sharing their learning with others; (e) deciding how to make their learning a community contribution; (f) responsible for finding community resources for and places to apply and further their learning; (g) demonstrating their learning in public settings and receiving public feedback; and (h) working and learning from one another individually

and collaboratively at paces that challenged everyone (p. 16). Democratic learning is the foundation of high-quality service learning.

Service Learning Definition

Service learning has been defined in many ways; in fact, there have been over 150 definitions (Klopp, Toole, & Toole, 2001, p. 18). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), service learning is “an educational activity, program, or curriculum that seeks to promote students’ learning through experiences associated with volunteerism or community service” (Kleiner & Chapman, 2000, p. 1). The Wisconsin Partnership in Service-learning defined it as “community service linked to classroom curricula: genuine service linked with structured learning, and including reflection and evaluation” (Monsour, 2002, p. 5). Learn and Serve America defined service learning as a strategy that “engages students in the educational process, using what they learn in the classroom to solve real-life problems” (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2011).

Yet another definition of service learning states that it is a strategy combining academic skills and community service with structured and ongoing reflection (Jennings, 2001). The addition of ongoing reflection during and after the service learning connects the volunteer aspect of the learning to the academic knowledge of the curriculum (Karasik, 2006). Congress added reflection and “compassion building” to their official definition in 1993 (Brown & Howard, 2005, p. 2). Researchers advocated ongoing reflection matched to the learners’ multiple intelligences and learning style preferences

(Klopp et al., 2001; Schauffler, 2005). “Service-learning is a curriculum-based form of community service that integrates classroom instruction and reflection with hands-on service experiences” (Stagg, 2004, p. 1). Regardless of the source or syntax of the definition, service learning connects the classroom curriculum with the needs of the community and, as such, falls under the umbrella of community-based learning (Schauffler, 2005, p. 7).

According to Karasik (2006), service learning balances educational needs and curricular requirements of students with the real needs of local, state, or global communities, by meeting the needs of those communities. Service learning is experiential (i.e., learning by doing). Service-learning projects involve students in constructivist experiences that provide community-based opportunities for learning and personal development. Service learning involves students in five stages: (a) investigating the community problem or need; (b) planning or preparing for how to meet the community need; (c) action in the form of a project designed to address the problem or need; (d) ongoing reflection; and (e) a demonstration and/or celebration of the extent to which the need was met (Billig, 2002; Billig, 2006; Kaye, 2004; Klopp et al., 2001; Schauffler, 2005; Stagg, 2004; Zaff & Michelsen, 2001).

Seitsinger (2005) clarified community service and service learning by defining service learning as “a synthesis of community service and academic learning” (p. 22). Stagg (2004) asserted that “service-learning attempts to go beyond mere [community] service by intentionally connecting service experiences to academic outcomes, providing

a context for classroom learning, and helping students draw meaningful lessons from their service experiences” (p. 1). The distinction between community service and service learning is an important one, especially in a standards-based educational system where academic integrity is demanded, and accountability systems are in place to measure standards. High-quality service learning, unlike community service, is an instructional strategy that meets the requirement for being aligned to academic standards.

Historically, service learning finds its roots in community service. Community service, however, has a longer history within public education. As a result, more research has been compiled on community service, and more public schools engage in community service than in service learning. According to the NCES 2000 report, about 27 % of high school students were involved in community service and volunteer work from the mid-1970s through the early 1990s. However, by 1999, over 80% of public high schools were offering opportunities for their students to engage in community service (Kleiner & Chapman, 2000, p. 1). Schools began encouraging service based upon schools’ curricula in the early 1980s. The NCES also found that in 1984, about 9% of high schools participated in service learning, compared to 46% of public high schools and 38% of public middle schools in 1999 (Kleiner & Chapman, 2000, p. 2; Stagg, 2004, p. 2). By 2004, the percentages of participation in service learning had declined, with about 44% of public high schools and only 31% of middle schools reporting participation in service learning (Stagg, 2004, p. 2). Some scholars theorized that the “recent declines in participation may be explained by the stringent achievement levels and compliance codes

that went into effect with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and may not necessarily reflect declining interest in or support for service-learning” (Stagg, 2004, pp. 2-3).

The NCES report indicated that (a) community service and service learning are more common in high school than in middle school; (b) parents’ highest level of education is positively connected with community service (the higher the level of parental education, the more likely a student is to engage in community service - just as the opposite is true for service learning, i.e., the higher the level of parental education, the less likely a student is to engage in service learning); and (c) white students participate in community service more often than do Hispanic or black students - although white students participate less frequently in service-learning projects (Kleiner & Chapman, 2000, p. 5). Both community service and service learning promote civic efficacy and fit within community-based learning, “an approach that enhances the curriculum by using community members and places as resources for learning” (Schauffler, 2005, p. 7).

The NCES 2000 report found that students are more likely to participate in both service-learning projects and community service projects if their schools require and arrange the projects (Kleiner & Chapman, 2000, p. 5). This study lends credence to those who favor mandatory inclusion of service for students. The concept of mandated volunteerism is a concern for some within and outside the ranks of service learning. Some opponents to mandating service learning go as far as to call it “exploitation” and “slave labor,” saying it waters down the curriculum, is a burden to students who need to

work part-time jobs, and can leave a “bad taste” in students’ mouths (Newquist, 2004, pp. 1-2). According to Newquist, proponents however, point to various benefits, including promoting civic efficacy, increasing career options, building positive character, and meeting community needs (p. 1).

Quality indicators of service learning. Scholars have agreed that service-learning projects must “meet minimum standards” in order to be classified as “effective service-learning project[s];” these include “curricular integration,” a “response to real community needs,” a “sustained” duration of time, youth decision-making/voice, and ongoing reflection and analysis (Stagg, 2004, pp. 1-2). According to the CIRCLE (2007) report, service learning is “most effective when it: lasts for at least one semester, is linked to standards, involves direct contact with service recipients, and includes cognitively challenging reflection activities” (p. 8). In order to ensure high-quality service-learning experiences for students, teachers, and community partners, the following eight components need to be included in the service-learning experience: meaningful service, link to curriculum, reflection, diversity, youth voice, partnerships, progress monitoring, and duration and intensity (National Youth Leadership Council [NYLC], 2008). Without these quality components, educators will not reap the outcomes for which they are hoping (Billig, 2005).

High-quality service learning “engages participants in meaningful and personally relevant service activities” (NYLC, 2008, p. 3). Meaningful service meets a recognized community need, is developmentally and age appropriate, has a visible outcome, helps

students better understand the social context of their service, and is interesting and engaging to the participants (Fredericks & Billig, 2008; NYLC, 2008).

When service learning is linked to the curriculum, it is used to meet clear learning goals (Billig & Northup, 2008b; NYLC, 2008; Stagg, 2004). Service activities need to be well aligned to the curricular goals, and in turn, the goals should be clearly linked to stated outcomes (Billig & Northup, 2008b; CIRCLE, 2007).

Quality service-learning experiences embed “multiple challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one’s relationship to society” (NYLC, 2008, p. 7). These reflection activities must go beyond basic summaries and challenge the learner to think deeply about the problem and the context of the learning (Billig & Fredericks, 2008b; CIRCLE, 2007; NYLC, 2008; Stagg, 2004).

Quality service learning encourages mutual respect for different points of view and an understanding of diversity (Billig, 2008a; NYLC, 2008). Diversity in service learning helps students develop interpersonal skills, overcome stereotypes, and improve conflict resolution skills (Billig, 2008a; NYLC, 2008).

Youth voice is included in quality service learning in all phases of the experiences with guidance from adults (Billig, Brown, & Turnbull, 2008; NYLC, 2008). Strong youth voice enhances youth leadership skills and helps youth and adults to create a trusting and open environment (Billig, Brown, & Turnbull, 2008; NYLC, 2008; Stagg, 2004).

In order for quality service-learning experiences to occur, partnerships must be “collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community needs” (NYLC, 2008, p. 13). Reciprocal partnerships, as Billig and Fredericks (2008a) called them, promote two-way communication and shared vision and goals.

Progress monitoring is an important attribute of quality service learning and involves participants “in an ongoing process to assess the quality of implementation and progress toward meeting specified goals, and uses results for improvement and sustainability” (NYLC, 2008, p. 15). The monitoring should be “low stakes” and should be shared with all stakeholders in order to benchmark progress toward the project’s goals (Billig, 2008b, p. 1).

The final component of quality service-learning experiences is duration and intensity. Service learning needs to have sufficient depth and breadth in order to meet community needs and reach the desired outcomes (Billig & Northup, 2008a; CIRCLE, 2007; NYLC, 2008; Stagg, 2004). Although Billig and Northup (2008a) warned practitioners to be cautious of mandating hours alone to ensure quality, they do concur that the service-learning experience needs to occur in concentrated blocks of time and last for several weeks or months (NYLC, 2008).

In order to better position one’s students, schools, and community partners to reap the numerous benefits of service learning, one must be sure to pay attention to the eight attributes of high-quality: meaningful service, link to curriculum, reflection, diversity, youth voice, partnerships, progress monitoring, and duration and intensity (NYLC, 2008).

Benefits of service learning. The benefits and positive outcomes of service-learning projects for students, teachers, their schools, and their communities are numerous. Benefits of high-quality service learning include academic, civic, ethical/moral, student career, and personal and social outcomes (Furco, 2007). Academic outcomes for quality service learning include increased scores on standardized tests, improved content knowledge and skills; improved school attendance, improved grade point average, improved grades, improved overall engagement with school, and increased the likelihood of going to college (Billig, 2002, 2006; CIRCLE, 2007; Davila & Mora, 2007; Furco, 2007; Strage, 2004). In fact, recent studies have shown that when service-learning experiences are required as part of coursework at the high school level, “the odds of graduation from college” raise by 22 percentage points (CIRCLE, 2007, p. 8; Davila & Mora, 2007, p. 3). “Civically-engaged teenagers make greater scholastic progress during high school and subsequently acquire higher levels of education than their otherwise similar peers” (Davila & Mora, 2007, p. 1). Billig (2006) cited high-quality service-learning projects as resulting in “improved attendance, increased test scores, greater problem-solving skills, and better acquisition of skills and knowledge” (p. 25).

Another benefit of using service-learning projects is their widespread appeal to a variety of learners. This authentic, experiential type of learning builds upon students’ strengths, values, and talents; increases their self-confidence; combines individual and collaborative reflection; and helps show students how they can make a difference

(Pleasants, Stephens, Selph, & Pfeiffer, 2004, pp. 17-18). KIDS Consortium, a service-learning organization, asserted that real-life projects motivated and maintained student interest and met students' needs who did not respond favorably to traditional classroom approaches as well as the gifted and talented student (Schauffler, 2005, p. 14). Kaye further supported this idea of the inclusiveness of service-learning projects, noting it worked for all ages, grade levels, and "most every ability level" (Kaye, 2004, p. 7). Bradford (2005) asserted that integrating technology and service learning increased student motivation and mastery of content knowledge. Students can benefit from making a difference in their communities.

Research suggested that civic benefits of participation in high-quality service-learning programs included a broadened understanding of government and its procedures; enhanced citizenship and social responsibility; enhanced awareness and understanding of social issues; increased civic responsibility; increased civic and political skills, civic attitudes, and community participation; improved one's sense of agency; increased volunteering; and increased tolerance and compassion for others (Billig, 2005; CIRCLE, 2003, 2007; Furco, 2007). Research has less substantiated benefits for political participation; although, one study showed that students were "more likely to vote and to participate in community organizations 15 years later" (CIRCLE, 2003, p. 26). Additional research is needed to determine the range of civic and political benefits of service learning, as well as the long-term effects on civic and political engagement.

Service learning has been combined with many education initiatives, such as leadership training. This coupling benefits students by providing leadership training to participants, which in turn helps to better equip students to more fully participate in civic and public life (Boyd, 2000). Some educator-practitioners carefully design their projects to include overt leadership training and see the honing of leadership skills as one of the biggest benefits to students who participate in service-learning projects. Boyd (2000) of Texas A & M advocated providing more opportunities for middle-school students to engage in service-learning projects and saw these projects as one method of increasing leadership opportunities for all students, especially for inner city youth whom were the focus of his particular research study. In his study, various leadership skills were introduced to the young adolescents, such as decision-making, brainstorming, setting goals, working cooperatively, and reflecting. These leadership skills were introduced; students were given the opportunity to practice the skills in experiential learning activities, and then students were asked to reflect on how the leadership skill could be applied to real-world contexts (Boyd, 2000). Ultimately, students partnered with 4-H Youth for Community Action and completed various service-learning projects. Boyd pointed out that the skills taught through these service-learning projects, especially those of solving problems, making decisions and being reflective, are not just skills needed for leaders, but they are skills needed to empower citizens to lead successful lives and participate in our democracy, solving real community problems.

There are a number of ways in which service learning has been integrated into schools, including integration into individual academic courses; as a grade-wide, discipline-wide, or school-wide initiative; as part of a special education program; as a separate elective or advisory period; or as part of a dropout prevention course or program (Stagg, 2004, p. 4). Service learning can be and is being used at the classroom level, in addition to being used to “meet specific needs or segments of the school population” (Stagg, 2004, p. 4). Sixteen percent of high schools and 12% of middle schools reported using service learning as a dropout prevention course or program (Stagg, 2004, p. 4). With nationwide concerns about high-school dropout rates, service-learning experiences are a promising intervention strategy.

Personal and social outcomes of quality service-learning experiences include increased self-esteem, motivation, and confidence; enhanced self-efficacy and empowerment; increased engagement in prosocial behavior; encouraged bonding with adults; increased caring; increased persistence; increased social responsibility; decreased disciplinary measures; and decreased at-risk behaviors (Billig, 2005; Furco, 2007). According to Jennings (2001), a middle school special education literacy teacher, his students improved self-esteem and confidence as a result of active participation in service-learning projects. Jennings’ students, struggling readers and writers, also reported feeling more connected to their communities after participating in We C.A.R.E. (a 10 week children’s literature read aloud service project with kindergarten students) and GROW with Grandfriends (a project that connected students with elderly residents for

multiple interviews and the compilation of these interviews/essays into a book donated to the local historical society). Jennings (2001) and Mueller (2005) pointed out that students at-risk and/or students with special needs are often used to receiving services but are not often made to feel like they too can provide meaningful service to others or give back to their communities. Smith (2001), a middle school Maine teacher, also asserted that one of the major benefits to students is the way they see themselves, as “individuals who can make a difference” (Smith, 2001, p. 7).

Researchers have found that the ethical and moral outcomes of high-quality service learning include greater exposure to new points of view and perspectives; positive changes in ethical judgment; and enhanced ability to make independent decisions regarding moral issues (Billig, 2005; Furco, 2007). In addition, research has substantiated several career outcomes for quality service-learning experiences. Among them are broadened career awareness and options; enhanced understanding of workforce ethics; enhanced preparation for the workforce; and an increased persistence, a predictor of job success (Billig, 2005; Furco, 2007).

In addition to benefiting students, service learning also provides many benefits to schools and their programs, as well as to communities. For instance, McAnally (2002), a middle school music teacher from Philadelphia, pointed out that schools benefit from students participating in service-learning projects, such as the noncompetitive community choir at his school. Benefits to the school included greater community support for school programs; in this particular case, the service-learning project created increased

community support for the music program. Community agencies and members viewed young adolescents more positively as a result of the service-learning projects (Karasik, 2006). Authentic school and wider community needs are met by harnessing the knowledge, skills, and problem-solving abilities of youth.

Constructivist Learning Theory and Service Learning

The theory of constructivism states that learners construct their own meanings rather than simply having the meanings given to them and must interact with knowledge multiple times and in complex ways (Marzano, 2003, p. 112). Constructivism recognizes that learners have prior knowledge and experiences that influence their learning and make learning an individual as well as a social process. Since learners are individuals with unique experiences and backgrounds, learning takes on many different forms and has varied outcomes. Constructivism emphasizes the importance of social interaction, inquiry, self-reflection, and self-assessment.

Service-learning projects can be individualized to capitalize on students' interests and preferences, can be differentiated based on readiness and ability, can empower students by providing appropriate challenges and successes (Billig, 2002, 2006), and can provide what Dewey (1916) referred to as educative concepts at work in the real-world. Dewey (1897) stated that the beginning of meaningful education must center on the student's own interests and tendencies (p. 77). According to Wolf and Brandt (1998), an enriched classroom environment provided students with many ways to construct their learning and make connections between what they are currently learning with what has

already been learned (p. 11). Service learning may work to motivate marginalized students and work to empower students to feel like vital, contributing human beings, capable of making a positive difference using their skills, knowledge, and interests. Many of the Associated Psychological Association's 14 learner-centered principles (APA, 1997), such as students' knowledge base, motivation and affect, development and individual differences, and situation or context are addressed through service-learning projects done well. Service-learning projects tap prior knowledge, relate content to students' lives, structure learning content for success, and set a positive emotional tone, all of which Marzano (2003) stated was necessary for teachers to do in order to motivate students to learn.

Dewey (1916) warned about the danger of disassociation between the formal teaching of school and direct experience (p.8). Relevant and meaningful content can be made to seem bookish and useless at times because of the way it is presented and because of the context in which it is taught. Bruner (1965) highlighted the differing manners in which children are taught, such as the children of the Kung culture from Kalahari who learned by play and through direct observation (p. 1008). Bruner pointed out that the education of the Kung children is very different from the way in which American children are taught (through isolated formal schooling devoid of direct experience). Both Dewey and Bruner advocated for an experiential, constructivist learning experience for students.

Recent advancements in brain research have supported constructivism (Lambert, 2002). Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1995, 2004), Silver, Strong, and Perrini's (2003) integrated model of multiple intelligences and learning styles (2003), Marzano's work on motivation theory (Canter Group, *Theories and Models of Learning*, 2005), and Wolfe and Brandt's work on enriching the classroom environment (1998) supported and added to founding theorists work, such as the work of Dewey (1906 & 1916), Piaget (1955 & 1962), and Bruner (1965).

Gibson and McKay (2001) asserted that there are three tenets of brain research that appear to be significant for learning: (a) the brain seeks meaning through pattern-making and by making connections (relevance); (b) the brain grows as a result of experience; and (c) emotions drive learning (pp. 2-3). According to Wolfe and Brandt (1998), an enriched classroom environment, one that "influences the brain's growth and learning," provides students with many ways to construct their learning and make connections between what they are currently learning with what has already been learned (p. 11). As has been previously stated, service learning is experiential; Gibson and McKay (2001) claimed that "learning that is hands-on, experiential and relevant enable patterns to develop. Relevance helps children make personal connections between what they already know and the work they do in class" (p. 2). Service learning enables students to make personal connections between what they are learning in the classroom and problem solving outside of the classroom, making learning relevant and meaningful and hopefully aiding in the creation of an enriched environment. Brain research has

reaffirmed that making an emotional connection in the classroom, preferably a positive one, has an impact on long-term memory retention. “When emotions are engaged, the brain learns fastest and easiest” (Gibbs & McKay, 2001, p. 3). Service-learning projects help engage the emotions, as often they involve interacting and helping others or trying to persuade someone or some organization to take appropriate action to solve a problem or meet a community need.

High-quality service learning also engages students in regular and in-depth reflection, often matched to learners’ multiple intelligences and/or learning style preferences (Klopp et al., 2001; Schaufli, 2005). Klopp et al. (2001) maintained that all eight multiple intelligences can be and should be incorporated into service-learning projects and learning in general, thus honoring how students’ brains work and the differing intelligences possessed and shared by our students. “...The eight intelligences might be viewed as eight gifts that people have to share with their communities. The eight intelligences become eight paths to service” (Klopp et al, 2001, p. 30).

Synthesis of Research on Civic Education, Youth Volunteering, and Voting

The power of civic education has been well documented (CIRCLE, 2003, 2007; Syvertsen, Flanagan, & Stout, 2007, p. 1). The 2003 CIRCLE report called for civic education practices that emphasized “the need for instruction that is relevant to young people...provides opportunities for practice, and that moves beyond rote learning praxis” (Syvertsen et al., 2007, p. 1). Bennett (2008) advocated for a move away from “learning environments that emphasize old style, fact based, teacher-centered pedagogy” to a

learning environment that provided students with “tools to experience actual civic practice” (p. 7). When such approaches to civic education are adhered to, the results “yield positive, lasting outcomes in young people” (CIRCLE, 2007; Syvertsen et al., 2007, p. 1). Researchers have advocated high-quality, comprehensive, school-based civic education for all students (CIRCLE, 2003, 2007; National Commission of Service-learning, 2002), believing that such education will help produce “competent and responsible citizens” (CIRCLE, 2003, p. 10). “Competent and responsible citizens are informed and thoughtful...participate in their communities...act politically...[and] have moral and civic virtues” (CIRCLE, 2003, p. 10). According to CIRCLE, two of the qualifications for being a ‘competent and responsible citizen’, “participating in their communities [and] acting politically,” (2003, p. 10) have been widely researched. Researchers have looked at volunteering and voting rates as two indications of engaged citizenship.

Youth involvement in volunteerism and community activities had increased in the past decade (Andolina et al., 2003; CIRCLE, 2003; Helms & Marcelo, 2007; Keeter et al., 2002; Lopez, 2004; Toppe, 2005), giving rise to optimism about the future of this civic engagement indicator as a key to improving overall civic engagement for youth. However, after several years of increased volunteer rates among youth, recent reports show a decline in youth volunteering rates, perhaps marking the end of an era of significant increases in youth volunteering rates (Helms & Marcelo, 2007, p. 2; Lopez, Levine, Both, Kiesa, Kirby, & Marcelo, 2006; Lopez & Marcelo, 2007, p. 1). In fact, “the

2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Report found an eight-percentage point decrease in the volunteer rate among 15-25 year olds from 2002 to 2006” (Lopez & Marcelo, 2007, p. 1). Recent data found an overall decrease in volunteer rates among all participants 16 years and older from 2005 to 2006 (Lopez & Marcelo, 2007, p. 1). In fact, data from the Monitoring the Future (MTF) surveys even shows a decline in reported volunteering of 12th, 10th, and eighth graders (Lopez & Marcelo, 2007, p. 1).

According to a recent national volunteer study, 16-18 year olds volunteer at considerably higher rates than their college-aged adults (19-24 year olds) and at slightly higher rates than those aged 25 years and older (Helms & Marcelo, 2007). There is variance in youth volunteer rates depending upon the state and the year. For instance, the volunteer rate for 16-18 year olds ranged from a high of 47% in North Dakota to a low of 14% in Nevada in 2006 (Helms & Marcelo, 2007, p. 2). Volunteer rates by state were generally lower for college-age adults (19-24 year olds), ranging from a high in 2006 of 29% in Alaska to a low of 5% in Nevada (Helms & Marcelo, 2007, p. 2). Volunteer rates for those aged 25 years and older “ranged from 46% in Utah to 18% in Nevada” (Helms & Marcelo, 2007, p. 2).

Research has found that between 30%-50% of youth, aged 15-25, report having volunteered at some point in their lives (Andolina et al., 2003; CIRCLE, 2003; Keeter et al., 2002; Zaff & Michelsen, 2001). While on the surface this is good news, as it shows an increase in youth volunteerism over the past decade, youth are far less likely to be regular volunteers than older generations (Lopez et al., 2006). For instance, Keeter et al.

(2002) learned that Americans aged 26-56 report regular volunteering more frequently than do the youth. Keeter et al. also reported that only about 22% of youth say they regularly volunteer, and about 21% are active in trying to solve community problems (p. 12). Attending school seems to positively impact volunteerism, as research showed that youth not enrolled in school or college are much less likely to report volunteering (CIRCLE, 2003; Zaff & Michelsen, 2001).

Some researchers credit the higher levels of volunteering for 16-18 year olds to school community service requirements. In 1999, 19 percent of students in high school reported that their schools required community service participation. An additional 67 percent reported that their schools arranged but did not require community service participation. (Helms & Marcelo, 2007, p. 3)

In order to foster the development of competent and responsible citizens, civic education programs need to promote and increase civic knowledge, community participation, political action, and civic virtues (CIRCLE, 2003). Recent national surveys of youth indicated that engaging students in “active learning...can improve students’ civic knowledge, skills, and intentions to vote and volunteer” (CIRCLE, 2003, p. 14). Many institutions, researchers, and education practitioners are concerned about recent national trends that report fewer young Americans voting and a decrease in knowledge about public issues (Andolina et al., 2003; CIRCLE, 2003; Keeter et al., 2002; Lopez, 2004; Zaff & Michelsen, 2001). Young people aged 18-25 made up only 8% of the voters in the 2000 presidential election, and 5% of the voters in the 1998 election. (CIRCLE,

2003, p. 19). Although youth voting has declined 15% since 1972, there has not been a decline in voters 25 years of age and older (Keeter et al., 2002). National organizations such as The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement and Carnegie Corporation of New York, have “called for new strategies that can capitalize on young people’s idealism and their commitment to service and voluntarism while addressing their disengagement from political and civic institutions” (CIRCLE, 2003, p. 4). This call stems from youth reporting they volunteer because of the positive feelings they get from knowing they are making a difference and are helping others, versus volunteering to satisfy community service requirements or to gain college admission (CIRCLE, 2003, 2007; Lopez & Marcelo, 2007). Researchers acknowledge that engagement in civic and political life can be difficult, especially for marginalized or disadvantaged youth. Thus, the 2003 CIRCLE report stated it is imperative that civic education “provides skills, knowledge, and encouragement for all students, including those who may be otherwise excluded from civic and political life” (p. 10). Service learning is an approach that can address the needs of civic education.

Need for Professional Development

In order to help improve service-learning experiences for students, educators need to have a wide spectrum of professional development opportunities available to them, all of which are teacher-driven, collaborative, job-embedded, and inquiry-based (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Dantonio, 2001; Little, 2001; Lomax, 2005). Professional learning communities, including study teams and lesson study groups, as well as collegial

coaching opportunities are professional development structures that should aid educators in the following: (a) learning more about high-quality service learning; (b) examining effective strategies for engaging their students in service learning that increases student learning; (c) analyzing current implementations of service-learning projects; and (d) challenging the thinking and instructional practices of one another with the purpose of increasing student learning, e.g., academic achievement, civic engagement, and personal and social development.

Evolution of professional development and shared leadership. Historically, professional development has taken the form of one-shot, in-service workshops in which experts from the outside are invited to enlighten teachers about a particular instructional or assessment method (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Schmoker, 2006). Traditional professional development has been what Cochran-Smith and Lytle referred to as “knowledge-for-practice,” where experts developed and shared knowledge created by others outside of the classroom for teachers to use (2001, p. 47). Another common form of professional development is what Cochran-Smith and Lytle referred to as “knowledge-in-practice,” in which “practical knowledge” from expert or competent teachers was shared with others and reflected upon” (2001, p. 47). One of the latest improvements in professional development emphasized and encouraged teachers to work “together to construct knowledge-of-practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001, pp. 48-49) or to form teacher communities of inquiry. By establishing professional learning communities or communities of inquiry to learn about instructional practices, educators are able to

participate in high quality, job-embedded professional development (DuFour, 2004; DuFour et al., 2006; Schmoker, 2006). The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) asserted that the goal of professional development should be that “all teachers in all schools will experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work” (NSDC, 2001, n.d.).

Successful administrators realize the value of teacher leaders and work to support and develop teacher leadership skills within their schools (Patterson & Patterson, 2004, pp. 77-78). Lambert (2002) asserted that the days of a one-leader school are over; leadership must be a shared responsibility within the school community (p. 37). In fact Dantonio (2001) declared that leadership could only be considered effective if it was shared among the school community; when such leadership was shared it became empowering to teachers (pp. 43-44). Barth (2001) pointed out that schools most often do not operate democratically (p. 444), but when leadership is shared and teachers lead, “these teachers become owners and investors in the school rather than mere tenants” (p. 449).

Principals need to share leadership with their teachers and work to hone “three sources of influence: credibility, expertise, and relationships” (Patterson & Patterson, 2004, p. 75). These types of administrators understand that when tough times arrive at their schools, teachers will most often first turn to those they perceive to be leaders within their buildings, i.e., those teachers who either hold formal or informal leadership positions (Patterson & Patterson, 2004, pp. 74-75). Such principals encourage

professional development in order to improve the leadership skills of all their teachers. These administrators asserted that (a) “everyone has the right, responsibility, and ability to be a leader; (b) how we define leadership influences how people will participate; and (c) educators yearn to be more fully who they are - purposeful, professional human beings” (Lambert, 2002, p. 38). Principals who willingly share leadership understand that teacher leaders will help their schools be successful in promoting student learning and will often do so by helping other teachers (a) stay focused on what matters most, (b) create a climate of caring and support, and (c) maintain hope in the face of adversity (Patterson & Patterson, 2004, pp. 76-77).

Professional learning communities. “A Professional Learning Community (PLC) is composed of collaborative teams whose members work interdependently to achieve common goals aligned to the purpose of learning for all” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006, p. 3). Characteristics of a professional learning community include the following: a focus on and a commitment to the learning of each student; a clear and compelling vision; collective inquiry into best practice; action-orientation (learning by doing); results-oriented goals (making data-driven decisions); and a commitment to continuous improvement (DuFour et al., 2006). DuFour (2004) outlined the following three “big ideas” or core principles of a professional learning community: ensuring that all students learn; a culture of collaboration; and a focus on results. In its work, a professional learning community asks four critical questions: (a) What is it we want our students to learn, i.e., what knowledge and skills should every student acquire as a result

of the unit of instruction? (b) How will we know when each student has learned it, i.e., how will we know when each student has acquired the essential knowledge and skills? (c) How will we respond when some students do not learn? and (d) How will we respond when some students have clearly achieved the intended outcomes? (DuFour, 2004; DuFour et al., 2006).

These study teams or groups regularly meet to learn more about a particular issue surrounding student learning or achievement and work together to challenge each other's teaching practices, beliefs, or knowledge in a collaborative, inquiry-based approach (Lambert, 2002, pp. 37-38). "The powerful collaboration that characterizes professional learning communities is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice" (DuFour, 2004, p. 9). These teams of teachers read and discuss books or journal articles (Lambert, 2002, p. 38). Their goal is to better understand the issue or concept being studied and to collectively work toward improved instructional practices that benefit their students and schools (Lambert, 2002, pp. 38-39). Vandeweghe and Varney (2006) identified four principles that guided their particular study group; they acted upon the premises that (a) a learning community encourages individual development; (b) inquiry motivates change; (c) expertise lies within; and (d) reflective practice is key (pp. 285-286). Typically professional learning teams move through seven stages as they progress "from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning" (Graham & Ferriter, 2008, p. 34). Graham and Ferriter (2008) described the seven stages as (a) filling the time; (b) sharing personal practices; (c) planning, planning, planning; (d)

developing common assessments; (e) analyzing student learning; (f) differentiating follow-up; and (g) reflecting on instruction (pp. 34-38). While developing successful professional learning communities is difficult work, Graham and Ferriter asserted that such “teams represent a powerful mechanism for improvements in teaching and learning” (2008, p. 34) – the ultimate goal for any learning organization.

A related professional development activity is lesson study groups. Teachers may participate in lesson study teams because they are interested in teaching a certain concept or skill or because they share a common group of students (Richardson, 2004, pp. 1-2). Richardson stated that lesson study teams focus on what students are learning, how they are working with one another, and what they are saying and/or thinking (2004, p. 1). In his workshops, Schmoker leads teacher participants through a “pared-down version of lesson study,” taking “teachers through an entire team meeting – from identifying a low-scoring standard, to roughing out an appropriate assessment, to building a lesson designed to help as many students as possible success on the assessment” (2006, pp. 7-8). Participants reported that such lesson study meetings (a) “ensure follow-up and reflection on instruction and its impact;” (b) “are results-oriented;” (c) “reinforce a focus on essential common standards;” (d) “are social” and therefore create accountability and commitment to our colleagues; and (e) “honor and empower teachers and their intelligence” (Schmoker, 2006, pp. 9-10).

Coaching. Coaching is a collaborative, teacher-driven process designed to benefit everyone involved; the teachers involved reflect upon their practice, share ideas and

strategies with one another, and work together to build new skills (Dantonio, 2001, pp. 3-4; Toll, 2004, p. 5). Neufeld and Roper (2003) agreed that coaching was meant to be a collaborative process that engaged teachers in developing “the intellectual capacity of schools” (p. 1). Dantonio explained collegial coaching in this way; collegial coaching is “growth-through-practice [which] is the recognition that teaching talent is developed through reflective practice” (2001, p. 8). Collegial coaching is different than traditional in-service training in that teachers share their knowledge, skills, and talents with one another (p. 9). Knight (2004) defined an instructional coach as someone engaged in offering daily, immediate professional development (p. 33). Coaches need to have expertise, but they also have to be flexible, respectful of those with whom they work, be able to use varying approaches and procedures to meet the needs of individualized teachers, and know how to effectively advise “teachers on how to contend with the challenges and opportunities they face” (Knight, 2004, p. 33). Feger, Woleck, and Hickman (2004) agreed. In order to be as successful as possible, coaches needed strong: interpersonal skills, content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of the curriculum, awareness of coaching resources, and knowledge of the practice of coaching (pp. 15-16).

The job of an instructional coach takes on a myriad of roles. Killion and Harrison (2006) asserted that the job of coach included nine roles: catalyst for change, classroom supporter, curriculum specialist, data coach, instructional specialist, learning facilitator, mentor, resource provider, and school leader (p. 2). Knight (2004) described how

instructional coaches worked on site at schools and taught teachers research-based problem-solving strategies and practices (p. 34). These instructional coaches ultimately wanted the teachers they worked with to improve their instruction and for students in turn to increase their learning (Russo, 2004). According to Killion and Harrison (2005), emerging studies showed that coaching increased students' achievement when coaches work directly with teachers in their classrooms (p. 2). However, Russo (2004) reported that although coaching strategies appear to have great potential for improving schools, there has been little research that provides empirical evidence that coaching increases student learning; most of the evidence has been anecdotal (p. 3). Sometimes coaches' work requires them to provide resources, other times the coach needed to plan and/or model a lesson, or perhaps the coach needed to aid in collecting or interpreting classroom data (Russo, 2004). Each role was necessary as coaches worked toward the ultimate goal of helping teachers and students perform at the highest levels possible (Neufeld & Roper, 2003). Coaches want those they coach to be successful.

Service-learning Methodology Summary

Over the past 2 decades, research concerning service learning has increased considerably (Battistoni, 2006), although, Billig (2000) warned that much of the research that exists "comes from service-learning program evaluations" (p. 660). Traditionally, survey research has played a large part in the research base around community service, service learning, and volunteering (Battistoni, 2006). For instance, Keeter et. al (2002), conducted a study comprised of a national telephone survey and an Internet survey of

youth. This study aimed to examine political and civic motivations “through a generational prism” (p. 44). Keeter et. al (2002) surveyed 3, 246 youth and adults, using a random digit sample of telephone numbers. Keeter et. al (2002) surveyed 1, 166 youth and young adults (15 to 25 years of age) via an on-line questionnaire (p. 45).

Another example of a study that used surveys was the National Youth Survey conducted by Lopez (2004). Researchers interviewed 1,000 American youth ages 15-25 on “a range of civic engagement measures” via a nationwide telephone survey; telephone numbers were “drawn from a random digit dial sample” (Lopez, 2004, p. 1). In an effort to develop and field test a set of survey questions “that comprise and index of civic and political engagement,” Andolina et al. (2003) conducted a series of surveys to vet the questions, including a web-based poll that surveyed youth ages 15 to 25 to participate. Andolina et al. (2003) also conducted a national survey via the Internet of 3,246 individuals aged 15 and up. The series of survey studies resulted in an index of 19 items that measure a breadth of civic and political activities with which individuals might engage (Andolina et. al, 2003, p. 1).

Yet another example of a research study employing surveys is that of Seitsinger (2005). Seitsinger (2005) examined the survey results of 2,164 core classroom teachers from 271 middle schools (p. 21). These teachers completed a survey that assessed 48 variables of concern, including questions about service learning and other classroom instructional practices and educational attitudes and beliefs (p. 22). The aforementioned studies represent only a sampling of the studies around community service, service

learning, and volunteering that made use of the survey as a primary means of collecting data.

In recent years, more and more experimental and quasi-experimental studies have been conducted in the field of service learning (Battistoni, 2006, p. 14), although “very few of the studies used control groups and very few tracked whether the impacts were sustained over time” (Billig, 2000, p. 660). One study, however, that utilized control groups was conducted by Strage (2004). Strage (2004) examined the academic records of 477 college students “who completed an Introductory Child Development lecture course with or without a service-learning requirement” (p. 257). Strage (2004) found that the service-learning students academically outperformed the nonservice-learning students. Other service-learning studies have used a mixed-methods design. For instance, Simons and Cleary (2005) used an explanatory mixed methods design for their study and collected both quantitative and qualitative data from 59 undergraduate students enrolled in an educational psychology course (p. 169). Multiple measures were used to collect data, including a demographic questionnaire, a Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire, a Community Service Involvement Preference Inventory, community service-learning evaluations, students’ scores on examinations, and open-ended reflection questions (Simon & Cleary, 2005, pp. 170-173). In another mixed-methods study, Wells and Grabert (2004) collected data from multiple sources, including a survey, reflection/learning journals, and a final reflection paper from 40 undergraduate college students enrolled in a psychology class.

Some researchers have invoked qualitative research traditions, such as case studies. For instance, Brown and Howard (2005) studied five secondary teacher candidates who had been through an alternate certification program that included exposure to Brown's model of service learning for teacher candidates. Brown and Howard (2005) probed participants' reflections on how the service-learning activities they had designed and implemented had "increased their social justice sensitivity and augmented their commitment to becoming culturally responsive classroom teachers" (p. 3).

Organizations, such as the Carnegie Foundation, Pew Charitable Trusts, and CIRCLE, have funded many research studies around civic education, including service learning (Battistoni, 2006; CIRCLE, 2003 & 2007). Battistoni (2006) and others (i.e., Billig, 2000; CIRCLE, 2003 & 2007) have called for longitudinal studies, and an increase in both qualitative and quantitative studies centered around the larger concepts of "civic engagement, education for citizenship, political or community involvement, public work, and most importantly social sustainability" (Battistoni, 2006, p. 15). This researcher is hopeful that this study will add to the research base by using the qualitative tradition of phenomenology, a tradition underutilized in the study of service learning.

Conclusions

One of the primary purposes of public education is the education of its citizenry and the preparation for all students to fully participate in a democratic society (Dewey, 1897, 1916; Glickman & Alridge, 2001). A majority of American youth have described

themselves as “completely disengaged from public life” (Keeter et al., 2002, p. 27). Schools need to model the importance of valuing and respecting each individual; educators must be committed to constantly reflecting on their practices individually and collaboratively as they work to engage all students in democratic learning.

Service learning is an instructional strategy that has been repeatedly shown to statistically improve grades and overall engagement with school (Billig, 2002, 2006; Davila & Mora, 2007; Kaye, 2004; Pleasants et al., 2004; Schauffler, 2005; Strage, 2004). Another effect of service learning documented by quantitative and qualitative studies is the positive impact it has on civic engagement (CIRCLE, 2003, 2007; Davila & Mora, 2007; Zaff & Michelsen, 2001). Service-learning projects can be individualized to capitalize on students’ interests and preferences, can be differentiated based on readiness and ability, can empower students by providing appropriate challenges and successes, and can provide students with clear opportunities to directly experience what Dewey (1916) referred to as educative concepts at work in the real-world (Billig, 2002, 2006). Service-learning projects are constructivist and tap prior knowledge, relate content to students’ lives, structure learning content for success, and set a positive emotional tone—all of which Marzano (2003) stated was necessary for teachers to do in order to motivate students to learn.

Educators can help empower and equip students to fully participate in a democratic society by ensuring that ample opportunities are provided for students to construct their own knowledge and practice their citizenship skills by engaging in civics

education programs, such as high-quality service-learning projects (CIRCLE, 2007). Educators need to model democratic principles of shared leadership in their classrooms and school communities, inviting all stakeholders to actively participate in helping fulfill a fundamental purpose of public education i.e., preparing all children to be active citizens (Dewey, 1897, 1906, 1917; Glickman & Aldridge, 2001).

In order to help improve student achievement and equity, educators need to have a wide spectrum of professional development opportunities available to them, all of which are teacher-driven, collaborative, job-embedded, and inquiry-based (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; DuFour et al., 2006; Dantonio, 2001; Little, 2001; Lomax, 2005).

Professional learning communities, including study teams and lesson study groups, as well as collegial coaching opportunities are professional development structures that should aid educators in the following: (a) learning more about high-quality service learning; (b) examining effective strategies for engaging their students in service learning that increases student learning; (c) analyzing current implementations of service-learning projects; and (d) challenging the thinking and instructional practices of one another with the purpose of increasing student learning, e.g., academic achievement, civic engagement, and personal and social development. Please transition here to section 3.

Section 3: Research Method

Introduction

The primary purpose of this phenomenological study was to elicit a participant-driven explanation of the phenomenon of service-learning experiences of rural middle-school students and their educators. This study was guided by the central questions: What are the effects of service-learning projects on rural middle-school students? What kinds of professional development opportunities will educators need to effectively engage their students in service-learning projects? Additional subquestions guided the study, such as: How do service-learning experiences impact students' views of their roles in schools and society? What professional development methods or approaches would improve the effectiveness of service-learning projects in increasing civic efficacy for all students?

Service learning has been widely studied; however, one deficiency I noted in the literature is a lack of a student-driven, inductive approach to examining the effects of service learning. The academic benefits of service learning have been well documented; quantitative studies have repeatedly demonstrated that service learning done well can statistically improve grades and overall engagement with school (Billig, 2002, 2006; Kaye, 2004; Pleasants, Stephens, Selph & Pfeiffer, 2004; Schaufli, 2005; Strage, 2004). Another benefit of service learning documented by quantitative studies is the impact that it has on civic engagement. However, the research on the civic and political benefits of service-learning projects, including civic and political knowledge, skills, and attitudes is not as well documented or studied as is the academic benefits of service-learning

(CIRCLE, 2003; Zaff & Michelsen, 2001). This qualitative research study was needed in order to discover how youth who experience service learning perceive its effects to be on their school and community lives. A second gap in the service-learning research is the lack of studies on young adolescents (Zaff & Michelsen, 2001); this study addressed this deficiency in the literature. A third gap in the service-learning research is the lack of studies that represent rural populations; most of the larger studies have been conducted close to a university setting or within a highly populated geographical region. I recognized the unique set of circumstances and factors that come into play when dealing with rural areas with scarce human and material resources. I addressed these gaps in the literature by researching an understudied group, i.e., rural youth, and by examining the perceived effects of service-learning projects.

Qualitative Tradition

Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as:

an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

Creswell (1998, pp. 16-17) stated that qualitative inquiry is appropriate if a researcher is willing to do the following:

(a) commit to extensive time in the field; (b) engage in the complex, time-consuming process of data analysis—the ambitious task of sorting through large

amounts of data and reducing them to a few themes or categories; (c) write long passages, because the evidence must substantiate claims and the writer needs to show multiple perspectives; and (d) participate in a form of social and human science research that does not have firm guidelines or specific procedures and is evolving and changing constantly.

There are many reasons why one might choose to engage in qualitative inquiry. For instance, if one's research questions begin with how or what and are intended to describe, then qualitative research might be a good choice (Creswell, 1998, p. 17). Other reasons why one might chose qualitative inquiry include the following: (a) because the "topic needs to be explored;" (b) because "of the need to present a detailed view of the topic;" (c) because one wishes to "study individuals in their natural setting;" (d) because of a writer's interest in writing in a narrative style; (e) because a researcher has "sufficient time and resources to spend on extensive data collection in the field;" (f) because one's audience might be receptive to qualitative studies; and/or (g) because one wishes to "emphasize the researcher's role as an active learner who can tell the story from the participants' view rather than as an 'expert' who passes judgment on participants" (Creswell, 1998, pp. 17-18).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is one of the five traditions of qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 1998). It is the "study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view" (Smith, 2008, p. 1). Phenomenology is the study of the way we

experience things and concentrates on the conscious experience from the subjective or first-person point of view (Creswell, 1998, pp. 51-52; Littlejohn & Foss, 2008, pp. 37-39). A phenomenological study helps to describe the experiences individuals have with regard to a particular phenomenon or concept (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). Littlejohn and Foss (2008) put it like this. “Phenomenology is the way in which human beings come to understand the world through direct experience. You come to know something by consciously examining it and testing your feelings and perceptions about it” (p. 37).

I used qualitative research because of its descriptive nature, because of the nature of the research questions, and because of the focus on participant perspective. The goal of the study was to describe the experiences of various stakeholders (students, teachers, administrators, and community partners) of one middle school’s service-learning initiative. I used open-ended “how” and “what” research questions typical of qualitative studies (Creswell, 1998, p. 99) to arrive at the participants’ viewpoints. Because the primary method of collecting data were through long interviews, I used the phenomenological tradition of inquiry (Creswell, 1998, p. 65). In addition to the use of interviews, additional and varied data were collected, including student reflection papers, grant documents and reports, and observations of service-learning projects in action and project presentations.

A quantitative study was considered for the research study; however, quantitative data, such as survey data, would be less useful in answering my “how” and “what”

questions. I determined that while such a design may provide interesting data about service learning at a rural middle school, it would not be as useful in providing a depth of understanding and new dialogue to the service-learning research community. Because I wanted to look at participants' perceptions of their experiences with curriculum-embedded service-learning projects, as opposed to conducting a comparative study with a service-learning group and a non-service-learning group, an experimental or quasi-experimental study seemed not to be a viable option.

Research Questions

This study explored the perceptions and experiences of rural middle-school students and their educators with service-learning projects. The phenomenological study explored the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of service-learning projects on rural middle-school students?
2. How do service-learning experiences impact students' views of their roles in schools and society?
3. What kinds of professional development opportunities will educators need to effectively engage their students in service-learning projects?

Context for Study

The study was conducted in a rural, public, middle school in the northeastern United States with a school population of approximately 370 fifth through eighth graders and 65 staff members. The population of the town where the school was located is roughly 5,500, and the pre K-12 school district has a student population of approximately

1,200. The closest university or college was located approximately 40 miles away. All students in the middle school where the study was conducted have a civics education component to their yearly social studies curriculum. The seventh and eighth grade teams have made service learning one of their foci for the 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011 school years and have engaged their students in several projects throughout the last three school years. Both the middle school being studied and the district as a whole have been involved in a service-learning initiative for the past five school years with each school building having a service-learning coordinator. Grant money was available to teachers and teams who applied for the money through a mini-grant process.

During the 2009-2010 school year, seventh and eighth grade teams, with the help of the district curriculum coordinator, applied for and received a grant from KIDS (Kids Involved in Doing Service) Consortium to aid them in the development and implementation of a local history service-learning project. In addition, the seventh and eighth grade teams collaborated to begin the year with an introductory unit to service; as a result of that unit, their students created a service corps called PENCORPS. The service corps designed and implemented a service project entitled Kids' Fun Day as part of their participation in the National Day of Service. This site was unique in that the seventh and eighth grade teams have emphasized the importance of service-learning experiences for all their students by embedding the service learning into the curricula. As a result of the increased engagement in service-learning projects, I was interested in conducting the

study in this setting, exploring how middle school students and their educators talk about their experiences with service learning.

Ethical Concerns

As a result of nearly half of the study's participants being under the age of 18 years of age, special consideration was made to ensure the protection of the participants. I met with the potential student participants and their parents or guardians to explain the study and answer any questions, prior to having students and their parents/guardians sign consent forms. I ensured participants that their privacy would be respected in that their identities would not be revealed; participants were identified through a numbering system as opposed to by name. In addition, I took precautions to protect the data files by keeping print files as well as my hard drive with the electronic files of transcripts, coding attempts, and my notes under lock and key in my office safe. Because this study had minimal (if any) risks associated with it, I was comfortable with engaging students of middle school age in this study as well as their educators. In fact, I wished to give voice to participants, ensuring that the adults in charge of making curriculum decisions heard youth viewpoints and that the larger research community heard the voices of middle school educators. I wished to empower participants by giving their voices "airtime" and making sure that rural participants' views and perceptions became part of the literature dialogue around service learning experiences.

Data were not collected for this study until after I received approval from the Walden University Internal Review Board (IRB) to do so. The IRB approval number for

this research study is #03-02-10-0335007. I also received permissions from both the superintendent of schools and the principal of the study site to conduct research at the middle school.

Role of Researcher

This researcher embraced a qualitative approach to better understand issues in the studied middle school related to a lack of youth civic and political engagement as well as the lack of professional-development opportunities offered to local educators addressing high-quality service-learning experiences. Since the study was first designed, more emphasis has been paid by the district to meeting the professional-development needs of educators around service learning. In spite of a lack of ongoing professional development opportunities around high-quality service learning in prior years, the school district being studied encouraged teachers to engage their students in service-learning projects as part of their civics education. Over the past 5 years, teachers around the district had been “doing” service learning, but it had been my observation, that many had not reaped the benefits that research suggested.

After completing much reading, thinking, and experimenting in her classroom with service-learning, I held the proposition that educators in the district were not engaging students in what the literature referred to as “high-quality” service learning. Instead many of the service-learning projects, including ones in which I had engaged my own students, were one-shot projects, loosely linked to curriculum and short in duration and depth. From initial conversations with teachers, I postulated that it was not because

they could not be bothered to engage their students in high-quality service learning or were philosophically opposed but rather because the educators were not sure what high-quality service learning looked like. From these experiences, I became interested in interviewing teachers in the middle school who had engaged their students in service-learning projects in the past school year. I was interested in ascertaining what their experiences had been with service learning, including their purposes for engaging students in service learning; what impacts they hoped to see and what impacts they had seen; what measurements they were using to determine the impacts of service-learning; what their current understanding of the components of a quality service-learning experience included; what kinds of support and/or professional development they would like to see around service learning; and what kinds of reflection activities they, their students, and community partners had experienced, among other things.

I had been drawn to qualitative research because of its ability to probe more into the thoughts and ideas of participants than I might be able to do in a quantitative study. Likewise, I had learned much in my dozen years as a middle school educator by listening to students. Unfortunately, educators do not often enough find the time or energy to ask the right questions of students, listen attentively to their responses, and learn from what they have to say. Too often, adults report what the effects are of a particular instructional strategy, based on their own perceptions and assumptions without giving proper attention to truly gathering/listening to students' perceptions and gleaning ways to improve and make more effective the experiences for all involved.

Over the past seven years I had dabbled in engaging students in service-learning projects. My goal had always been to help students feel empowered about being able to make a difference in real-world problems. Five years ago, I became the building level coordinator for service learning and worked to encourage and publicize projects with which her colleagues and their students were engaged. I began attending workshops and seminars on service learning, reading literature on the topic, as I attempted to educate myself and my colleagues more deeply about the topic.

I am no longer in the classroom, nor am I the building-level service-learning coordinator. As a result, my role in the study was to collect and analyze the data. I worked in the same building that I taught in for ten years, so I of course engaged in dialogue with my colleagues about social studies education, including service learning. I had access to students, their educators, and the site by virtue of being a member of the middle school being studied.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

I used a criterion sampling procedure for selecting participants for this study (Creswell, 1998, p. 112, 119). Creswell stated that because it is “essential that all participants experience the phenomenon being studied,” there is a fairly narrow range of sampling types available for a phenomenological study with “criterion sampling working well” (p. 118). There were three categories of participants in this study: middle school students, middle school educators, and community partners. I narrowed the student population to nine seventh and eighth graders from one middle school. I chose to study

this particular population for three reasons. First, I knew that service-learning projects were ongoing in the building and, second, that teachers and teams throughout the district were examining the effectiveness of various civics education programs, including service learning. Third, I was involved in various leadership capacities within the district and felt that the outcomes of this study had potential to have a direct impact on the future experiences of students and educators within district. I chose seventh and eighth graders for participation in this study for two reasons: (a) because they had the most exposure to service-learning experiences as a result of their teams creating a service corps; and (b) because I was not currently teaching any of these students nor was I a part of any of the projects with which they are engaged, so there was less of a conflict of interest issue. Of the approximately 180 seventh and eighth graders who had engaged in service-learning projects during the 2009-2010 school year, I asked for the seventh grade and the eighth grade teams of teachers to place the students in one of three categories: (a) leadership/high participation/engagement in service learning; (b) moderate participation/engagement in service learning; or (c) little to no participation/engagement in service learning. From each of those three categories, I randomly selected three students to participate in this phenomenological study examining their experiences with service-learning projects. If a student participant had dropped out of the study, I would have randomly selected another student from the same category to take his/her place. Fortunately, none of the nine student participants dropped out of the study.

In choosing the participants for the middle school educator participants, I invited all six of the seventh and eighth grade teachers involved in engaging students in service-learning projects this past school year, as well as the district curriculum coordinator who had been instrumental in writing service-learning grants and providing funding, and the middle-school principal. In addition to these eight educators, I was also interested in inviting two school-community partners who had worked closely with the seventh and eighth grade teams during the school year in an extensive service-learning project. Six of the eight educators and one of the two community partners chose to participate in the study.

Data Collection Procedures

I was interested in interviewing rural middle-school students who had engaged in service-learning projects over the past school year and their teachers who had engaged their students in service-learning projects in the past school year. I used a semi-structured interview approach as described by Merriam (2002, p. 13). I used a long interview protocol (Creswell, 1998, p. 112) to explore what the interviewee's perceptions of the benefits and challenges of engaging in service-learning projects were; what impacts he/she hoped to see and what impacts he/she had seen; what measurements were being used to determine the impacts of service-learning; what the current understanding of the components of a quality service-learning experience included; what kinds of support and/or professional development the interviewee would like to see around service learning; and what kinds of reflection activities the participants had experienced. The

semi-structured interview approach provided the forum for learning more about a student's and educator's views of the benefits and challenges of service learning, but also the professional development needs of staff around high-quality service learning.

Prior to conducting the interview, I tested the recording equipment, i.e., an iBook laptop and snowball microphone with a USB port. This method of recording allowed the interviewer to set the laptop and microphone on a stand or table near the interviewee but yet out of the way. The interviewer and interviewee could then sit comfortably facing one another, carry on the conversation, and the microphone picked up the voices just fine. I piloted the interview question protocol and equipment, using a colleague. I was pleased that I had tested out the recording options and had everything cued and ready to go prior to the pilot interview. It felt natural to engage a participant in conversation, as it did not feel forced or unauthentic engage in respectful, polite, and open conversation. An interviewer should show good manners; be polite (Hatch, 2002, pp. 107, 114; Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 98); show respect (Creswell, 1998, p. 125; Hatch, p. 107; Rubin & Rubin, p. 97); build trust by being open, honest, and fair (Rubin & Rubin, pp. 92-93); control nonverbal expressions i.e., frowning, shaking of head, furrowed brow... (Canter, 2005; Hatch, p. 108); be nonjudgmental (Hatch, pp. 106-107; Rubin & Rubin, p. 82); demonstrate active listening skills (Hatch, pp. 107-109, 115); show caring interest in what the participant is saying (Hatch, p. 108; Rubin & Rubin, p. 81); and refrain from sharing dissenting opinions and arguing with the interviewee (Hatch, pp. 108, 110; Rubin

& Rubin, p. 82). Each of these components of polite conversation was easy and natural for me to incorporate into the interview conversation.

An interviewee must also honor an interviewee's time and stick to the length agreed upon by the interviewee (Canter, 2005; Hatch, 2002, p. 111). During the pilot interview, I was conscious of this fact and when I reached the end of the second main question, I noticed that the interview was at about twenty minutes. I alerted the interviewee and asked if he/she would like to continue or not. The interviewee agreed to continue the interview, and it lasted approximately twenty minutes longer. After the pilot interview was completed, I transcribed the interview. I used my laptop, playing and pausing the recorded interview using a transcription pedal borrowed from a colleague while I typed verbatim what was said in the first twenty minutes of the interview.

This pilot interview served me well and became the model I used to collect interview data. Extended interviews were conducted with the nine middle-school students, six middle-school educators, and one community partner, using a semi-structured interview protocol. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed.

In addition to the interviews, participants' reflection entries, project blogs, Moodle discussion posts, observation notes from service-learning events, and grant documents and reports were examined. The written documents and observation write-ups were read and reread, looking for additional perspectives or viewpoints that may not have come out during the interviews. Follow-up interviews with some participants resulted as an outcome of examining this data. In addition, I observed the participants in action while

working on their service-learning projects to record perceptions, dialogue, and nonverbals that shed additional light on the participants' experiences with service learning. These observations also resulted in follow-up interviews with three of the participants.

Data Analysis Procedures

After conducting the pilot interview, I worked to develop a coding system. In doing so I followed Rubin and Rubin's guidelines (2005) for the initial phase of data analysis. In this first phase of analysis, "you prepare transcripts; find, refine, and elaborate concepts, themes, and events; and then code the interviews to be able to retrieve what the interviewees have said about the identified concepts, themes, and events" (Rubin & Rubin, p. 201). In general, I also followed Creswell's eight step process for analyzing qualitative data: (a) get a sense of the whole by reading the transcript carefully and jotting down ideas; (b) pick one transcript to examine and think about the underlying meaning; (c) make a list of all the topics and cluster together similar topics; (d) go back to the data with the topic lists, develop code labels, and code text segments; (e) turn your topics into categories by grouping them together to show interrelationships; (f) make a final decision on the abbreviation of each code; (g) put the data material for each category together in one spot and begin analysis; and (h) recode existing data if necessary (2003, pp. 192).

I transcribed the interviews. "Before the analysis was conducted, it was important to get a sense for the entire interview within its context. Each interview was listened to

and read three or four times before analysis commenced” (Merriam, 2002, p. 124). Upon reading and rereading the interview transcripts, I pulled out a few memorable quotes to include as a memo in a “notable quote file” (Rubin & Rubin, p. 205) for future use. For instance, I included the following block quote in the file:

I think the types of students that it would be most difficult for would be those that are kind of concrete-sequential. They like to follow the recipe. They want to know what it’s going to look like, taste like at the end. They want to know step A and step B, and they want to check off when they have everything completed, and they want a very tight timeline. And they want it to be perfect too along the way.
(educator 1)

I then wrote the following summary of the interview transcript: the interviewee explained the set-up of service learning in her district, detailing who the players were as she understood it, including the curriculum coordinator who controls the purse strings. The interviewee argued that service-learning projects work for nearly every type of student, with students who are concrete-sequential perhaps having the most difficult time with the projects. The interviewee identified the hands-on, real-life connections of service learning as being a benefit to students. She identified the fact that authentic needs are met for community partners at little to no cost as a real benefit to the community. The interviewee identified time management as a challenge for both students and teachers; a related challenge for community partners and teachers is how to manage the number of students and the number of needs or projects that might legitimately exist.

The next step in Rubin and Rubin's first stage of transcript analysis was recognizing or identifying concepts, themes, events, and topic markers (2005, pp. 206-207). Creswell (1998) referred to this approach of narrowing down the data into categories as "winnowing" the data (p. 140). As part of this process, I first identified major categories, such as: benefits to students, benefits to teachers and schools, benefits to the community, challenges to students, challenges to teachers and schools, challenges for the community, service learning definition, service learning structure, and service learning examples. Researchers "look for major themes, key words, and indexes of behavior and belief, and they make an initial list of major and minor categories" (Janesick, 2004, p. 86). Creswell (1998) suggested developing a "short list of tentative codes (e.g., 12 or so) that match a text segment, regardless of the length of the database" (p. 141). I developed a shorthand label or code for the initial categories (as suggested by Creswell), reread the transcript, and coded it using the labels developed.

After additional readings of the transcript, I identified concepts within and across those categories such as time-management, authentic needs, real-life connections, differentiation, mutual benefits or reciprocal relationships, action, money, views of youth, and management. After identifying the concepts and themes, I established a coding system (a label) and began coding the transcript once again, identifying data units or chunks that fit into each of the coded categories (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As part of this process, I transcribed the remainder of the pilot interview that had not been transcribed earlier to identify codes related to the professional development portion of the interview,

such as professional development needs, professional development suggestions, and professional development challenges.

The data analysis spiral continued as I reread the various interviews in their “entirety several times” (Creswell, 1998, pp. 142-143). I wrote memos, “short phrases, ideas, or key concepts” that stood out to her as I reread the interview (p. 144). I then reflected upon what the data seemed to be saying, “asking questions of the data” (Hatch, 2002, p. 148) and created categories or domains that represented these larger thoughts. I looked for domains or categories organized around semantic relationships, such as strict inclusion, cause and effect, and attribution (Hatch, 2002, p. 165). I then asked for a peer reviewer to read the interview transcript and offer categories or domains that stood out to him. The peer reviewer, a colleague with some experience with inductive, qualitative research and the coding process, identified several domains similar to the ones I had identified in the previous three attempts at developing a coding system. I obtained the idea to engage a peer in the process of identifying categories from Janesick’s analyzing interview data exercise (2004, p. 85). I then compared the categories the peer reviewer had created with those I had created. I reread the interview transcript once again, and then began working to forge a revised domain outline.

Once the categories had been determined and outlined, I began pulling out chunks or excerpts of data from the transcript to support each outline category (Creswell, 1998, p. 144; Hatch, 2002, p. 162). This process called for a careful line-by-line reading of the transcript and a cut and paste procedure. I examined each line of the interviews to

determine what category, if any, it supported. I copied chunks of data from the interview transcript and pasted them into the domain outline. I understood the recursive, spiraling nature of data analysis and knew that as additional interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed, the domains would be refined and reduced to five or six categories or general themes (Creswell, pp. 142-144). “Inductive data analysis is a search for patterns of meaning in data so that general statements about phenomenon under investigation can be made” (Hatch, p. 161). This coding system exercise illustrated to me the complex and time-consuming nature of analyzing qualitative data. I gained a new appreciation for her qualitative research brothers and sisters who engage in the “mindwork” of making sense of qualitative data (Hatch, p. 148). This researcher used the analysis procedures piloted and described above as I further conducted this phenomenological study. In addition to the coding and categorizing of the interview transcriptions, I coded and categorized the participants’ reflection logs, grant documents, and project observations. These additional sources of data helped make the already rich data collected from the extended interviews that much richer.

Validity of Study

I used numerous methods to establish “credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” (Janesick, 2004, p. 102). One way that I worked to ensure quality was by engaging in a pilot study of limited duration before beginning the study. Janesick (2004) asserted that pilot studies were one way that one could “test one’s skills as observer and interviewer” before the study began (p. 106). Mills (2003) stated that data

analysis was a researcher's attempt "to summarize the data that have been collected in a dependable, accurate, reliable, and correct manner" (p. 104). I also used member checks, triangulation of data, peer review, and "long-term exposure to the program" (p. 102) as means of enhancing credibility. Mills (2003) encouraged the use of "consciously pausing during the investigation" to "reflect on what you are attending to and what you are leaving out" (p. 103). The use of the peer review process encouraged me to take a reflective stance, in addition to aiding in the credibility of the study. Janesick (2004) confirmed that the use of peer reviewers was an important step in ensuring credibility (p. 109).

In addition to the aforementioned credibility checks, I included "rich description of both sites and program" to address transferability issues (Mills, 2003, p. 102). I kept a journal "documenting the steps [I took] during the data collection and data analysis portions of the...study" (p. 102) in order to establish dependability. Hatch (2002) verified the usefulness of keeping a journal when he recommended that "researchers keep track of their impressions, reactions, reflections, and tentative interpretations in field notes and/or research journals" (p. 149) In order to "augment the confirmability" (p. 103) of the case study, I used outside readers and maintained an extensive paperwork trail. Creswell (2003) and Janesick (2004) agreed that the use of outside readers was a valid approach to checking the accuracy of one's findings.

Creswell stated that by clarifying one's bias, it "creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers" (2003, p. 196). An additional strategy for

checking the accuracy of one's findings was that of presenting "negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the themes" (Creswell, p. 196). Creswell further explained that sharing contrary information adds credibility to the study and helps the account ring true for the reader.

Summary

Participants in the study included nine middle-school students, six middle-school educators, and one community partner. Data were collected primarily from in-depth interviews of each participant; I also collected and analyzed grant documents and participants' journal entries, in addition to completing formal observations of various service-learning events. This section discussed the collection of data and the coding process used to determine the categories of themes that emerged from the data. Section 4 will share the results of the data.

Section 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore participants' perspectives about their experiences with service-learning projects. Participants in the study included nine middle-school students, six middle-school educators, and one community partner. Data were collected primarily from in-depth interviews of each participant. However, I also collected and analyzed grant documents and participants' journal entries, in addition to completing formal observations of various service-learning events. This section presents the analysis of the data collected and coded during the study. Data collected during the study were used to answer the following three research questions:

1. What are the perceived effects of service-learning projects on rural middle-school students?
2. How do service-learning experiences impact students' views of their roles in schools and society?
3. What kinds of professional-development opportunities will educators need to effectively engage their students in high-quality service-learning projects?

Participant Selection

I used criterion sampling to select her participants: seventh and eighth grade students and educators from a rural, northeastern middle school and community partners who had worked with the students. All participants were selected because of their direct

involvement with service-learning projects over the previous two school years.

All nine of the students randomly selected from the approximately 180 seventh and eighth graders chose to participate in the project. Of the eight educators selected, six chose to participate in the study. Of the two community partners selected, one chose to participate in the study. Consent and assent forms were completed, and participants were assured of their rights as participants. Parents of each of the selected students were contacted, and consent was gathered prior to engaging students in the study.

Process

Data were collected over a 10-month period from March to December 2010. In-depth interviews of all nine students, the six educators, and one community partner were completed, transcribed, and coded during that time. All student and community partner interviews occurred at the middle school in a conference room or private office, using a MacBook, an external microphone, and GarageBand software to record the interviews. Five of the educator interviews occurred at my home office, away from the distractions of the school, and one of the educator interviews occurred at the middle school in a private office. Observations of four service-learning events occurred, two hosted at the middle school and two hosted at the participating district's high school, including a school board presentation by middle-school participants. Observations and researcher notes were recorded using an observation protocol developed for the study. A third source of data came from participants' reflection journals. Not all participants kept and/or shared their journal entries with me: of the sixteen participants in the study, nine shared one or more

of their written reflections with me. The fourth source of data collected was grant documents and reports.

Participant Profiles

Educator 1 has a bachelor's degree in elementary education with a concentration in mathematics and science and a master's degree in curriculum and instruction. She is currently finishing a certificate of advanced study in technology education. She holds curriculum coordinator's and administrator's endorsements in addition to her teaching endorsements. She is an active member of the district, providing technology clinics and other professional-development opportunities for staff. She has served on numerous school-wide and district-wide committees, including the Technology Committee, the Training and Professional Development Committee and its sub committee of Teacher Evaluation, and the Recertification Committee. Educator 1 is a trained mentor and an advocate for teachers new to the profession and/or district. Educator 1 has participated in service learning for the past four years, engaging students in interdisciplinary service-learning projects.

Educator 2 has a bachelor's degree in English and a Masters in literacy with Literacy Specialist certification. She has been involved in education for the past 24 years as a middle-level English language arts (ELA) teacher, department head and athletic coach. She has served on numerous committees in her districts, including accreditation, school improvement, and assessment. Her recent professional interests include Thoughtful Education, service learning, using professional learning communities to

improve student learning, and educational reform utilizing the ReInventing Schools Coalition (RISC) model.

Educator 3 has a bachelor's degree in elementary education with a concentration in English and an endorsement in teaching middle school. She has been in education for four years as a middle-level English language arts teacher. She has been involved with service-learning projects for the past three years. She is currently serving as the seventh grade team leader. Her professional interests include Thoughtful Education, technology, literacy, and service learning.

Educator 4 has a bachelor's degree from the University of Maine in secondary education with a concentration in social studies. She has been in the field of education for six years, with the roles of seventh and eighth grade English language arts and social studies teacher. She has served as Curriculum Resource Teacher (CRT) for the social studies department, a member of the district's Service Learning Team, the service learning coordinator for her school, and the team leader for the Maine Community Heritage Project. She has been involved with service learning for the last three years.

Educator 5 has an associate's degree in the humanities, a bachelor's degree in English with a minor in philosophy, and a master's degree in educational leadership with a concentration in curriculum design and instructional supervision. She has been involved in education for the past 36 years as middle-school English language arts and mathematics teacher, a high-school English teacher and department head, an adjunct instructor for a northeastern community college and an adult education program, and a

curriculum director. She has served on and facilitated numerous teams and committees, such as Curriculum Design, Training and Professional Development, Assessment, Response to Intervention, Dropout Prevention, and Learn and Serve America Service Learning Leadership, and she is an active member of numerous professional organizations. She has been an advocate for service learning since 2003-04.

Educator 6 has a bachelor's degree in elementary education with a concentration in physical education and a master's degree in administration. He is currently pursuing his Certificate of Advanced Study (CAS) degree in administration. He has been an educator for the last 27 years, including being a building administrator for the past 18 years. Prior to his work as athletic director, assistant principal, and principal for rural middle and high schools, he worked as a math teacher, physical educator, and social studies teacher. He is active in the state's Principal Association, serving on and chairing several committees. In addition to running his middle school and chairing building-level committees and teams, Educator 6 is an active member of many district-wide committees and initiatives, including the Service Learning Leadership team, the Training and Professional Development Committee, and its Teacher Evaluation sub-committee, the Response to Intervention team, the Technology Committee, and the Dropout Prevention Committee.

The Community Partner participant served as president of the Local Historical Society for the past decade and has been a founding member of the society. She and her husband have worked with middle school students and educators on service-learning

projects for the past two years. She was an instrumental member of the middle school's grant-writing group that successfully worked to put together a grant application to preserve local history.

The nine student participants are either seventh or eighth graders in a rural middle school. All nine students participated in at least two service-learning projects during the past school year.

Systems

In order to keep track of the data and emerging understandings, I relied on a log, a journal, and a cataloging system. The log was primarily used to track when and where each interview occurred, to record the length of the interview, and to verify that consent and assent forms had been obtained. I used an electronic word document to summarize her thoughts and overall impressions of each interview, observation, journal, and grant document. The electronic Microsoft Word document was also used in conjunction with an ongoing electronic coding outline to keep track of emerging categories and possible themes. I used both a print copy and electronic cataloging system to keep track of each transcribed interview, observation protocol, journal entry, and grant document. At first, I relied on an electronic cataloging system, but found that I needed to write thoughts and ideas in the margins of the interviews I was coding. As a result, I had to develop a hard-copy cataloging system as well. I stored the physical copy of each consent and assent form after the binder tab for each participant, along with a transcription of the participant's interview and/or reflection journal. I housed a separate binder for

observations and a separate one for data collected relating to one of the three service-learning grants that helped fund the district's initiative. The binders were kept in a locked filing cabinet in her home office, along with an external hard drive back-up of all electronic files related to the doctoral study.

Findings

In this section, I will first present a synopsis of participants' descriptions of service learning at "our school," their definitions of what service learning was all about for them, and then findings related to themes that emerged around each of the three research questions.

Description of "Service Learning at Our School"

Participants, especially the educators and students, spoke at length of their personal involvement in service learning. As part of these descriptions, participants often made a point to discuss those involved, including who the "players" were and what their roles seemed to be, the community needs being met by the service-learning experiences; the "target audience" of the project, and the evolution of their understanding of service learning as a result of the experience.

I think service learning has really developed in our school from teacher interest.

We have had various service groups in the past, and it expanded into service learning. We have had a couple of teachers in particular that have shown initiative with that, partnered up with the district curriculum coordinator and the high

school initiative to make it part of curricula expectations for students.

(Educator 6)

Definition of Service Learning

When asked to explain their definitions of service learning, participants consistently spoke of four defining qualities: authentic needs of the community are met; learning is applied outside of the classroom; academic knowledge and skills are learned; and civic learning/volunteerism is embedded in the experience.

Authentic needs of the community are met. Participants spoke about the importance of what KIDS Consortium calls “apprentice citizenship” (KIDS, 2005), the idea that one key component of service learning is providing youth with opportunities to wrestle with authentic needs or problems in the community, examine possible solutions, and take action to try to solve the authentic needs or bring increased awareness to the area of concern. Both middle-school students and educators discussed the importance of authentic needs being met. The following quotes are examples of participants’ comments on the centrality of service learning meeting authentic community needs: “Service learning is about doing something for your community” (Student 5). “It’s where we help our own community, or someone outside the community, or outside the U.S., who are in need, to make their lives better, or so they don’t have as much work to do on their own” (Student 7). “We are helping them [the Historical Society] put their website up, and it’s making their job a whole lot easier” (Student 9). “Students from our school assisted people with quilts when they were ill” (Educator 1).

It begins with the teacher or a student sharing with the students that somebody has a need, whether it's school-based or local community or larger than that. That somebody has a need that maybe they could help with conjuring up within the students a desire to actually do something about that need. Then it's about getting those same students who now have an interest in doing something involved in planning how to go about meeting that need. (Educator 2)

Learning is applied outside of the classroom. Another defining quality used to explain what service learning is all about for those involved in the study was the importance of the service-learning experience transporting students beyond the walls of their classrooms. This aspect of service learning helped answer the question, "Why will I ever need to learn this?" By helping students engage in application of the learning to a "real-world" setting, educators help provide purpose for what is often seen as simply an academic exercise. The following quotes are examples of participants' comments on the centrality of service learning transporting students outside of the classroom into "real-world" settings: "Service learning for me is all about engaging my students in projects that take the student outside of the classroom" (Educator 4).

Service learning is an opportunity to put teeth into what it is kids are learning in the classroom so that they have an authentic way, or a real-life way, if you will, of applying the concepts and skills that they're learning. (Educator 5)

"That whole notion of giving kids an opportunity to apply what they're learning is really the key point in the whole thing" (Educator 1).

Academic knowledge and skills are learned. When asked to define service learning, participants talked about the crucial importance of the experience actually teaching students not only important life skills but also truly engaging them in learning the standards that are part of the curriculum. Educators talked about their understanding of the importance of not just loosely linking the project to their content area but of being sure that the project was linked in rigorous ways to the curriculum and what they would teach in the classrooms regardless of the instructional strategy used to teach the content, skills, and/or habits of mind. Educators spoke about how this was a developing skill for them and a transition from a community service focus, where one might loosely link a service project to “doing math” by “tallying items” or “rolling coins.” One of the participants further explained this idea by talking about teaching sixth grade math and science and engaging students in what she thought was a service-learning project connected to math. She later realized that in order for it to meet the academic integrity requirement of service learning she would have to incorporate the “actual bullets of her curriculum guide.” The following quotes are examples of participants’ comments on the importance of embedding rigorous academic learning into the service experiences: “We just got done with [learning about] world hunger, and now we’re kind of going into Haiti activities. And if you do service learning, it’s like donating, having fundraisers for a good cause, or teaching someone else what you have learned” (Student 7). “One thing service learning does is help kids learn about what’s happening around the world, and that we’re lucky to have what we have when other people don’t have it, and we don’t

realize it” (Student 9). “[Service learning] is involving students in a project that they do outside of school that relates to some academic learning that they are doing in school” (Educator 2).

SL is a project that involves the students in learning a skill or a concept that they would be essentially required to learn in my class regardless of what the activity was, but that we connected that learning to an activity that connected with somebody outside of just us in the classroom. A great example of the importance of ensuring that a project has academic rigor is the food cupboard project-where it used to be a community service project; they used to collect food, and then it’d get delivered. Now it takes on, regardless of what grade does it, it takes on a whole other dimension because it’s tied to the curriculum. They learn about nutrition and health; they study needs and wants in social studies; they talk about economics, you know, the economics behind the scenes – how much the food costs; sometimes they graph and do a math activity related to it. So it’s not just a community service project anymore. (Educator 1)

Civic learning/volunteerism is embedded in the experience.

The fourth component of service learning discussed consistently by participants was the importance of encouraging civic participation. Participants spoke about the importance of volunteering and helping to raise awareness as key ingredients to service learning. “A successful service-learning project needs to inform other people and get them involved” (Student 9).

Service learning is one way to do a lot of research on a certain topic, share the information with other people to get them to start helping out with that topic. I think the big goal is to educate people on different things that are going on in the world. (Student 5)

Service learning is when you give your time and skills, and not necessarily your money- but you might do that in the future- but you give your time and your effort and you do something for someone that may need your help. The important thing is that you don't expect anything back from it. It's not like a job, it's not like working at McDonalds, where you're expecting to get paid. You're there to help, maybe to get donations, but mostly to help others. The funny thing is you do get something in return. It makes you feel a lot better about yourself, and it gets other people involved so you feel happy that you have other people behind you.

Everyone is coming together to help, and it inspires a lot of people – so, it feels good to pass it on to others. (Student 7)

This civic mindedness portion of participants' service-learning definition relates to KIDS Consortium's apprentice citizenship requirement. The following quotes are examples of participants' comments on the centrality of service learning encouraging civic participation: "We did a service by raising money and giving awareness to everyone [the kids and the adults]. Then the goal is for other people to get involved in helping fix the problems, not just complaining about them" (Student 1). "It kind of makes you happy that you were involved with something that would help a lot of people" (Student 6). "I

feel happy giving, and that I'm making the community better" (Student 3).

"We're also learning about good citizenship. We've been doing this [service learning] for a while, so I think this whole good citizenship is coming together. I think every teacher has a new meaning of what they're wanting us to learn" (Student 7). "What we learn today impacts us in our lives later. So, if we learn to be good citizens now, it'll lead up to making the world a better place tomorrow" (Student 2).

I was thinking that SL is really good because it helps you get used to helping other people, and if when you get a job, you might have to do research or other stuff like that, and it's a lot of help getting you used to this kind of thing, doing research and working together with other people. So, when you get a job or have a family, you'll know what to do to help out your community. You know, so you'll know that you can make a difference." (Student 1)

Students even talked about how their experiences with service learning have impacted their civic mindedness now, not just how it will help them become better citizens in the future.

And now I find myself thinking, how can I help out more in my community? Sometimes now I volunteer when I go out to eat at the little diner in my community. I see that they're so busy and dishes pile up, so I go in and I help them out. (Student 2)

Themes Related to Research Questions 1 and 2

The following themes emerged from the recursive coding process and helped answer the research questions: What are the perceived effects of service-learning projects on rural middle-school students and How do service-learning experiences impact students' views of their roles in schools and society? (a) academic knowledge, skills, and habits of mind acquired, (b) real-life connections, (c) youth voice, (d) relationship-building/making connections with others, (e) altered perceptions and positive public relations, (f) differentiated instruction (learning style variety, student choice, and hands-on/minds-on learning activities), (g) motivation and interest, (h) leadership opportunities, and (i) time management.

Academic knowledge, skills, and habits of mind acquired. One of the benefits of engaging rural middle-school students in service-learning projects discussed by participants was that of acquiring academic knowledge, skills, and habits of mind. Educators, in particular, saw the benefits of helping students bolster their understanding of curricula standards through the use of service learning as an instructional strategy.

Kids can articulate their learning; they can talk about their learning well beyond what they might have been able to if it hadn't been put to a practical experience.

They can understand the concepts that they have learned in other content areas as well. It brings meaning and purpose to their learning. (Educator 6)

Without exception when the participants discussed service learning, they not only talked about the service part of the experiences but also the learning portion. "I liked putting

together all the pieces, like taking all the art and all the knowledge that we're learning in class and putting it all together to show everyone" (Student 7). "I learned a lot more about note-making than I ever have before. That's really going to be helpful in high school and in college" (Student 9).

This service learning taught a lot of people about the history of our town. I know a lot of people think this is a boring town, but a lot of cool things have happened here in the past. It made us all appreciate our town more. I can't believe I just said that! (Student 6)

"I learned a lot, like how to become a better researcher, but working with other people really helped me build my social skills" (Student 2).

Participants articulated numerous specific curricula concepts, skills, and habits of mind learned as a result of service learning, including the following examples: integrated units of study incorporating several content strands from English Language Arts, Social Studies, and Computer Technology; multi-media production; website design; photograph scanning photographs; computer literacy and applications; taking and editing digital pictures; technological design; oral presentation skills; interviewing skills; cataloguing; collaborative work habits; social skills/interpersonal skills; questioning skills; graphing skills; persuasive writing skills; descriptive writing; writing constructed responses; knowledge of current events issues; research skills; summarizing; note-making; informational reading and writing; accuracy in measurement; and sewing skills.

Participants saw the need for additional projects involving fine arts and curricula areas beyond the core.

I'd like to see service learning bridge itself with more areas of the curriculum, for instance more with the fine arts and using some of the artistic skills that students have, not just using the math, science, ELA, and social studies skills. (Educator 6)

Students also expressed their enthusiasm for and desire to incorporate more of their artistic and musical talents into projects (Students 2, 4, 9).

Real-life connections. Participants saw the fact that students were able to apply what they were learning to real-life or authentic community needs/problems as a true benefit to rural, middle-school students.

My concern with some of the NCLB mandates is that they may take away the real experiences of what students can do and learn from when they are involved in projects that help them solve real-world problems as well as the creativity that teachers can bring to the classroom with service learning. Too many mandates can really take away the excitement and joy from education itself. I'm a big fan of those kinds of moments, those kinds of learning experiences, and I appreciate the staff that have stepped up to do these kinds of projects with their students, who are thinking a little bit further beyond the walls of their classrooms. (Educator 6)

Students pointed out that the connections they made between the content, the service-learning projects, and their lives were important components to the experiences being meaningful and different from other learning activities.

I help myself learn, by thinking of what I'm trying to learn and thinking of something to link into it, so that I can remember it easier. I like that service-learning projects force you to make connections between what you're learning in class and other things in the real world. (Student 2)

I can really relate my life to his [the town's Founding Father], because he was the first teacher in our town, and my mom is a teacher. As I worked on this project, it took on new meaning for me, because I wanted others to have the chance to know about his contributions. His story is really interesting, and I realized that I wanted others to know about it too. (Student 1)

Participants spoke about sharing their service-learning experiences with their parents and families, because this type of learning had meaning for both students and their families. "Me and my mom and dad had big discussions about our history project. They were kind of shocked that I was talking to them about school stuff!" (Student 3). "At my house, I was talking to my dad about our history project, and he was like, 'Yeah, I remember this place, I remember that place'" (Student 4).

Youth voice. Another benefit of engaging rural middle-school students in service-learning projects is that it gives voice to young adolescents, a group that often feels disenfranchised and disempowered (Andolina et al., 2003; Billig, Root & Jesse, 2005; CIRCLE, 2003; Keeter et al., 2002; Lopez, 2004; Zaff & Michelsen, 2001). The middle school from which participants worked and attended had formally articulated one of their three big goals as improving student achievement for *all* by creating an increasingly more

learner-centered and individualized environment. Participants spoke about their desire to empower students by giving them more voice, more say in what and how they were learning.

It's a lot better than just reading about it or listening to a teacher tell you about it, because this way, it's hands-on. It's kids our own age that are doing this history; so, we can actually see the history, touch the history with our own eyes and hands. That's so cool, I think. This way we get to do the research and find out for ourselves, instead of someone just giving us the information and saying here you go. (Student 1)

This idea of incorporating as many opportunities as possible for the students involved to truly plan, implement, and reflect upon community needs, potential solutions to those problems, and the service in which they engaged came up in the interviews as an important aspect of service learning and one of the more desired effects of this instructional strategy. Participants expressed their view that by providing authentic opportunities for youth voice to be expressed and honored, students began to view their roles in their schools and in their communities as valuable.

Educator 6 summarized an activity that the middle school administrators used to give voice to youth and gather student and staff input about what their vision of an ideal school was. Administrators visited each of the twenty homerooms in the fifth through eighth grade to elicit student input. Students were given prompts asking them to describe what a 21st century school designed for them would look like. Individual students wrote

their ideas on sticky notes (one idea per sticky note), and then groups of students placed their sticky notes in groups on chart paper and labeled those categories. After the categorizing piece was completed, administrators charted categories reported out from each of the small groups. Then, students were given three sticky dots and engaged in a Power Voting activity, where they indicated the categories most important to them by placing one or more of the sticky dots next to that category on the chart paper. Categories receiving the most traction across homerooms were compiled into a list and shared with staff. Educator 6 discussed how that category list based on student input is used to guide teachers' and administrators' decisions. During a recent service-learning workshop, the category list was distributed once again to staff with the idea of having them examine student input for connections with using service learning as an instructional strategy. Staff commented on the numerous ways in which using service learning as an instructional strategy honored students' input from the shared vision activity. Student categories that connected with service learning included: more hands-on projects and interactive activities; more use of technology; more learner choices; more movement and physical learning; more field trips and learning outside the classroom; more student talk, less teacher talk; more opportunities for working at student's own pace; more group work/experiences; and more having fun while learning.

The following quotes illustrate participants' belief that one benefit of engaging rural, middle-school students in service-learning projects is increased opportunity for youth voice: "Which really speaks to that whole efficacy, the empowerment piece of SL.

And I think why we might be seeing more of that too is because I think we've figured out pieces like youth voice (educator 3)." "It didn't really have as much voice as kids really saying, "Oh. Here's the need. We can do this and that and why do we have to do it that way? And have you ever thought about this?" (Educator 4)."

The seventh graders not only did what was in our original grant project description, but one day very early in the project they said, of their own initiative, "There's all this written stuff that's hard to read, and some of it's very fragile, and wouldn't it be neat if we typed it up?" And they took that on as an extra project, and it's a whole folder of that kind of material available. And I think that that speaks volumes of the value of getting kids involved and getting them to help identify a need, not just the teacher doing that part of the project. (Educator 4)

I think also that, the fact that we had four student leaders involved in the project, who could really have some say in how the project evolved over time and how it was celebrated and so forth, was very, very important. (Educator 1)

Relationship-building/making connections with others. Another benefit of engaging rural middle-school students in service-learning projects is that it helps build relationships between students, between students and teachers, and between community partners and students and the school. Participants in the service-learning projects articulated this idea of making connections with others as one of the clear benefits of engaging in service learning. Educators encouraged students to converse with one another, share their ideas, work in teams to solve problems, and make contact with peers

as well as adults outside of their classrooms. When engaged in solving authentic community problems, educators reported that they found themselves taking on more of a facilitator role in the classroom. As a result, the educators interacted with students in different ways than they did when using other more traditional instructional strategies. Educators shared that they made deeper connections with students because their role was not just about dispensing or scoring learning outcomes but was about helping provide access to other human and material resources outside of the classroom and about being responsive to students' ideas about how to proceed with meeting the identified need. As a result, students, educators, and community partners forged relationships built on mutual trust and a sense of belonging to one another; this concept was described by more than one student and educator as creating either a "family" or "team" atmosphere, where ideas were judged on their merit not on the age or background of the person suggesting the next step.

Student-to-student relationships. In helping to develop student-to-student relationships, teachers used a variety of cooperative learning structures and/or different technologies to encourage dialogue between students within the same classroom, across multiple classrooms within a school, and with students from far away who were also concerned about solving the same or similar problems in their communities. Educators and students alike talked about how the projects lent themselves to students being grouped in a variety of ways, forcing them to interact with other students whom they might not have voluntarily or readily interacted, including interaction with students from

other schools. Teachers found other schools and classrooms that had or were engaged in service-learning projects and set up opportunities for students from different communities to share their experiences. One educator noted the power of these connections for students,

It was really neat for the kids, and they got to ask lots of interesting questions, and I think that was powerful, because they got to say, “Oh these kids have done it so we can do it too.” And it was really nice for them to be able to talk to kids their own age that have already done a similar project. (Educator 4)

Another way that teachers helped to encourage relationship building between students was by using technology. One such strategy used was Moodle, a classroom-management system allowing students to post blog-like responses to discussion threads. By using Moodle or Wikis, students could carry on asynchronous conversations, capitalizing on the fact that they are digital natives and use similar technologies outside of the classroom to interact with one another. It also provided viable ways for them to share ideas and resources with students who might not be in their homerooms but might be working on similar projects. In this way students were encouraged to dialogue about both the content and their approaches to solving the community problem with a larger audience than just that of the twenty students within their classroom setting. One educator explained the use of technology in encouraging dialogue amongst students this way,

One of the pieces that we used that tied to the technology computer curriculum was we communicated from class to class and group to group of students using Moodle

which is a class management tool. Through this vehicle students were able to share what they were thinking and what was going on and communicate in a blog-like fashion with other students in other classes. (Educator 2)

Another educator involved in using Moodle as part of the service-learning experience for students spoke about the way this use of technology helped to form a sense of collaboration amongst students and teachers:

This had a really good impact in that it allowed kids to participate in a collaborative sort of effort by using the Moodle, beyond just the classroom, which ordinarily wouldn't happen during the day – unless they sought out conversations at lunch time or after school, which really, let's be real, middle school students are probably not often talking necessarily about poverty in Haiti during lunch or whatever. But that seems to be a pretty big thing to me too – that you're able to get use beyond collaboration or teachers working together, to encourage kids to work together too. (Educator 1)

Student-to-teacher relationships. Another benefit that educator and student participants noted was the relationships between students and teachers that were forged as a result of the use of service learning as an instructional strategy. Educator participants spoke about the power of adults and students working alongside one another to solve genuine community problems and the shift in interactions with students as a result of this kind of teaching.

I've seen it more and more over time where teachers are working, not overseeing kids so much as they're working alongside kids in getting the work done and I think that that's been valuable for kids to see another side of a teacher.

(Educator 1)

Another benefit that some people might not think about right away, but I've noticed it over the last few years, is kids working with teachers. Not sit and get, but working right alongside teachers in a project. And that creates a whole other kind of relationship building; it's not your traditional teacher-student relationship. Kids get to see teachers as their partners, and not just the people who tell them what to do, and when to do it, and how to do it. (Educator 2)

Student participants spoke about how "cool" it was to share skills they had with others and to collaborate with others, including their teachers. Several student participants spoke about how as a result of their service-learning experiences, they saw their teachers in a new light. "I liked it because we got to interact with the teachers on a different level other than sitting there and talking to them about just school stuff" (Student 9). Students reported that their teachers laughed more and seemed to truly value their input and ideas. One student reported that it was the first time that he really understood how hard teachers work to help students like him learn. "I have a new appreciation for my teachers. They must really care about us and our projects, because it's a lot more work for them than just having us read something from a book or lecturing at us" (Student 4).

Community partners and students/school relationships. Another benefit of engaging middle-school students in high-quality service-learning projects is the relationships and connections they make to expert others in their communities. Educator, student, and community partner participants all spoke about the power of their service-learning experiences in building relationships with adults and organizations within and outside of the schools. The service-learning experiences described to I included various field trips for students to experience first-hand some aspect of the community problem in a more authentic way or to become more acquainted with the community partner's organization, and many visits of community partners and other guest speakers to the schools to work on the projects alongside the students or to share knowledge, a skill, or resource they might have that would assist students in completing their project.

Another huge piece of that particular project was the training provided by people outside of the school. To actually be able to provide the teachers and the kids who were working on the project with the type of professional development or training that they needed to do the work. Whether it was the Maine Historical Society coming in saying, you need white gloves and you need acid-free boxes or folders or what-have-you, or it was Roo from Central Office coming in to show us how to use transcription equipment. (Educator 4)

These kind of first-hand experiences with others outside of the normal classroom experience widened students' perspectives and their sense of community.

I think we [students] enjoy service learning more because we have guest speakers coming to talk to us. It kind of makes us more excited about what we're learning when we have people from the community come in to work with us on the projects. (Student 5)

Several educator participants spoke about the positive nature of having students and elderly community partners communicate with one another.

The residents of the nursing home of course had that great interaction with young people when they were up there. So, the benefits there in that kind of project were not only did they receive the items that were obviously needed, but they also had that time of communication and sharing from both groups. (Educator 1)

As part of the local history service-learning project in which all participants were involved, elderly community members visited the middle school for interviews, some of the interviewees visiting multiple times. The community partner participant spoke about the overwhelming feedback she had received from the twenty community members and how much they enjoyed sharing their knowledge of local history with another generation; in addition, the participants were "pleased" with the interest of the young students and the excitement it seemed to be generating in the community, "a renewal of sorts in local history interest" (community partner). "It was very evident from conversations that she [president of the Historical Society] had and from her conversations in some of those meetings, that it was important for her to be able to pass this love of our local history on to kids, and I think she was really excited to be part of that" (Educator 4).

Altered perceptions and positive public relations. Another result of forming partnerships with community members and organizations was that their perceptions of youth were altered. Community partners spoke openly about how they were surprised by how caring and respectful the youth were and how interested young people were in helping meet community needs. Students spoke about their views of how “older” community members might view them, and how these kinds of projects helped change community members’ outlooks about teenagers. “Usually adults in the community think teens aren’t really that smart, and they’re just little punks on the street. But we can really learn stuff and do important things and show you guys what we can do” (Student 1).

They [community partners] might not trust the students where they don’t know them. They might think what if this kid completely destroys something. We had to be very careful with the papers. If we forced them open, they’d rip because some of them were from the 1800’s. They might not trust us enough with that but luckily the historical society did. Yea. I think it would change their outlook. Not all kids are disrespectful, maybe a few of them are, but for the most part, they can be mature and responsible about it. (Student 9)

Educators and community partner participants saw this change in how adults viewed young people as an important and perhaps an unintended outcome of engaging in service-learning projects. Those community partners who were involved with the schools in the

service-learning projects used word-of-mouth to spread the good news of the projects, thus promoting positive public relations between the community and the school.

You hear all these horrible stories about kids being mean. I think kids get a bad rap, and you know that they can be heartfelt and polite and you know, sweet kids, but I think maybe the public, especially the older population thinks: “Oh – darn kids!” So it was really nice to see the president of the Historical Society saying, “Your kids were always so polite and nice.” That’s good PR for students.

(Educator 4)

Our community partner got to speak about her involvement, and how eloquent was she? You know, very precious, talking about the valuable resources that the kids were and how it changed her perception of kids. I thought to be able to do that publicly was wonderful. Now that we’ve been through it once, and we know the power of doing that sort of celebration, I think we will be better at doing public relations around it too. (Educator 1)

It was good PR for our students who kind of get a bad rap sometimes and the things that are in the paper a lot of times are the kids that are vandalizing or getting caught for this or doing that or something and this was a positive thing that our students were doing and I tried to get that into the news a little bit for people to hear about it and the kids are going home and talking to their parents about it too, so that’s another form of good PR. (Educator 4)

Students also talked about how their perceptions of their own lives were altered as a result of engaging in service-learning projects. Many student participants talked about being grateful for what they have, including the natural resources of their rural community, the freedom of their country, and the financial resources of their families. “You learn things about being glad about what we have. Other people don’t have what we have, even if you don’t have a whole lot. We should be glad about what we’ve got and stop always complaining” (Student 3). Another student expressed a similar sentiment this way, “We’re lucky to have what we have when other people don’t have it, and we don’t even realize it” (Student 4).

Differentiation of learning. One benefit (and challenge) of engaging middle-school students in high-quality service-learning experiences is that this instructional strategy keys in on differentiated learning, appealing to a variety of learners. Educator participants spoke in great detail about how service learning dove-tailed with an ongoing school-wide initiative, the Thoughtful Classroom, which involved teachers talking to teachers about teaching and learning. As an integral part of the Thoughtful Classroom training the educator participants had received, they were taught to plan units of instruction around standards and to use various instructional strategies and tools that would engage students from all four of the learning-style neighborhoods (mastery, understanding, interpersonal, and self-expressive). Educator participants talked about how service learning was truly a differentiated learning strategy, incorporating

instructional and assessment variety (varied learning activities meeting different learning styles), student choice, and hands-on/minds-on learning.

Educator participants spoke about the varied instructional strategies they used within a service-learning project to engage different types of learners in a myriad of doing and thinking activities. One educator reported that service learning seemed to work for her students because the unit was “layered with so many different instructional strategies that were brought into the classroom to make history alive for kids” (educator 4). Another educator spoke about how service learning had stretched her teaching, helping her more readily engage various learners.

I’m not just lecturing at my students all day, I’m getting them out in the community, and I’m realizing that history and social studies are applicable in everyday life and that the students can take this on and I think that’s been really good. (Educator 4)

One of the hallmarks of high-quality service learning is the incorporation of reflection. One educator participant described her journey in differentiating reflection activities for her students prior to, during, and post service.

Kids reflect in a number of ways, sometimes orally, sometimes in writing, sometimes through a presentation that they do, being reflective about what they’re learning, how they’re learning it, even what they might do differently if they could repeat or redo parts of it. (Educator 1)

Both educator and student participants reported that the variety of learning activities, the amount of student choice, and the incorporation of different hands-on/minds-on activities were “big selling points” for this instructional strategy (Educator 2). “I think the fact that it’s hands on, it’s not textbook, it’s not testing, and yet it is assessing what they’ve learned really appealed to students” (Educator 1).

A lot of times students will lose interest in class stuff because teachers lecture or have you read a textbook, and we kind of are just reading to read it, and we zone out. Something a little bit more hands-on is a whole lot better for students. Then, they can get a hold of it better. (Student 5)

Service learning is more hands-on. It gets us out into our communities and we learn so much about it instead of just sitting there listening. Because no one likes to be talked at you know. I don’t like to be talked at, so lectures don’t go over well with me. I know how to take notes, but note-taking is not a good learning strategy for me. Copying down notes, people could fall asleep. Plus, also the reading and filling out the answers – you aren’t really going out and helping your community. You’re doing more learning about it, but it’s not really helping anything or anybody. It’s a lot better when we do something to help out. (Student 2)

Students especially seemed to appreciate the amount of choice they were given during their service-learning experiences.

Teachers are always talking about choices, but they usually don't give you very many. I liked that we got some chances to make choices, like we got to choose who we wanted to interview, who we were going to work with, what we wanted to ask for questions, that kind of thing. (Student 7)

When asked about how they might change the service-learning experience, some students talked about how there was still a need for more student choice and voice.

I think maybe teachers could talk to the students about what topic they want to do their public service announcements (PSA's) on. That way they can get a connection with it, because they chose it themselves. So, more student choice.

More student voice. Use our leadership skills and our organizing. (Student 9)

Another student talked about the importance of variety in service-learning activities and allowing students choice as two major factors in getting more students actively involved in the process and their relationship to helping student leaders emerge.

The more variety you have, like the variety show, the talent show, things to get the kids actually involved, that they'll actually like, is very helpful. And choices. Give lots of choices. It's about giving people lots of options to become a leader or to step up and share their talent or skill. (Student 8)

Both teachers and students seemed to really enjoy the fact that they were both doing and thinking in many authentic, hands-on ways as a result of the projects in which they were involved. One educator summed up this concept by saying, "We had lots of guest speakers and opportunities for kids to go places and visit and talk to other people

who were involved” (educator 4). The following quotes illustrate how differentiated instruction was used in various projects described by educator participants:

We had a woman come up from the Maine Historical Society, who trained a bunch of staff, teachers, as well as a bunch of – about ten – students to work with the documents to handle them and everything, and then we passed that knowledge on to all 90 of our students and that’s what we did this year. Our students worked to preserve the documents, meaning to put them into folders, organize them, label the folders, and put them into acid-free folders and boxes, and they’ll be donated to the Historical Society. (Educator 4)

We did a lot of hands-on things in the classroom with our students; they had the gloves, they used magnifying glasses, you know, they were actually using – touching the documents and they did a little side project of sort of typing up. (Educator 1)

Our community partner has a lot of information about the history of Main Street, so even leaving from the school it might be kind of neat to do that walking tour instead like, this is what it looked like, and we have pictures to show you, or to show pictures back at school before they left and to visit the little schoolhouse and the historical society, the library, and get to – everybody – get to be at those places, might be kind of fun to do. And see, you’d be able to weave in some physical education standards as well, right? (Educator 4)

And I think using technology for a lot of the kids too was quite engaging for them. But where they did have a chance to even be able to type, just simply using word processing, I think that they can get the value of that too, like: “Oh I’m using technology.” And I think for the interview project that that was – using the microphones and videotaping and creating the DVDs and that kind of thing, that’s pretty neat. (Educator 1)

Student participants spoke about how being involved with hands-on aspects of the project made them feel. “I liked knowing that people could see our work” (student 3). “I feel like kids are more into class, they’re not dozing off” (Student 9). “I liked learning how to use the cameras for something real” (Student 7). “I liked editing pictures and using my tech skills to help out with the local history project. It was much better than just hearing about the history. I got to make a difference by helping other community members have access to the history” (Student 1). “I don’t like the textbook thing. I like more visual, hands-on things” (Student 7). “I like when we do things with our hands and stuff. I’m like the kinesthetic learner. I want to be up and moving and doing it” (Student 9). “I like a lot of learning activities that are hands-on. I like handling things like that. That really helps me learn. I get pretty bored listening to teachers talk on and on” (Student 1).

I have teachers that use hand motions and body movements to help you remember things. I found that really effective; it helps a lot with my learning. I found I tried

to use that strategy when I'm working with the younger kids at Kids'

Fun Day. (Student 2)

Motivation and interest. Student, educator, and community partner participants all agreed that overall service-learning projects had wide appeal to most middle-school students. "I think at first they thought it was kind of like a fun game and not even really know or care that it was hard work" (Educator 3). Student participants frequently referenced the concept of "fun" or having something to "look forward to" as being a side effect of engaging middle-school students in service-learning experiences.

It [service learning] gets students more excited than just having to sit there.

Students can look forward to something. I know a lot of us in the 8th grade were looking forward to seeing the little kids' faces again when they got to play the games at Kids Fun Day. We were looking forward to trying to beat the teachers in the Hoops for Haiti event. So, we had something to look forward to while we were learning all about the topic. (Student 9)

We're learning a lot more by researching, and we're learning a lot more period. Sometimes when kids aren't interested in whatever they're learning, they don't put their best effort into it. And so, SL is better learning for everyone, because you're more into it. We don't find what we need all the time and so we have to ask a lot of questions. But questions are good though, at least that's what our teachers always say. I don't think you bother to ask questions if you're not into it. (Student 1)

Both students and educators talked about service-learning experiences providing a lasting impression on students. “Service learning gives you a memorable moment, something to remember about school” (Student 2).

I think service learning provides opportunities for students to experience real-world opportunities. They will be the events that take place over the course of their education that will be the memorable events for students. These service-learning experiences will be practical application of what they learn in other content areas. It will be the culmination of that learning. The projects that they do, they will be able to reflect on their learning as they discuss their public education many years from now. Those are the things they will remember. The kids that worked on our historical society project will always remember the fox farms, how to handle the data, the photo, the celebration. They’ll remember all of that. They may not remember all the little things that went along with educating them to get to the final culmination, but they will remember the process and the important learning from the project. (Educator 6)

Participants seemed to be motivated by the idea that they were helping to solve real community problems and were making a difference. Students also reported that not only did engaging in service learning motivate them, but it also seemed to motivate their teachers. “I think it makes them [teachers] feel good about themselves too, how they have helped others do something meaningful, like helping someone else” (Student 4). Students

reported being motivated by having an authentic reason to learn, engage in content, and practice skills learned in the classrooms.

Actually, I didn't really think that I'd be into the history project as much as I am right now, because I'm not really a history person. I barely can keep up with the present, so I can't be like staying with the past so much! (Student 7)

One student shared that some of the service-learning events occurred on Saturdays, a real commitment for a middle-school student to make. "We really had to weigh is it really that worth it to me to come on a Saturday or not? I heard a lot of kids say that it was worth it to come on their Saturday. It was a cool feeling for all of us" (Student 4).

Others were motivated by the fact that service learning was a hands-on method of learning and provided them with a variety of ways to learn academic content and show what they know and are able to do. "I think the hands-on or the real-life connection is what makes it a real interest for many students" (Educator 5).

I wouldn't have learned as much if it wasn't service learning because I would have read it and wrote my questions down and did the test and it would have gone right out of my mind. Being able to be hands-on is much more engaging. (Student 9)

Another student expressed that service learning was motivating to him because it allowed him to layer in his musical and creative skills.

We made a song about the founding fathers of Lincoln, and my partner rapped it while I played the electric guitar. The people from the Historical Society loved it.

I don't think any of them would have presented information on our town's history website about the founding fathers the way we did! (Student 6)

Still other students were motivated by the projects because it connected them with opportunities to communicate with others and often involved the use of technology. "We got to work with people from the *Bangor Daily News* on the special newspaper insert about our project, and we got to make our own website, so it's pretty cool. We usually don't make our own websites, so that's pretty cool" (Student 5). "We got to interact with the technology, that was the best part. It makes learning more fun and easier too. Because if you type something, you can learn it, because you have to move your fingers and that's how I learn it" (Student 3). Participants also agreed that the community involvement piece was a motivator. Educators stated that seeing students truly "into" what was being taught was motivating to them.

While most participants felt that service learning appealed to most types of learners, some pointed out that there were a few students for whom it did not seem to motivate. "Some kids don't want to do it because it's not 'cool' or whatever. They might think it's going to ruin their reputation, but I think that's a pretty small percentage of kids" (Student 3). The consensus among educator participants was that service learning worked to engage students at both ends of the spectrum in terms of ability.

For instance, students who are special needs - it would be a benefit to that group of students. Students that are gifted and talented, it would be a benefit to those

students. So, I can't think of anybody else that I haven't seen service

learning work for, other than if it's just a work-style thing. (Educator 1).

Both educator and student participants did acknowledge that in spite of the variety, student choice and voice, and the hands-on nature of the projects, there were still some students who did not seem interested in the project and some for whom the project seemed frustrating, possibly because of having a more mastery type of learning style or in some cases because learning was not the student's primary focus at this point in their lives. "There are some kids who just don't have very much of an interest in school or their community. Some kids do. I guess maybe it's just a personality thing" (Student 4).

I think the types of students that it would be most difficult for would be those that are kind of concrete-sequential. They like to follow the recipe. They want to know what it's going to look like, taste like at the end. They want to know step A and step B, and they want to check off when they have everything completed, and they want a very tight timeline. And they want it to be perfect too along the way. (Educator 1)

One student (Student 3) suggested that teachers ought to spend more time talking to students who seemed to be unmotivated to try to figure out how teachers could create projects that piqued and connected more with their interests. It was also noted by several student participants that some students may find the projects challenging because they lack some of the academic knowledge or skills needed to successfully complete the project.

A lot of kids don't like to have to research; so, it was a lot harder for some students. Some don't have a lot of good technology skills, and they might need to get a lot of help, like go after school to get help to do the project. But some students whiz right through. (Student 4).

The length and duration of the service-learning projects may also have been a factor in why some students were not as motivated as the project unfolded. One educator attributed waning motivation to the fact that "as the project wore on, sometimes their energy might have waned a little bit, but not for long or across the board" (Educator 1).

I think it depended on the day or you know – one day they'd be, I think maybe earlier in the project, everybody was really excited about it, but when it got to the seventh, the eighth, the ninth time it was: "Eh, this is old and we've done this." But you know, it was a small percentage of the kids, most of them would say – they'd walk in and they'd see the sponge activity was 'clear your desk for the local history project' they'd go, "Yay!" But you know, there was a small percentage of a couple kids in every class that would go: "Great... again. Ew." (Educator 4)

Leadership opportunities. Another theme that emerged from coding the interviews was the value of leadership opportunities that emerged from engaging middle-school students in high-quality service-learning projects. "I really think the leadership team is so crucial to the success of the project because it really gave voice to the students, and they really took ownership of the project, so that was really neat" (Educator 1).

Educators described how they created a leadership team for their projects and provided opportunities for their students to take on additional roles beyond those expected of all seventh and eighth grade students.

We really wanted students involved and so I, being kind of blind myself as to what it was going to end up being, I kind of introduced it to my students, all five groups, and said we want some student representation. I came up with sort of an application, just asking kids questions like: Why would you want to be on the leadership team and so forth? I sat down with some of the ELA department who were familiar with students as well, and we picked a couple of students, two from seventh grade and two from eighth grade, one boy and one girl from each grade. And they were involved through the whole year on the leadership team. (Educator 4)

The leadership team involved ELA, Computer, and Social Studies teachers, and the Library and the Historical Society as well as four students. We met once a month at least and the students were there every time. They were vocal; we'd ask their opinions, and they were very helpful along the way, and I'm very thankful for that because it was nice to have that. They would stay after school and do other things that had to be done. (Educator 1)

Educator and student participants also voiced the way a variety of leadership and public speaking opportunities developed from the projects, and while all of these opportunities might not have been planned for in advance, these opportunities did further

engage interested students in educating the larger school and local community (or beyond). “Because of our SL project, we’re now kind of role models almost to the little kids. They look up to us and want to follow in our footsteps. To me that means we’re being leaders” (Student 4). Participants spoke about the commitment the adults and students involved in these leadership opportunities made to the projects and how these leadership opportunities sparked greater communication skills, confidence, and voice in the students who became highly involved in the planning and implementation of current projects, as well as advocates for additional service projects.

And the kids have said since being involved with PENCORPS especially, and then with the Historical Society project, they’ve been saying: “What else can we do?” They want to help more, so I think that’s been really nice to see the kids, our whole school culture I think has changed a lot since a lot of the SL projects have started. And the kids are looking now, not waiting for us to say: “We’re going to do this project.” The kids are looking for “Okay, what can we do? What can we organize?” Which is nice. (Educator 3)

The leadership teams were also used to provide specialized training needed for the success of the projects, and then leadership members helped teach other students and adults involved in the project.

The first big kind of training of that group that needed to be done was the Jamie Kingman Rice training, or actually even before that Matt Robinson came to our first leadership team and he kind of taught us all, and refreshed for some of us,

what SL is as opposed to community service. We played little training games with the students, so that was kind of like the little training to make sure that the kids especially were on the same page. And then Jamie Kingman Rice came in October or November to train us with the documents. I had two students from each seventh grade homeroom; so it involved the two leadership team members who were from different homerooms and then eight other students. As a result, other students got involved in that too; so there were eight other students as well as all of our staff who were all involved on Leadership Team who were trained on how to handle documents. (Educator 4)

Leadership opportunities were also provided for students to collaborate/communicate and learn from other students, schools, and organizations that were also engaged in similar service-learning projects. Sometimes, this meant that students had the opportunity to go on field trips to learn more from others and bring that knowledge and skills back to their classrooms.

We wanted some pointers and so our leadership team kids and some others went to Skowhegan and talked to a teacher and her students and asked them about their local history project. They recommended the snowball microphone, and they had some tips about interviewing—because lots of people they had interviewed were kind of older people, so they had some tips about how to be respectful to the older generation and what kind of questions to ask. It was really neat for the kids, and they got to ask lots of interesting questions, and I think that was nice, because

they got to say: “Oh these kids have done it so we can do it too.” And it was really nice for them to be able to talk to kids their own age that have already done this, a similar project. When they came back, they shared their findings with the rest of the seventh and eighth graders. That trip also resulted in our team purchasing snowball microphones to use for the project. (Educator 4)

Managing time and resources: Human and financial. One of the common threads I found in the interviews, especially the educator interviews, was that of the challenge of managing time and financial needs. Educators discussed how time management was a challenge for all involved, for the educators, for students, and for community partners. Participants spoke about the challenge of trying to balance service projects that extend beyond the school day with other responsibilities, whether it be family, other jobs, or extra-curricular activities. “I think, too, that sometimes projects take students outside the school day, and if they are involved in other things, you have to make choices. You know, am I going to go to soccer practice or go to the nursing home?” (Educator 1). Educators expressed that while they believed that engaging middle-school students in high-quality service-learning projects was worthwhile, it also could be quite time-consuming and labor intensive. As one educator put it: “It’s just easier to do everything in the classroom and to check off scores and grades and take care of things that way, but I don’t think that that is true learning for many students” (Educator 3). Other educator participants agreed.

It was a lot of time I had to invest in pulling off this project, and I think I'll hopefully be better organized for next year. With a SL project you're doing so much good, but it's almost easier sometimes to just lecture or whatever.

(Educator 4)

I think, because teachers are so busy, there is so much on their plates in education today that finding the time to actually put a plan of action together for meeting the need, and even just thinking about service learning and planning for it is challenging. When in the school year do they have time, and what kind of a project will be chosen, and how much time do they really have to devote to it; these time constraints are challenges. (Educator 5)

I know that's a lot of preparation- and that's a big challenge in keeping myself motivated and the kids motivated to do it. I mean it was a long project, which was really nice and good, but it was a lot of work. With a SL project, you need to make all these connections with people and I was coordinator for the project, so I had to set up all the meetings and set up all the agendas and make sure this deadline was met and da-da-da-da-da. And tons of emails, I don't know, a thousand probably. This is why I need to turn even more over to kids!" (Educator 4)

Students also recognized the time commitment educators made in order to do service-learning projects with them.

I hope it's worth their [teachers'] time, because we are benefiting someone else. I don't think school is all about learning what we need to learn for the future, it's about now too...teachers probably have other things they want to do, but this is a priority. We have to have chances to help other people. (Student 7)

I think that teachers know that even though it's a lot of work for them, that it will help us a lot, and they feel confident that it's a lot better way to learn for us. So, then they know that they have accomplished being a good teacher, and I think being a good teacher is very important to teachers at our school. (Student 1)

Students noted the challenges for teachers in grading student projects associated with the service-learning experiences. "Arggh. I bet teachers hate grading. Because, I mean, if you think about it, there's like 120 eighth graders, and the teachers have to score all our work. Developing all those rubrics and scoring guides, and then the actual time it takes to score all that. It probably helps their work ethic too!" (Student 2).

Students identified time as a challenge to completing authentic projects, where one is solving real problems that do not often have neat answers that one can just look up and summarize. "It takes a lot of work ethic to do these things for the community. You have to buckle down and really get them done, because there's not a whole lot of time. That can be difficult, because I've struggled with getting things done on time in the past" (Student 2).

Time. Yeah. Oh boy. Like when you're doing research, trying to find particular answers in the time given, that can be tough. It's not like you're just looking for the answers in a textbook or online some place. Trying to make a real project out of the information you find and put it together in a given time can be tough. (Student 1)

Another challenge with regards to time is trying to coordinate school schedules with schedules of community partners and their organizations. As one educator pointed out,

The rest of the world outside of the school walls does not operate in time frames such as from 8:37-9:43. A challenge for a teacher in time management is making it fit in and making those connections before school, after school, and during school with people outside of their buildings, because you are dealing with people who are not operating on a school schedule. (Educator 1)

Yet another type of challenge for participants centered on human resources. Educators pointed out that their rural location led to challenges that more urban or university-situated schools might not encounter. Being located in a northeastern, rural community made finding community partners sometimes challenging because of a lack of availability of organizations with whom to partner.

A few of the challenges that we have encountered in putting forward service learning I think is because we're a rural community; so, we find limitations to partnerships that are able to provide support for this kind of learning. Not that the

people here in our rural community are not supportive; we're just not diversified in the kinds of opportunities for partnerships that can be provided to our students and teachers. Also because of our distance from a city or university setting that could work with us closer – we are about 50 miles away – transportation is an issue. It would take the greater part of the day to get students transported to the site to work for a little while and return to school in time to be transported home. It just doesn't make those kind of valuable partnerships feasible. (Educator 6)

Another challenge related to human resources is learning to work with others. For instance, one student pointed out that,

Being able to cooperate and help out your teammates was sometimes challenging. You had to be able to coordinate your project with not just your classmates, but with other teachers, and other people in the community. And let me tell you, not everyone is always easy to get along with or all that agreeable. (Student 2)

In addition to time constraints and challenges with human resources, several educators shared their concern that the “good work started” (Educator 1) may become more difficult because of local budget cuts. The district studied has relied primarily on grants to fund its service-learning initiative, although, it has been working toward slowly funding more and more of the service-learning budget through local monies in an effort to provide sustainability.

I think service learning will continue to sustain itself. I think there is enough momentum to keep it going. However, the breadth of it, how big it might become, and the opportunities may be limited due to shrinking budgets. Currently, we are in a situation where local budgets are being trimmed so there would be some limitations to resources. I would say though that this district does pursue a lot of grant opportunities. As a result of being a rural district involved in service learning coupled with the fact that we are a district known for providing quality learning experiences for our students, we are often a recipient of grant opportunities. So, I don't see grants not being an option for us; I think grant opportunities may be even more readily available to us. Local monies might very well though prove to become a difficulty, as budgets get tighter and tighter.

(Educator 6)

Themes Related to Research Question 3

The following themes emerged from the data and helped answer the research question: What kinds of professional-development opportunities will educators need to effectively engage their students in high-quality service-learning projects? (a) structure and resources needed and (b) professional-development approaches that work.

Structure and resources needed. One thing that became evident from the educator interviews was their belief in the importance of having structures in place at both the school and district levels to support service learning. All six of the educators talked about the value of having specific human and material resources earmarked to

facilitate the use of service learning as an instructional tool. Participants acknowledged the importance of grant revenues and processes in helping to support service learning. Participants also acknowledged the necessity of having structures in place at both the district level and at the school level.

The school district has applied for and been the recipient of numerous service-learning grants over the past seven years. The grant funding has resulted in an emphasis on putting structures in place to support the work of service learning and to help ensure that the work is sustained even after grant funds or soft money dry up. Examples of professional-development structures, strategies, and processes in place at the district level include: grade-span service-learning coordinators; a mini-grant application process; an active district-wide service-learning leadership team in place; district-wide service-learning celebrations; a district service-learning webpage promoting the ongoing work; monthly service-learning School Board presentations; professional-development service-learning sessions for all staff (teachers, ed techs, secretaries, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians, etc.), as well as sessions for School Board members and community partners; K-12 vertical team work around service learning; connection with KIDS Consortium for ongoing technical advisement and partnerships; and support for attendance of and presentations at district, state, regional, and national workshops and conferences about service learning. Examples of professional-development structures, strategies, and processes in place at the middle-school level include: the use of a school-wide service-learning coordinator; in-service days devoted to service-learning instruction;

the creation of a service-learning portaportal site to share resources and ideas; a culture of teachers and administrators sharing resources and projects electronically and at teachers' meetings; the use of a shared visioning activity to elicit student voice and a commitment to continually going back to this activity to incorporate student voice in the service-learning work; use of professional learning community time to design high-quality projects and units of study incorporating service learning; use of the project probe process; sharing projects at staff meetings; hosting school-wide celebrations of service learning; widespread support and attendance at service-learning events and in projects; ongoing links to school goals, and an emphasis on improving instructional strategies.

One of the structures put in place is that of the Service Learning Leadership Team. During the 2009-10 school year, a K-12 Service Learning Leadership Team was created, composed of grade-span service-learning coordinators and teacher leaders from each building in the district, administrators from all three buildings, a community partner, a School Board representative, the district curriculum coordinator, an external service-learning coordinator, student representatives, and a technical advisor. Monthly meetings were held, where service learning "stories" and ideas were exchanged; professional-development opportunities, presentations, and celebrations were planned; goals and measurable objectives were established; and progress was analyzed.

I have so appreciated the service-learning stories, brainstormed ideas, and positive energy of the leadership team. Everyone has contributed in meaningful ways. It feels collaborative in nature. I am genuinely proud to be part of a group engaged

in such meaningful work, centered on authentic student learning. It's refreshing. (Educator 5)

The Service Learning Leadership Team was created as part of an Action Plan for a Learn and Serve America grant the district received, one of only three such grants awarded to districts within their state. Educator participants in this study found this Leadership team to be a driving force in promoting and deepening the effectiveness of service-learning instruction.

In addition to educator interviews, examination of Learn and Serve America grant documents, such as the team's Lessons Learned Summary 2009-2010 report and the Progress Report Form for 2009-2010, revealed that the following service-learning goals were created and monitored during the 2009-2010 school year:

The district is committed to upgrading what it has been doing since 2003 so that more service-learning projects have the hallmarks of high-quality service learning:

1. Part of doing so means creating structures to support and sustain service learning, K-12.
2. Part of doing so means educating stakeholders about what high-quality service learning is and why it is important.
3. Part of doing so means finding truly authentic, curriculum-embedded projects that engage students in the full range of activities that a high-quality service-learning project must entail. This grant provides an

exciting opportunity to extend the school system's efforts to provide all students with multiple opportunities to engage in high-quality service learning during their K-12 experience and an opportunity to celebrate their accomplishments.

4. Part of doing so means creating one or more policies that not only make service learning a part of Board-approved curriculum, but make it a requirement for transitioning from middle school to high school and/or for graduation from high school. By 2012-13, the local budget will be supporting service learning within the school system (Learn and Serve America Progress Report, 2010).

In order to meet their goal about creating structures to support and sustain service learning, K-12 (Goal 1), the Service Learning Leadership Team established three measurable objectives 1(a),(b),(c):

- 1(a) Each grade span will have a teacher leader whose job it will be to promote and oversee service-learning projects within his/her grade span and serve as a liaison for that grade span on the district-wide Leadership Team for the LSA grant. (Learn and Serve America Progress Report, 2010)

When reflecting upon progress made, participants remarked that the grade-span teacher leaders provided each school with someone trained in the hallmarks of high-quality service learning who could assist with projects from application through celebration.

Without these teacher leaders in the schools, much of what has occurred would not have

occurred. “We took advantage of the opportunity to build local capacity by investing in our own teachers who could in turn build other teacher leaders” (Educator 5).

1(b) The Service Learning Leadership Team with broad representation will be formed to oversee grant activities and to work towards sustainability after 2011-12 when the LSA grant expires. (Learn and Serve America Progress Report, 2010)

Prior to 2009-10, participants reported that they did not have a leadership team overseeing service learning. Having one with broad-based representation has helped the initiative to gain momentum through shared responsibility and a common vision. “The energy and enthusiasm at meetings is palpable. We set a monthly meeting schedule early in the year so that everyone could protect meeting dates and times” (Educator 5). Another participant reported that creating a district-level leadership team with all the key players sitting around a table, “made it much easier to garner support for the things we wanted to do. We cut out the middle man!” (Educator 4).

1(c) The district will have a contracted services agreement with an external service-learning coordinator whose job it will be to help teachers strengthen their community partnerships, assess the impact of at least one project per grade span, help educate community partners and the Board of Directors about the importance of service learning and the important role community partners play in service-learning projects, and help the district build local capacity to do these things. (Learn and Serve America Progress Report, 2010)

When reflecting about the district's external service-learning consultant, participants put it this way:

Having an experienced service-learning consultant partnering with us is helping us build local capacity for creating strong community partnerships and assessing the impact of projects. It has also given us an outside perspective that has helped us refine practices that may not have been refined any other way. We took advantage of the opportunity to learn from an experienced and passionate consultant who was willing and able to meet the leadership team and teachers to educate community partners and the Board and to help teachers assess the impact of projects. (Educator 5)

In order to meet their goal about educating stakeholders about what high-quality service learning is and why it is important (Goal 2), the Service Learning Leadership Team established the following measurable objectives-2(a) through 2(f):

2(a) All grade-span teacher leaders will have participated in a two-hour training with a middle-school educator who has an extensive background in and experience with service learning. (Learn and Serve America Progress Report, 2010)

This training was designed to distinguish service learning from community-based learning and community service, to look at the research supporting service learning, and to explain the hallmarks of high-quality service-learning projects. According to the district curriculum coordinator, grade-span teacher leaders needed a refresher in the eight

hallmarks of high-quality service learning so that they could, in turn, help other teachers in their grade span consider these hallmarks when planning, implementing, and evaluating projects.

Without such training the quality of the projects would not be as likely to improve over time. By sharing the hallmarks, we are building broader local capacity for understanding and sustaining the work. We took advantage of the opportunity to invest in a local administrator and local teachers to provide and receive the training respectively. This kept costs low and ensured teachers access to the trainer over time. (Educator 5)

2(b) “All teachers included on a district vertical team will have participated in a two-hour training with the middle-school educator aforementioned” (Learn and Serve America Progress Report, 2010). The training included the same content as that described in 2(a).

Because 90% of the district’s teachers are on a vertical team, this was a cost-effective and efficient way to provide information about what service learning is, why it is beneficial, and how it can be of high quality. Turnover since 2003 made providing this kind of information important to our efforts to build local capacity for the work. (Educator 5)

2(c) “The external service-learning coordinator will have met the community partners to explain what service learning is, why it is important, and what role they can play in the service-learning projects” (Learn and Serve America Progress Report, 2010).

The team felt strongly that recruiting and educating community partners was critical to their ability to build a long-term sustainable service-learning program. “We took advantage of the opportunity to work with someone who already had experience recruiting and educating community partners and who could help us build the capacity for doing so by learning from her example” (Educator 5).

2(d) The external service-learning coordinator will have met with the district Board of Directors to explain what service learning is, why it is important, and what role the Board can play in supporting service learning and ensuring its sustainability. (Learn and Serve America Progress Report, 2010)

Participants felt that having a fully educated Board that understands and supports service learning was critical to the directors’ ability to create policies and local budgets that would enable educators to sustain service learning over time. Educator 5 explained how teachers and students from each of the grade spans were partnered with the external service-learning coordinator “so that we continue to build local capacity for the work when the external coordinator is no longer available.”

2(e) “The Leadership Team will problem solve how to educate other stakeholders about service learning and their role in supporting it (e.g., paraprofessionals, bus drivers, secretaries, food-services personnel, custodians, etc.)” (Learn and Serve America Progress Report, 2010). The Leadership Team discussed this issue at Spring 2010 meetings and agreed to contract with a KIDS Consortium consultant who had worked

with the district for a number of years to meet with these stakeholders during a two-hour segment of the August 2010 inservice days.

2(f) “Grade-span teacher leaders will have promoted community understanding of service learning by putting pictures and descriptions of projects in the local newspaper (at least once per grade span per trimester, K-8, and at least once a semester, 9-12)” (Learn and Serve America Progress Report, 2010). Participants explained their belief that publishing pictures and articles about service learning would broaden the community’s understanding of service learning and help create better school-community relationships that they hoped would result in more support for the schools and the school budget. In May 2010, two different service-learning celebrations were held. One was a K-12 Celebration of Service Learning and was held at the district’s high school. All 22 service-learning projects completed during that school year were showcased by teachers and students via a display board and/or electronic presentation. A second service learning celebration occurred at the middle school being studied. This celebration culminated a year-long local history service-learning project. The gymnasium was packed with enthusiastic educators, community partners, students, parents, Board members, and community members. Both celebrations showcased students and their work.

In order to meet their goal of providing all students with multiple opportunities to engage in high-quality service learning during their K-12 experience and an opportunity to celebrate their accomplishments (Goal 3), the Service Learning Leadership Team established two measurable objectives – 3(a) and 3(b):

3(a) “All students in Grades K-10 will have participated in at least one high-quality service-learning project, some of which will be related to community and economic development” (Learn and Serve America Progress Report, 2010). Participants spoke about their pride around the fact that for the second year in a row, all students K-9 had participated in at least one service-learning project and in 2009-10, Grade 10 was added. Several projects described by participants contributed to community and economic development by helping food cupboards, mapping a local cemetery, providing art for public places, etc. The district used grant funds to provide teachers with the funds needed for material or software to complete projects. “Although some projects required no funds, most did. Some might not have happened without LSA funds” (educator 5).

3(b) Beginning September 2009, each grade span will have a teacher leader whose job it will be to promote and oversee service-learning projects within his/her grade span and serve as a liaison for that grade span on the district-wide Leadership Team for the LSA grant (Learn and Serve America Progress Report, 2010)

The grade-span teacher leaders provided each school with someone trained in the hallmarks of high-quality service learning who could assist with projects from application through celebration. “Without these teacher leaders in the schools, much of what has occurred would not have occurred. We are building local capacity by investing in our own teachers who could in turn build other teacher leaders” (Educator 6).

In order to meet their goal about creating policies around service learning and supporting service learning in the local budget as opposed to strictly through grant funding (Goal 4), the Service Learning Leadership Team established the following measurable objectives 4(a) and 4(b):

4(a) “The Leadership Team will have drafted at least one policy in support of service learning, K-12, with the idea that this policy will be presented to the Board of Directors for adoption by the end of 2011-12” (Learn and Serve America Progress Report, 2010).

We drafted a vision for service learning, created a logo, and drafted two policies – one that shows general board support for service learning, K-12, and one that provides support and procedures for posting student pictures and names on the service-learning website. The one providing support for service learning was approved by the Board in June 2010. We took advantage of in-house talent to create the logo. We took advantage of technical assistance provided from a consultant from KIDS Consortium to locate sample language for one policy and requested language for the website/webpage policy from MSMA. (Educator 5)

4(b) “The Leadership Team will have recommended the inclusion of stipends for the grade-span teacher leaders in the local budget for 2010-11 as a way to incrementally work towards sustainability beyond the grant” (Learn and Serve America Progress Report, 2010). According to the Lessons Learned Summary 2009-10 LSA report, the district moved the stipends for grade-span teacher leaders and 75% of the funds needed

for the external service-learning coordinator into the local budget for FY11.

Participants explained that the LSA grant agreement required them to move funding into the local budget in order to build a program that could survive without LSA funding.

It was very difficult to keep the money for the stipends and the contracted services in the budget since we needed to go below flat funding in order to send a budget to the public that they would support. Sacrifices in other areas were made to keep these items in the budget. (Educator 5)

Professional-development Approaches that Work

Job-embedded professional development. If one is to expect someone to deliver something of high quality, then those involved must possess, as a minimum requirement, the knowledge of what makes that particular something high quality (Educator 5). With service learning that means that educators and community partners (perhaps to a lesser degree) must understand the differences between community service and service learning. Participants in the doctoral study explained that the Kids Involved in Doing Service (KIDS) Consortium's three-legged stool model helped them understand whether a service project was a community service project or a service-learning project, and perhaps even more importantly, how to turn a worthy community service project into a service-learning project. Participants were trained to ask themselves three questions: (a) Does this project have academic integrity? (b) Does this project have student ownership? (c) Does this project incorporate apprentice citizenship? (KIDS, 2007; Educator 4, 2010). If teachers could answer yes and give details to support their affirmative answers, then

they could feel assured that they were on the right track to ensuring that the project was indeed a service-learning project.

To help teachers get at the notion that service learning is not just a project, but a learner-centered, hands-on/minds-on instructional strategy, a service-learning enthusiast in the district provided materials, resources, and ongoing training around the National Youth Leadership Center's eight hallmarks or standards of high-quality service learning. The in-house professional-development provider helped ensure that educators had a deep understanding of the eight hallmarks supported by research (i.e., meaningful service, link to curriculum, reflection, diversity, youth voice, partnerships, progress monitoring, and duration and intensity) and could apply those hallmarks to projects within their specific content areas. Teachers were introduced to the hallmarks during a two-hour service-learning training experience at each of the six vertical team days. The vertical teams consisted of K-12 teacher representatives from each grade level focused on one of six content areas: mathematics, literacy, science, social studies, health and wellness, and visual and performing arts. Each of the vertical teams meets two times during the year for a full day of professional development centered around their content areas. During that round of vertical team training sessions, project examples utilized were specific to the content area of focus for that particular vertical team and spanned kindergarten through high school senior projects. The trainer also introduced educators to the project probe concept and modeled the process using a vertical team member's service-learning project or project idea. The project probe was introduced to the district by a KIDS Consortium

consultant and consisted of examining the service-learning project for academic integrity, student ownership, and apprentice citizenship. Teams of teachers work together on these project probes to help make the project “meatier” and to help ensure that they focus on meeting authentic community needs.

As a follow-up to the winter vertical team meeting training on the hallmarks of service learning, the district used grant funds to hire their KIDS Consortium technical adviser to come in and work with teams of K-8 teachers on ramping up their service-learning projects by engaging in full-blown project probes. The consultant worked with grade-level and/or specialty area teams in two-hour blocks during the school day, specifically focused on developing a high-quality project for their team. Teams spent time discussing and brainstorming how to ensure that their projects were legitimately connected to curricula, met real-life community needs/problems, engaged students in brainstorming alternative solutions to the problem, and incorporated as many of the hallmarks or standards of high-quality as possible.

Service learning has been connected with our district’s overall curriculum and educational plan. Since then as far as service-learning professional development, we have had consultants connected with outside organizations come in and provide some training. We have done some in-house professional development as well. We have some people on staff that have a lot of experience and have spent a lot of time with service learning. It’s really nice to have in-house people. As far as our school goes, we are fortunate to have a couple of individuals, one in

particular, who has a lot of interest in it and they provide a lot of insight to help support teachers as they develop their projects. (Educator 6)

Three years ago the in-house service-learning enthusiast and professional-development provider became the assistant principal at the middle school being studied. In this role, I, in concert with the principal, was asked to provide most of the professional development provided for the school. Administrators at this rural, middle school are avid believers in the power and necessity of job-embedded, ongoing professional development. For the last several years, the school has focused its professional development around improving unit design, instructional strategies, and assessment literacy. Three school goals were established and a commitment was made that all teachers' meetings, leadership team meetings, early release day trainings, book studies, and inservice days would be devoted to meeting these goals. Every agenda has a clearly articulated link to one or more of the school-wide goals with appropriate learning objectives articulated. Professional learning communities were asked to be sure that their work also centered on meeting one or more of these goals. District-wide or state-mandated initiatives were tied to these goals and the focus became less about the mandate and more about how the work required could help the school meet its goals. In addition, teachers at this middle school were asked to show how their teacher evaluation goals for the year aligned to one or more of these school goals. According to Educator 6, a commitment has been made to focus energy around:

1. Improving student achievement for all (creating an increasingly more learner-

centered and individualized environment),

2. Developing a *positive school culture* that models respect and responsibility with high expectations for all,
3. Improving communication about student learning (refining standards grading and reporting skills, including descriptive feedback skills, rubric-writing, etc.)

Prior to this, there had not been an articulated set of goals that focused the work of the school. This was new territory for the school. The connection to service learning is that the assistant principal was asked by teachers to provide additional training around service learning to the middle-school community of educators and paraprofessionals and to help everyone understand how using service learning as an instructional strategy could help the school/teachers meet goals one and two.

This latest professional-development opportunity at the middle school being studied included a 90-minute session devoted to: situating service learning as an instructional strategy into the school's ongoing work around creating a learner-centered environment; providing a purpose for engaging middle-school students in service-learning projects; deepening teachers' and paraprofessionals' understanding of the hallmarks; weaving reflection throughout the service-learning cycle; and building strategies for encouraging youth voice, leadership opportunities, and communication skills. Participants were asked to examine their beliefs about the purpose of public education, to reflect upon instructional strategies already being used to create a more learner-centered environment, and to consider their readiness for incorporating service learning into their unit designs.

This kind of tailored and ongoing professional development has proven to be beneficial to this middle school, where 100% of its nearly 400 fifth through eighth graders will engage in quality service-learning projects during this school year.

I'm not a fan of one-time, one-day professional-development opportunities. I believe in sustainability. I believe that you continue to build upon what you are invested in knowing more about, what your vision is for your building. When we take on professional development in our building, we look for it to be a year's worth of work and development with constant following up. Some of our professional development is into its fourth or fifth year. So, I am a believer that if it's something that you really want, you really believe in, you have to build sustainability. You have to spend time with your staff to do that; so if you have turnover or that kind of thing happens through attrition or what-have-you, you still have a core group to maintain the initiative. You don't get sustainability from bringing in someone from the outside for one day or for one workshop with no follow-up afterwards. If you've built on-going professional development, then you can bring in outside experts for one day and follow-up on that learning after they leave. If you're aligning beliefs around professional development to service learning, then I think you just continue to build on the base or foundation that's already been laid. I don't think where we are is where we want to be, but I see the quality of service learning continuing to grow as we continue to educate more and more of our staff about it and as they have more and more experience around

putting good quality projects together. So the more they put good quality projects together and share that with their colleagues, the more comfortable they are with it, the more experienced they are with it, and they seek other opportunities. (Educator 6)

Evidence of Quality: Accuracy

Janesick (2004) asserted that a researcher must use numerous methods to establish “credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” (p. 102). To establish credibility, I used member checks, triangulation of data, peer review, and “long-term exposure to the program” (p. 102). Mills (2003) encouraged the use of “consciously pausing during the investigation” to “reflect on what you are attending to and what you are leaving out” (p. 103). Janesick (2004) confirmed that the use of peer reviewers is an important step in ensuring credibility (p. 109). The use of the peer review process (another doctoral student working on a qualitative study around service learning) encouraged me to take a reflective stance, in addition to aiding in the credibility of the study. Creswell (2003) and Janesick (2004) agreed that the use of outside readers is a valid approach to checking the accuracy of one’s findings. In order to “augment the confirmability” (p. 103) of the case study, I used outside readers and maintained an extensive paper trail.

In addition to the aforementioned credibility checks, I included “rich description of both sites and program” and extensive use of participant quotes to address transferability issues and add rich description (Mills, 2003, p. 102). Hatch (2002)

supported the usefulness of keeping a journal when he recommended that “researchers keep track of their impressions, reactions, reflections, and tentative interpretations in field notes and/or research journals” (p. 149). I kept a journal “documenting the steps [I took] during the data collection and data analysis portions of the...study” (p. 102) in order to establish dependability.

Creswell stated that by clarifying one’s bias, it “creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers” (2003, p. 196). An additional strategy for checking the accuracy of one’s findings is that of presenting “negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the themes” (Creswell, p. 196). Creswell further explained that sharing contrary information adds credibility to the study and helps the account ring true for the reader. I took this into consideration in my presentation of findings, making sure that I included not only the benefits but also the challenges of service learning as seen by middle-school students, their educators, and their community partners.

Summary

In summary, rural middle-school students, their educators, and community partners shared a common definition of service learning, in which the following four defining qualities emerged: authentic needs are met; learning is applied outside of the classroom; academic knowledge and skills are learned; and civic learning/volunteerism is embedded in the experience. The educators, in particular, talked about the evolution of service learning within their schools and their classrooms and its transformation from an

add-on project to an instructional strategy. As their experiences with the strategy, knowledge of quality indicators, and connections with others increased, so had the effectiveness of their service-learning projects. Students, educators, and community partners articulated their beliefs that service learning promoted the application of academic content to real world settings; motivated students; appealed to student's various learning styles; built in choice and variety; connected with hands-on learners especially; built relationships within the classroom, school, and community; altered perceptions of young and old alike; promoted a positive feeling in those who participated; encouraged collaboration with others; provided leadership opportunities; encouraged youth voices to be heard; and promoted a sense of belonging and a desire to get more involved in meeting needs of one's community. Participants recognized the challenges embedded within service learning, especially for a rural community, including a lack of readily available community partners/organizations, scarce financial resources, and time-intensive and costly transportation concerns. Those involved in the study identified management of time and resources as one of the biggest challenges. Participants acknowledged that while service learning seemed to be an effective instructional strategy for most middle-school students, it was not a cure-all or a magic bullet; there were some students who were not engaged in the projects or inspired by this type of learning experience. The middle-school educators reported the importance of job-embedded, ongoing professional-development opportunities to increase the quality of students' experiences and their satisfaction with

service learning. In addition, the educators noted the importance of organizational structures to support and sustain the work of service learning.

Section 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore participants' perspectives about their experiences with engaging in service-learning projects. Participants in the study included nine middle-school students, six middle-school educators, and one community partner. Data were collected primarily from in-depth interviews of each participant. I also collected and analyzed grant documents and participants' journal entries and conducted formal observations of various service-learning events.

Data collected during the study were utilized to answer the following three research questions:

1. What are the perceived effects of service-learning projects on rural middle-school students?
2. How do service-learning experiences impact students' views of their roles in schools and society?
3. What kinds of professional-development opportunities will educators need to effectively engage their students in high-quality service-learning projects?

Themes and Findings

The following themes emerged from the data: (a) academic knowledge, skills, and habits of mind; (b) real-life connections; (c) youth voice; (d) relationship-building and connections with others; (e) altered perceptions and positive public relations; (f)

differentiated learning (choice, learning styles, and hands-on learning); (g) motivation and interest; (h) leadership opportunities; (i) managing time and resources; (j) structure and resources needed; and (k) professional-development approaches. Middle-school students, their educators, and their community partners identified four defining qualities of service learning: authentic needs are met; learning is applied outside of the classroom; academic knowledge and skills are learned; and civic learning/volunteerism is embedded in the experience.

As was reported in section 4, rural, middle-school students, their educators, and community partners articulated their beliefs that service learning promoted the application of academic content; motivated students; appealed to various learning styles; altered perceptions of young and old alike; built in choice and variety; built relationships within the classroom, school, and community; promoted a positive feeling in those who participated; encouraged collaboration with others; provided leadership opportunities; encouraged youth voices to be heard; and promoted a sense of belonging and a desire to get more involved in meeting needs of one's community. Participants recognized the challenges embedded within service learning, especially for a rural community, including a lack of readily available community partners/organizations, scarce financial resources, and time-intensive and costly transportation concerns. Those involved in the study identified management of time and resources as one of the biggest challenges.

Participants acknowledged that while service learning seemed to be an effective instructional strategy for most middle-school students, it was not a cure-all or a magic

bullet; there were some students who were not engaged in the projects or by this type of learning experience. The middle-school educators reported the importance of job-embedded, ongoing professional-development opportunities in increasing the quality of students' experiences and their satisfaction with service learning. The educators also noted the importance of organizational structures to support and sustain the work of service learning.

Interpretation of Findings

This section includes connections between the literature review from section 2 on constructivist learning and the findings from this study, between the literature on democracy to the findings from this study, and between the literature on professional development to the findings from this study.

Connection to Literature: Constructivist Learning

Participants in the study expressed their beliefs that their service-learning experiences worked for so many students because of its constructivist approach to learning. Participants talked about service learning as a hands-on learning experience and, as such, as motivating for most of their middle-school students and/or peers. Participants also talked about the importance of making connections with others and building relationships; of using their knowledge and skills to solve authentic problems; and of being offered choices about how, what, and with whom they learned—fundamental characteristics of a constructivist approach to learning (Billig, 2002, 2006). According to participants' responses, special attention was paid to learning styles and

differentiation of learning strategies, leading to student buy-in. Silver et al. (2003) provided a framework for using learning style and multiple intelligence research in the classroom; Silver et al.'s framework was supported by Gardner's research (1995, 2004). Teacher participants in the study had undergone several years of Thoughtful Classroom training that had incorporated Silver et al.'s work, and it showed in terms of participants' responses. Service-learning experiences were seen as a way to help students construct their own meaning and honored both individual development needs and social interaction, key principles of constructivism supported by founding theorists and more recent advancements in brain research (Bruner, 1965; Canter Group, 2005; Dewey, 1906, 1916; Marzano, 2003; Piaget, 1955, 1962; and Wolfe & Brandt, 1998). Students involved in service learning in this rural, middle school were provided with rich opportunities to be involved in a constructivist approach to learning and to reflect upon their learning experiences in a variety of ways (Klopp et al. , 2001; Schauffler, 2005).

Connection to Literature: Democracy

Participants emphasized the importance of service-learning experiences in providing opportunities for students to become engaged in civic and political activities. One of the themes or categories that emerged from the data were the importance that participants now saw in volunteering, contributing to their communities, in raising awareness about important issues or problems, and in making a difference. This theme is supported by the work Glickman and Alridge (2001) conducted around the power in engaging students with democratic learning experiences. Another theme that emerged

was that of leadership opportunities; by ensuring that the service-learning experiences were curriculum-embedded and that *all* of their middle-school students were engaged in these experiences, leadership opportunities were afforded to all students, including those that may be marginalized or typically disenfranchised. By engaging all middle-school students in high-quality service-learning opportunities, marginalized citizens were invited into the public conversation and were given a voice, as citizens of various ages and walks of life worked toward the “common good” described by Dewey (1916, 1937, 1939).

According to Glickman and Alridge (2001), democratic learning occurred when students were (a) actively working with problems, ideas, and materials; (b) given individual and group choices within teacher guidelines; (c) responsible to themselves and the school community for using educational time wisely; (d) sharing their learning with others; (e) deciding how to make their learning a community contribution; (f) responsible for finding community resources for and places to apply and further their learning; (g) demonstrating their learning in public settings and receiving public feedback; and (h) working and learning from one another individually and collaboratively at paces that challenged everyone (p. 16). Democratic learning is the foundation of high-quality service learning, and the findings of this doctoral study suggested that by participating in high-quality service-learning experiences, students were engaged in democratic learning.

Connection to Literature: Professional Development

Educators involved in the study talked about the importance of having structures in place that supported ongoing, job-embedded professional development; such findings have also been supported in the literature (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Dantonio, 2001; DuFour, 2004; DuFour, et al., 2006; Little, 2001; Lomax, 2005; Schmoker, 2006). The educators' school and district utilized common planning times, early release days, in-service workshop days, teachers' meetings, curriculum resource teacher meetings (CRT leadership team), fifth and eighth grade department meetings, and K-12 content-area vertical team meetings as opportunities to systematically engage educators in professional development. Participants shared their experiences with professional learning communities, working together with colleagues on lesson and unit development as well as various instructional strategies, learning from and with teaching coaches, being part of leadership teams within their school and district, and learning from others through technology, field trips, trainings, and workshops as critical approaches to professional development.

Educators involved in the study discussed how the quality of their students' experiences with service learning had improved over time as a result of educators' increased understanding of the components of a high-quality service-learning project. The educators also attributed their success to having in-house supports, in particular mentioning the curriculum coordinator, the grade-span service-learning coordinator, and other teacher leaders in the building whom shared their experiences with service learning.

Participants also saw the financial resources from soft money (i.e., grants) as well as from the local budget as impacting the community's experiences with service learning. As a result of funding, more projects could be supported, transportation could be paid for in order to take students on field trips to community partners or volunteer organizations' work sites; community-wide celebrations were afforded; and the help of experts could be solicited.

Implications of Social Change

While I believe that this study has many implications for social change, perhaps the strongest two implications are those centered on youth engagement in civic and political life and increased school-community involvement. This next section explores these two implications in more detail.

Youth Engagement in Civic and Political Life

As students experience more opportunities to engage in projects where they solve authentic community needs and problems, become more informed about the world in which they live, interact more with diverse members of their school and communities (e.g., both local and global), apply their learning to real-world issues, and collaborate in meaningful ways with one another, they could have greater chances of becoming engaged citizens (Bennett, 2008; CIRCLE, 2003, 2007; Syvertsen, Flanagan, & Stout, 2007). By increasing the number of youth engaged in civic and political life, democracy will be strengthened. In order for a democracy to not only survive but also thrive, there needs to be widespread involvement in civic and political life (Andolina et al., 2003; Billig, Root

& Jesse, 2005; CIRCLE, 2003; Keeter et al., 2002; Lopez, 2004; Zaff & Michelsen, 2001). By ensuring that *all* students have multiple opportunities to practice their citizenship skills with guidance from their teachers and community members, the base of democratic participation is strengthened, helping to invite those typically disenfranchised or marginalized into community life. If middle-school students can become engaged in helping to make a difference in their communities (whether those communities be school, local, national, global, or online), then significant impact can be made on society. Engaged citizens tend to vote and volunteer on a regular basis; such behaviors have great implications for social change (CIRCLE, 2003, 2007). The more diverse voices one can invite into actively participating in our democracy, the greater the chance one has in solving some of the eight anti poverty goals facing society as identified by the United Nations Summit on Millennium Development Goals. Those goals include the following: end poverty and hunger, provide access to universal education, ensure gender equality, provide access to child health, provide access to maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, promote environmental sustainability, and encourage global partnerships (United Nations, 2010).

Increased School-Community Involvement

As students, educators, and community members become more involved in working together to solve important societal problems, they develop strong partnerships and a sense of belonging. This sense of being part of something important, of making a difference, of being a valued member of a group, of simply belonging helps to encourage

youth to stay in school and for community members to support the schools and the education of its youth. In harsh economic times, like the ones currently facing the United States, supporting school budgets can be a hard sell in some financially strapped communities. The findings of this doctoral study in conjunction with the findings of the professional literature could lead one to infer that high-quality service-learning experiences strengthens the bonds between the school and the larger community, helping to forge a mutually beneficial or symbiotic partnership between the two. The social implications for increased school-community involvement include more community commitment (in terms of time, energy, and material and human resources, etc.) to the education of youth, our greatest asset.

Recommendations for Action

Upon examining the findings of this doctoral study, I would recommend that rural middle school leadership engage their students in rigorous and relevant civic education programs, such as high-quality service-learning projects. I recommend that students be provided with multiple opportunities to engage in varied service-learning projects during their middle school years in order to provide them with ample opportunities to practice applying knowledge and skills needed for them to become effective, engaged, productive members of a democratic society.

In order to ensure that the service-learning experiences are high-quality learning experiences, I recommend that ongoing professional-development opportunities be provided for teachers to gain knowledge and skills around the hallmarks of high-quality

service learning and that teachers have job-embedded opportunities to work with their colleagues and expert others around best practices for engaging their students and communities with this instructional strategy. In addition, I recommend that districts and schools invest in providing structures for sustainability of service learning, such as school or grade-span service-learning coordinators, service-learning leadership teams, education of the school board and community members, incorporation of service learning as an instructional strategy into New Teacher Induction and Mentoring programs, embedding service learning into the district's curriculum, creating district-wide policies supporting service learning, and creating a mini-grant process for supporting teacher and student projects.

The results of this doctoral study will be shared with the local district administrative team, the Board of Directors, the district-wide Service Learning Leadership Team, and members of the school faculty. I intend to share the results and lessons learned from the doctoral study in other professional-development sessions as well, locally, statewide, and nationally.

Recommendations for Further Study

I would like to see this doctoral study replicated in other rural middle-school settings to determine if similar or distinct patterns in findings might be found. Because of some of the unique challenges of a rural setting, including having access to fewer community partners/organizations and potentially long and costly transportation concerns, I believe that continued study of rural populations is in order. According to the

U.S. Census (2000), 21% of Americans live in rural areas. Because most studies conducted about service learning were conducted in urban, suburban, or university settings, there is a need for continued study of this sub group of American society.

Battistoni (2006) and others (Billig, 2000; CIRCLE, 2003, 2007) have called for longitudinal studies and an increase in both qualitative and quantitative studies centered on the larger concepts of “civic engagement, education for citizenship, political or community involvement, public work, and most importantly social sustainability” (Battistoni, 2006, p. 15). I recommend that further study center around studying the long-term benefits of engaging middle-school students in high-quality service-learning experiences. One such research question might be: How does engaging in multiple high-quality service-learning experiences impact voting and volunteering rates of youth aged 18-25 years old?

In order to give continued voice to participants, I would recommend that there be further rigorous qualitative studies conducted in addition to quasi-experimental studies. In particular, I assert that there is room in the field for further study around giving more voice to youth participants. The field of education as a whole can learn much from listening to the responses of students to well-crafted prompts about how they best learn, (i.e., what works for them and what does not).

Researcher's Reflection

The qualitative nature of the study provided me with an opportunity to gather, document, analyze, and interpret the experiences of 16 voices engaged with service learning in a rural middle-school setting. The experience of interviewing, transcribing, coding, outlining, examining reflection journals and grant documents and reports, observing events, writing, and revising gave me a whole new appreciation for the intensive and overwhelming nature of conducting a qualitative study. At times the sheer amount of data collected was enough to cause me to close my laptop, put away the hard-copy documents, and contemplate if I had the skills and will needed to complete the task at hand. The process definitely challenged me intellectually and emotionally, pushing me to endure setbacks and to persevere. The process taught me a lot about myself as a student, researcher, and writer; it also taught me much about the need to balance work, research, family, friends, and one's health.

In addition to teaching me about qualitative research and myself as a researcher, my knowledge and understanding about service learning, instructional strategies, and professional development grew as a result of this opportunity to truly listen to middle-school practitioners and students. One of my favorite parts of the experiences was pouring over what the student participants had to say about their experiences with service learning (and with life in general); they were insightful, direct, and articulate about their beliefs about their roles in school and the community and about what constituted effective learning experiences for them.

One of the biases that I had to take into account was the fact that during my doctoral study, I took on an administrator role at the middle school in which the participants' worked and/or attended school. As a result of this position, I was careful not to pressure any of the participants or take advantage of my role in any way. I also worked hard to build rapport with each participant in order to make them feel comfortable enough with me, so that they would share their true perceptions of their experiences, including challenges and things that had not gone well. I felt that participants were honest and open with me. Another bias that I had to keep under consideration was the fact that I am a middle-school educator, one whom had engaged her middle-school students in service-learning projects and provided professional development for educators on using service learning as an instructional strategy.

Conclusions

This doctoral study sought to examine the problem of youth disengagement from civic and political life by examining the perceived effects of service-learning experiences upon youth. Findings from this study supported the need for ample opportunities for youth to engage in democratic experiences, practice citizenship skills, and enhance these lifelong skills in ways that empower youth to make a positive difference in their communities. Effective civic education programs are needed to ensure that schools are fulfilling the civic missions of public education. Results from this study support the claim that service learning can be an effective instructional strategy and an integral part of a high-quality civic education curriculum or program. With growing concerns nationwide

and locally about high school dropout rates and disengagement among some youth with schools, there is a need to keep youth engaged in both their schools and in their communities or society. As such, schools are charged with the tall order of using effective instructional strategies to engage *all* students in rigorous yet meaningful curricula. In order for all students to have access to ample opportunities to engage in democratic experiences, service-learning needs to be curriculum-embedded across varied, required curricula, ensuring that all students, not just those who might self-select to take a course that incorporates service learning, have access to develop their citizenship skills.

As a profession we have learned much about how students learn and how to match our teaching with their needs. Service learning is an instructional strategy, that when done well, ties together brain research, constructivist learning, differentiation strategies, and active hands-on minds-on learning. Service learning is both a rigorous and relevant approach to meeting academic standards. The academic, social, emotional, and civic/political benefits described by participants from this study as well as those reported by other quantitative and qualitative studies, make a compelling case for using service learning as an instructional strategy. The benefits associated with service learning hinge upon the instructional strategy being used with integrity (i.e., incorporating the hallmarks or indicators of high quality). As a result, educators need access to professional-development opportunities that help them possess the required knowledge and skills to more expertly involve their students and community partners with high-quality service-learning experiences. If it is indeed necessary for educators to possess a deep

understanding of the process and hallmarks of service learning (and any other instructional strategy they employ), then it is important to ensure that the professional-development training opportunities and structures are both present and of quality. Educators reported that on-going, job-embedded professional-development opportunities are a must; they reported that professional learning communities, common planning opportunities, unit and lesson study teams, vertical teams, working with coaches or expert others, and widespread teacher leadership opportunities were effective professional-development approaches.

As was stated in the opening of section 1, a democracy of the people, for the people, and by the people presupposes that those people are informed, willing, and able to be involved in ruling (Glickman & Alridge, 2001, pp. 13-15). A healthy democracy is dependent upon the education of its citizenry and the involvement of its citizens in public life (Billig & Root, 2006; Keeter et al., 2002). In order to meet the academic, social, emotional, and civic/political development needs of students, schools must employ instructional strategies that truly engage students with authentic opportunities to learn and apply academic knowledge and skills to real-life problems or needs. Service learning is one instructional strategy that may help address the problem of youth disengagement while also improving student achievement and learning.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

RESEARCH QUESTIONS for Middle school Educators

Research Question: What are the effects of service-learning projects on rural Maine middle-school students and their educators?

Research Question: What professional-development methods or approaches would improve the effectiveness of service-learning projects for students?

Background Questions:

How many years have you been teaching?

What courses do you teach?

What grades do you teach?

How many years have you been involved in engaging your students in service-learning projects?

Could you describe a service-learning project in which you have engaged students?

How would you describe what service learning is to a student, parent, or community member who had never heard of it before?

Main Question 1: Service Learning Set-up

How is service-learning set up at your school or in your district?

Possible Follow-up Questions:

Who is involved in service-learning projects in your school or district? Who are the players?

How long has your school or district engaged in service learning?

Who oversees the program and what are their responsibilities?

What is your role with regard to service learning?

Main Question 2: Service Learning Benefits & Challenges

What do you see as the benefits and challenges of engaging students in service-learning projects?

Possible Follow-up Questions:

What are the benefits to students?

What are the benefits to teachers and/or the school community?

What are the benefits to the larger community?

What are the challenges for students?

What are the challenges for teachers and/or other school officials?

What are the challenges for community partners?

Do service-learning projects work better for some students than they do for others? Could you elaborate please?

Main Question 3: Professional Development in General

Could you please describe a professional-development experience in which you have participated that you would describe as effective?

What structures or approaches to professional development work for you?

What structures or approaches to professional development do you find to be not very effective (at least not for your learning style)?

Main Question 4: Professional Development related to Service Learning

How has your school prepared you and other teachers to participate in service-learning projects?

What kinds of professional-development opportunities have been provided around service learning?

Possible Follow-up Questions:

How effective have you found these professional-development experiences to be in increasing your knowledge, understanding, and/or skills with service learning?

What kinds of professional-development activities or opportunities would you suggest for increasing the effectiveness of the service-learning projects?

How might professional-development experiences around service learning for teachers impact the effectiveness of the program for students?

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not effective at all and 5 being highly effective, how effective do you think service-learning training has been at your school?

Closure:

Is there anything else about your experiences with either service learning or professional development that you would like to share with me?

Appendix B: Pilot Interview

Pilot Interview Research Questions and Coding Attempts

What are the effects of service-learning projects on rural Maine middle-school students?

What professional-development methods or approaches would improve the effectiveness of service-learning projects for students?

Pilot Interview Codes and Definitions

Coding Attempt #1: Original Categories

ben/stu- benefits to students as a result of participating in service-learning projects

ben/sch- benefits to schools as a result of participating in service-learning projects

ben/com- benefits to the community as a result of partnering with schools in service-learning projects

chal/stu- challenges to students whom participate in service-learning projects

chal/sch- challenges that teachers and schools face when participating in service-learning projects

chal/com- challenges that the community faces when participating in service-learning projects

pd/need- a perceived professional development need

pd/sug- a suggestion for how to go about providing a professional development opportunity around the topic of service learning

pd/chal- a challenge in providing professional development around service learning

sl/ex- an example of a service-learning project

sl/def- a definition of service learning

sl/struc- the structure or set-up of a district or school's service-learning program, including who is involved in service learning

Coding Attempt #2: Categories Added

sl/com- components of a service-learning program

time- time-management issues

auth- authentic needs of a community are being met

real- real-life connections are being made

diff- differentiation issues (different types of learners' needs are being addressed)

mut/rec- the relationships or partnerships are mutually beneficial or reciprocal in nature

act- action is taking place

mon- issues around money and/or funding are being addressed

vie/you- views of the youth are being expressed

mana-management issues are being addressed

Coding Attempt #3: Domain Outline

- I. Service learning at our school
 - A. Examples of
 - B. Definition of
 - C. Components of
 - D. Structure or set-up of
 1. Teachers involved

2. Administration involved
3. Process for project approval
4. Money or funding of projects

II. Benefits of service learning

A. For students

1. Real-life connections
2. Voice
3. Differentiation
4. Relationship building – mutual or reciprocal relationships
5. Action

B. For teachers or the school

1. Differentiation
2. Relationship building
3. Action

C. For the community

1. Authentic needs
2. Relationship building - mutual or reciprocal relationships
3. Views of youth

III. Challenges of service learning

A. For students

1. Management

- a. Time
- B. For teachers or the school
 - 1. Management
 - a. Time
 - 2. Money
 - C. For the community
 - 1. Management
- IV. Professional Development and service learning
 - A. Perceived needs
 - B. Suggestions for
 - C. Challenges of

Coding Attempt #4: Peer Reviewer Coding domain

- I. Process
 - A. Number of students involved
 - B. Grade level
 - C. Subject area
 - D. Life skill learned
 - E. Target audience
 - F. Need
- II. Managing

- A. Time/schedule
 - B. Number of students
 - C. Partners (community)
 - D. Preferred 'comfort zones'
- III. Definition
- A. Outside of classroom (real world setting)
 - B. Give (no cost)
 - C. Relates to academic learning
- IV. Perception of
- A. Students
 - B. Those in need
- V. Communication about Service Learning
- A. Media/Public Relations
 - B. Lack of communication within the district
 - C. Benefits
 - 1. Short Term
 - 2. Long Term
- VI. Support
- A. Contact in and out of the building and district
 - B. Money
 - C. Application

- VII. Making Connections
 - A. Between classroom and real world
 - B. Between students and students
 - C. Between students and needs
 - D. Between school and community

Coding Attempt #5: Final Domain Outline

- I. Service learning at the school
 - A. Examples of
 - 1. Number of students
 - 2. Grade level involved
 - 3. Academic/subject area addressed
 - 4. Life skill learned
 - 5. Target audience
 - 6. Need being met
 - B. Definition of
 - 1. Outside classroom application (real world setting)
 - 2. Relates to academic learning
 - 3. Volunteering or giving
 - C. Structure or set-up of
 - 1. People involved

- a. Teachers
 - b. Project coordinators
 - c. Administration
 2. Project Process
 - a. Application
 3. Resources
 - a. Money or funding of projects
- II. Benefits of service learning
- A. For students
1. Real life connections
 2. Youth voice
 3. Differentiation of learning
 4. Relationship building/making connections
 - a. Student to student
 - b. Student to teacher
 - c. Student to community or community partners
 5. Perception of population served
- B. For teachers or the school
1. Differentiation of learning experience
 2. Relationship building/making connections
 - a. Positive public relations in and out of school community

C. For the community and/or community partners

1. Authentic needs
2. Relationship building/making connections
 - a. Community partner to student
 - b. Community partner to school
3. Perception of youth

III. Challenges of service learning

A. For students

1. Management
 - a. Time/schedules
2. Perception of population served
3. Learning styles or preferences

B. For teachers or the school

1. Management
 - a. Time/schedules
 - b. Logistics of supply and demand
2. Resources
 - a. Money
3. Communication
 - a. Lack of project knowledge within the school or district

C. For the community

1. Management
 - a. Time/schedules
 - b. Logistics of supply and demand
 2. Perceptions of youth
- IV. Professional development and service learning
- A. Perceived needs
 - B. Suggestions for
 - C. Challenges of

Coding Using the Final Domain Outline

I. Service learning at the school

A. Examples of

1. Number of students

It was a small number of students, less than ten students were involved.

2. Grade level involved

students in grades five through eight

3. Academic/subject area addressed

computer literacy and applications

taking their sewing skills that they've been learning in the classroom,

4. Life skill learned

sewing related or skills related to life management skills that she teaches, as far as keeping a home, you know, or you know, taking care of your personal belongings

5. Target audience

The students recorded stories from trade books for the elementary students in our district,

quilts for people who are ill

6. Need being met

they've worked on the Linus Quilt project, which is quilts for people who are ill... as a comfort item.

tablecloths that the LMS students did for the nursing home. So, the nursing home ended up with the tablecloths for no cost,

B. Definition of

1. Outside classroom application (read world setting)

projects that take the student outside of the classroom

2. Relates to academic learning

project that they do outside of school relates to some academic learning that they are doing in school

3. Volunteering or giving

they give to someone else, either to someone in their school community or in their local community or in the broader world, even globally

C. Structure or set-up of

1. People involved

a. Teachers

I also know that there are teachers involved in actually doing the projects. For instance, the life management skills teacher, I know has done various projects

b. Project coordinators

There is a service-learning contact person in my building, and when I was actually talking about my iPod project,

So, we have building representatives, and then we have a district teacher who I am assuming those building representatives work with to support service learning

c. Administration

There is also an administrator on what's called the A team, which means a district level administrator, the curriculum coordinator. I believe she's involved in service learning, just as a system of checks and balances to make sure that the projects truly are service-learning projects and not just "let's go out and have fun projects."

I know that she is part of the overarching project personnel

2. Project Process

a. Application

So, by using my building contact person, I was able to then apply for district money.

My application went to a different teacher outside of my building who oversees service learning for the entire district.

3. Resources

b. Money or funding of projects

I just so happened to be saying it in front of this person and this person let me know that there was money available

I was able to then apply for district money

the curriculum coordinator. I believe she's involved in service learning, probably in helping to secure funding

There's generally no cost to whoever receives whatever service. The cost is absorbed within the service-learning budget of the school.

II. Benefits of service learning

A. For students

1. Real life connections

taking skills that they are learning in a classroom and putting them to use in a real world setting, and I think that is often a connection that is missing in schools.

I think the hands-on or the real-life connection is what makes it a real interest for many students.

2. Differentiation of learning

students that are special needs it would be a benefit to that group of students. Students that are gifted and talented, it would be a benefit to those students. So, I can't think of anybody else, other than if it's just a work style thing.

3. Relationship building/making connections

a. Student to student

But, I think that if a person partners kids up together, and if you mix those folks up that have those tendencies, lots of times we know our students well enough, especially in small schools like what I work at, that you can mix kids together.

b. Student to teacher

And talk to kids about how this is going to be outside of your comfort zone because of this and this, but don't worry, your partner will help you along the way, and we have these things in place to help you too.

c. Student to community or community partners

So, the benefits there in that kind of project were not only did they receive the items that were obviously needed, but they also had that time of communication and sharing from both groups.

The young people and the elderly would benefit from that, and hopefully, if young people are involved in those kinds of projects their empathy toward elderly people and the issues of elderly people become more real, and they become more conscientious of decisions they make as young people and as they become older as employees and paying taxes.

B. For teachers or the school

1. Differentiation of learning experience

And talk to kids about how this is going to be outside of your comfort zone because of this and this, but don't worry, your partner will help you along the way, and we have these things in place to help you too.

2. Relationship building/making connections

a. Positive public relations in and out of school community

I think that public relations is a huge benefit. I mean often schools are in the newspaper when it's budget time or there's been some catastrophe or there's something like banning the books, some controversy going on. But, there's a real plus to saying students from our school assisted people with quilts when they were ill, or they provided this service to a nursing home or those kinds of things. make our schools look more accessible to our communities

C. For the community and/or community partners

1. Authentic needs

students from our school assisted people with quilts when they were ill, or they provided this service to a nursing home or those kinds of things.

I think that a benefit would be that whatever need there was was met for no cost. There's generally no cost to whoever receives whatever service.

The cost is absorbed within the service-learning budget of the school.

tablecloths that the LMS students did for the nursing home. So, the nursing home ended up with the tablecloths for no cost,

2. Relationship building/making connections

a. Community partner to student

the residents of the nursing home of course had that great interaction with young people as they were up there. So, the benefits there in that kind of project were not only did they receive the items that were obviously needed, but they also had that time of communication and sharing from both groups.

b. Community partner to school

3. Perception of youth

as well as to point out that our young people are not just skateboarding on the sidewalks, but they are doing these good things too.

III. Challenges of service learning

A. For students

1. Management

a. Time/schedules

Time management is going to be one. I think they often don't know what time they are volunteering for when they volunteer to be involved, and the project might get old before they get it wrapped up. So, time management in that do they have enough time to do it, and time management in the sense of staying on task for the duration of the project.

I think too that sometimes projects take students outside the school day, and if they are involved in other things, you have to make choices. You know, am I going to go to soccer practice or go to the nursing home?

Because those are the types of things that don't always happen in service-learning projects because you are dealing with people who are not operating on a school schedule,

2. Learning styles or preferences

I think the types of students that it would be most difficult for would be those that are kind of concrete-sequential. They like to follow the recipe. They want to know what it's going to look like, taste like at the end. They want to know step A and step B, and they want to check off

when they have everything completed, and they want a very tight timeline. And they want it to be perfect too along the way.

B. For teachers or the school

1. Management

a. Time/schedules

It's just easier to do everything in the classroom and to check off scores and grades and take care of things that way, but I don't think that that is true learning for many students.

And a challenge for a teacher time management wise is making it fit in and making those connections before school, after school, and during school with people outside of their building.

b. Logistics of supply and demand

If you're trying to do this, well in my situation, if I'm trying to do this with my seventh grade class that actually ends up being a hundred students. Even if you partner them together, you're talking fifty projects.

And the challenge to a teacher would be when you only have ten projects, but you have one hundred students, how are you going to divvy up the workload? And do you include everybody or do you just take the people that are interested or you know, those kinds of management issues

2. Communication

c. Lack of project knowledge within the school or district

And I know there have been other teachers involved too, because I know when my name was on a list, there wasn't just the two of us, there were other teachers, but I can't think specifically what their projects were.

C. For the community

1. Management

a. Time/schedules

Because those are the types of things that don't always happen in service-learning projects because you are dealing with people who are not operating on a school schedule,

b. Logistics of supply and demand

one of the challenges would be a place like the nursing home to have as much need for as many students.

a small nursing home in our rural community might not have fifty projects this year that are within the realm of the capabilities of those students. So, I think a challenge of the community is to help provide more opportunities for teachers.

IV. Professional development and service learning

A. Perceived needs

B. Suggestions for

C. Challenges of

Coding Using the Initial Categories with Transcription of Pilot Interview

Teacher #1

June 17, 2008

I: I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. The first set of questions are just some background questions. So, could you tell me about how many years you have been teaching?

T: I have been teaching fourteen years, but only three of those at the middle level.

I: And what courses do you teach?

T: I teach technology, as in computer literacy and applications, to grades, to students in grades five through eight.

I: You anticipated my next question.

T: [laughs]

I: How many years have you been involved in engaging your students in service learning?

T: Just the past year was my first year of actively moving out of the thought stage to the do stage. **(act)**

I: Could you describe a service-learning project in which you have engaged students or in which you plan to engage students?

T: I can describe one that I did with students. It was a small number of students, less than ten students were involved. The students recorded stories from trade books for the elementary students in our district, and they did this digitally. And then their recordings

were moved to iPod Nanos, and those iPod Nanos have not yet been delivered to the elementary schools, but they will be in the elementary school libraries starting at the beginning of the next school year. **(sl/ex)**

I: Cool. Thank you. How would you describe service learning to a student or a parent or a community member who had never heard of it before?

T: I would explain that it's that service learning are projects that take the student outside of the classroom so they give to someone else, either to someone in their school community or in their local community or in the broader world, even globally. And the project that they do **(act)** outside of school relates to some academic learning that they are doing in school **(sl/def)**

I: Now we move into some uh of the main research questions.

T: Okay.

I: So the first question I have for you within this category is, how is service learning set up at your school or within your district...at least from your point of view?

T: There is a service-learning contact person in my building, and when I was actually talking about my iPod project, I just so happened to be saying it in front of this person and this person let me know that there was money available. So, by using my building contact person, I was able to then apply for district money. **(mon)** My application went to a different teacher outside of my building who oversees service learning for the entire district. So, we have building representatives, and then we have a district teacher who I

am assuming those building representatives work with to support service learning. **(sl/struc)**

I: Who are the players in service learning in your school or in your district that you happen to know about? Besides, the building person and district person that you already mentioned.

T: I know that there are others. There is also an administrator on what's called the A team, which means a district level administrator, the curriculum coordinator. I believe she's involved in service learning, probably in helping to secure funding **(mon)** and just as a system of checks and balances to make sure that the projects truly are service-learning projects and not just "let's go out and have fun projects." **(sl/struc)** So, can you repeat the question again?

I: Sure. Who is involved in service-learning projects in your school or in your district? So, in other words, who are the players?

T: I know that she is part of the overarching project personnel, but I also know that there are teachers involved in actually doing the projects. **(act)** For instance, the life management skills teacher, I know has done various projects where her students are taking their sewing skills that they've been learning in the classroom, and they've worked on the Linus Quilt project, which is quilts for people who are ill... as a comfort item **(sl/ex; auth; real)**. I know she has also done other projects with the local nursing home, and I'm not sure if those were sewing related or skills related to life management skills that she teaches, as far as keeping a home, you know, or you know, taking care of your

personal belongings. **(auth; real)** But, I do know that as a teacher, she has been involved. And I know there have been other teachers involved too, because I know when my name was on a list, there wasn't just the two of us, there were other teachers, but I can't think specifically what their projects were. **(sl/struc)**

I: What do you see as the benefits and challenges of engaging students in service-learning projects?

T: I think one of the greatest benefits is that they are taking skills that they are learning in a classroom and putting them to use in a real world setting, and I think that is often a connection that is missing in schools. **(real)** It's just easier to do everything in the classroom and to check off scores and grades and take care of things that way, but I don't think that that is true learning for many students. I think the hands-on or the real-life connection is what makes it a real interest for many students. **(ben/stu; real)**

I: What do you see as maybe some of the challenges to students with being asked to engage in service-learning projects?

T: Time management is going to be one. **(time)** I think they often don't know what time they are volunteering for when they volunteer to be involved, and the project might get old before they get it wrapped up. So, time management in that do they have enough time to do it, and time management in the sense of staying on task for the duration of the project. I think that's one big one. I think too that sometimes projects take students outside the school day, and if they are involved in other things, you have to make choices. You know, am I going to go to soccer practice or go to the nursing home?

Things like that. Those are challenges. **(chal/stu)** And a challenge for a teacher time management wise is making it fit in and making those connections before school, after school, and during school with people outside of their building. **(chal/sch; time)**

I: How about any benefits that you see, because you spoke about the challenges for teachers? Do you see any benefits for teachers or other school officials?

T: Oh, I think that public relations is a huge benefit. **(vie/you)** I mean often schools are in the newspaper when it's budget time or there's been some catastrophe or there's something like banning the books, some controversy going on. But, there's a real plus to saying students from our school assisted people with quilts when they were ill, or they provided this service to a nursing home or those kinds of things. **(auth/real)** I think it's a way to make our schools look more accessible to our communities, as well as to point out that our young people are not just skateboarding on the sidewalks, but they are doing these good things too. **(ben/sch; vie/you)**

I How about benefits or challenges to the larger community, community partners or other folks outside of the school?

T: I think one of the challenges would be a place like the nursing home to have as much need for as many students. If you're trying to do this, well in my situation, if I'm trying to do this with my seventh grade class that actually ends up being a hundred students. Even if you partner them together, you're talking fifty projects. So, you know, a small nursing home in our rural community might not have fifty projects this year that are within the

realm of the capabilities of those students. So, I think a challenge of the community is to help provide more opportunities for teachers. **(cha/com; mana)** And the challenge to a teacher would be when you only have ten projects, but you have one hundred students, how are you going to divvy up the workload? And do you include everybody or do you just take the people that are interested or you know, those kinds of management issues. Those are the challenges. **(cha/sch; mana)**

I: I think you have alluded to this already, but could you speak a little more about the benefits you see for the community in having students involved in service learning?

T: Oh, I think that a benefit would be that whatever need there was was met for no cost. There's generally no cost to whoever receives whatever service. The cost is absorbed within the service-learning budget of the school. **(ben/com; mut/rec; mon)** Once again, oh I think it was tablecloths that the LMS students did for the nursing home. **(sl/ex)** So, the nursing home ended up with the tablecloths for no cost **(mon)**, and the residents of the nursing home of course had that great interaction with young people as they were up there. So, the benefits there in that kind of project were not only did they receive the items that were obviously needed, but they also had that time of communication and sharing from both groups. The young people and the elderly would benefit from that, and hopefully, if young people are involved in those kinds of projects their empathy toward elderly people and the issues of elderly people become more real, and they become more conscientious of decisions they make as young people and as they become older as employees and paying taxes. I think there's a real benefit. **(ben/com; ben/stu; mut/rec)**

I: Thank you. Do you think that service-learning projects might work better for some types of students than they do for others? If so, if you see that, could you please elaborate on who those types of students might be? You know, maybe you don't see that, and that's completely fine.

T: I think the types of students that it would be most difficult for would be those that are kind of concrete-sequential. They like to follow the recipe. They want to know what it's going to look like, taste like at the end. They want to know step A and step B, and they want to check off when they have everything completed, and they want a very tight timeline. And they want it to be perfect too along the way. Because those are the types of things that don't always happen in service-learning projects because you are dealing with people, who are not operating on a school schedule, and who's uh people's needs might be tablecloths one month but next month they might need napkins to go with the tablecloths. And you know, there are those students who would be saying, "well, if you had told me that in the first place, I could have..." You know, people who like to follow those strict structures. **(chal/stu)** But, I think that if a person partners kids up together, and if you mix those folks up that have those tendencies, lots of times we know our students well enough, especially in small schools like what I work at, that you can mix kids together. **(diff)** And talk to kids about how this is going to be outside of your comfort zone because of this and this, but don't worry, your partner will help you along the way, and we have these things in place to help you too. But I think, generally, I can't really think of a group of students on the whole that, you know, students that are special

needs it would be a benefit to that group of students. **(ben/stu)** Students that are gifted and talented, it would be a benefit to those students. **(ben/stu)** So, I can't think of anybody else, other than if it's just a work style thing. **(chal/stu)**

I: Great. Ahh, we are at about twenty minutes or so. I have a few more questions, questions related to professional development and service-learning. Would you like to continue the interview or does your time schedule allow you to do so? No problem either way. This would be a good place to wrap-up if you wish not to continue with the interview.

T: Oh absolutely, let's continue. [laughs] I have nothing to do this evening except avoid my workout.

I: [laughs] I hear you. Great. I really appreciate you agreeing to continue the interview. Okay, now we're on the home stretch.

Note: At this point, the interview continued for about ten to fifteen more minutes.

Questions were then asked about professional development opportunities offered around service learning within the district and the interviewee's ideas and suggestions about how to improve the service-learning professional development opportunities offered.

Appendix C: Sample Student Transcriptions

Student Interview #1:

I: Thank you very much for being willing to do this. I have some questions about your experiences with SL but before we get into those questions, I'd like for you to think for a few moments about a lesson, or an activity or a class where you would say, "oh we did something really cool there that really helped me learn." Have you had any of those experiences here at the Jr. High?

S: Yeah.

I: Oh phew. That's a good answer! [laughs]

S: [laughs]

I: Do you mind sharing one or more of those experiences?

S: At the SL Kids' Fun Day we had a game, and we wanted to make our game kind of have it relate to hunger; so we did a food pyramid and you had to stick the food on the pyramid, and the little kids loved it. There was a lot of people. And it was really fun.

I: So the kids really loved it, and you had a lot of fun?

S: Yeah, a lot.

I: That's neat. How about anything else? It doesn't have to be SL, but have you had a project or lesson activity that really worked for you as a learner?

S: I like a lot of learning activities that are hands-on and like in art class when we're making things with clay or making masks or in math when we're doing things with

geometry. I like handling things like that. That really helps me learn.

I: Ah. So you're very tactile. Does it work for you when a teacher has you read something?

S: No. It just doesn't sink in as much.

I: Okay. How about when teachers talk, 'cause that's pretty easy for teachers to do? We like to talk. Did you ever notice? [laughs]

S: Again. Not so much. I get pretty bored listening to teachers talk on and on.

I: Okay, let's talk some more about your involvement with SL projects. Would you mind talking to me a little more about Kids Fun Day? In addition to the game, you also did a PSA with a research question before the actual Kids Fun Day. Can you talk some about that?

S: I started out with these sheets of ideas and at first you jotted down some words that might be related and then some sites that you visited. And then after you got that done, you made a web, and I thought that was really cool because I hadn't done that before. And notmaking is a lot easier than note-taking.

I: It is, isn't it?

S: Yeah, and my research question was How do tobacco fields in Pakistan cause hunger.

I: Did you say tobacco fields?

S: Yeah.

I: Oh that's interesting!

S: It's kind of sad but interesting. I learned a lot.

I: So, then you created from all your research and your concept web, you created a PSA, using Keynote?

S: Yes. Keynote.

I: How was that? Do you like putting together something like that – presentations?

S: Yes. At the Kids Fun Day some adults looked at the PSAs, but they were mostly there with their kids playing the games.

I: Do you have a suggestion for how we could have done that differently, because I thought the PSAs were so well done.

S: Maybe encouraging if there are 2 adults with one kid, that they could switch off. One could go and look at the PSAs and the other could play the games with the kids, and then they could take turns that way.

I: Oh, that 's a cool idea.

I: Another SL project that you were involved in is the local history project.

S: Yeah, My class has been working on the Early Settlers and Founding Fathers, and my group as Jeremy Nelson. I can really relate my life to his, because he was the first teacher in Lincoln, and my mom is a teacher.

I: Oh! Cool!

S: He has like 12 kids and I have 5 sisters. [laughs] We kind of have like half as many kids as he had. That would be really hectic!

I: So you've made connections with who you've been researching

S: Yeah, definitely.

I: So what have you guys been doing to find information, since it's not like there's a textbook written on Jeremy Nelson?

S: Yeah exactly. We have borrowed a lot of books from the Historical Society and from our librarian. If we have any questions that we can't find in those books, then we can go ask her. And if she doesn't know, then we have people from the Historical Society that we can call to get information from. And it was really cool because we learned what it was like back in the 1900s and like how they coped and stuff.

I: Oh that's great. So the Historical Society and the librarian have been helpful.

S: Yeah.

I: Have you guys been scanning pictures?

S: We're going to. And it's really cool to look at the Maine Memory Network website because you can look back on what your town used to look like. And you're like, "oh I know that place, but it looks a lot different!"

I: It is really neat that you guys are creating this whole website based on Lincoln. Did you share with you that there were only like 3 or 4 pictures about Lincoln on the Maine Memory Network website before you started?

S: Yeah. Now we have like 60 or so pictures scanned. A whole lot. And we have more coming.

I: So did you guys go on a field trip?

S: We went on a field trip to the Historical Society, and it was really cool. We saw old snow shoes, and soda bottles, and pictures of the old school teams and stuff. Very

different. And the house was older, so you could really see the differences. It was cool.

I: So do you think from your perception as a student that this service learning is an effective way to learn about local history?

S: Yeah. It's a lot better than just reading about it or listening to a teacher tell you about it. Because this way, it's hands on. It's kids our own age that are doing this history, so we can actually see the history, touch the history with our own eyes and hands. That's so cool, I think. This way we get to do the research and find out for ourselves instead of someone just giving us the information and saying here you go.

I: Yeah, so you're having to process, find the information, research it yourselves. That is cool. Have you or anyone else in your classroom got stuck and couldn't find out information that you needed?

S: Yeah. We haven't had to call Mr. King from the Historical Society yet, but we have a few questions, so we'll probably have to call soon.

I: Transitioning a little bit here, I believe that you participated in the Hoops for Haiti fundraiser. What did you think about that experience?

S: I thought it was really cool, raising all this money for people that were already poor, and then they had this terrible earthquake and lost so much. We learned about this in social studies. So, we were baking and coming to the basketball game, and it was fun and it was helpful.

I: If you had to describe to one of your younger siblings what SL was, how would you

describe it?

S: I would say it's a chance for you to help other people and at the same time learn stuff by researching and working in groups with other people, you get to talk about what you're learning and how you can help. And, it's really fun!

I: How about talking to me about the benefits for student of SL? What do you see as the biggest benefit of SL for students?

S: We're learning a lot more by researching, and we're learning a lot more. Because sometimes when kids aren't interested in whatever they're learning, they don't put their best effort into it. And so, SL is better learning for everyone, because you're more into it.

I: Excellent. How about challenges of SL for a student?

S: Challenges. Well, not finding what you need all the time and having to ask a lot of questions. But questions are good though. [laughs]

I: Questions are good things. How about time; did that play a role at all?

S: Oh! Time. Yeah. Like when you're doing research, trying to find particular answers in the time given. Trying to make a project out of the information in a given time.

I: Thank you. How about benefits to the community?

S: Well, a lot of people in the community probably don't know a lot of stuff, [laughs], well, I mean about local history, but they can go on this website we're making or they could raise money for other people or get more information about a topic from the research we've already done. I think the people from the Historical Society feel really good about helping us; they might know some stuff that we didn't before so I think they

feel really helpful.

I: How about challenges for them?

S: Like if people aren't cooperating or if kids are really interested in certain questions but they can't come up with the information, like they're saying "oh I know this, it's in the back of my mind, I just can't pull it out right now."

I: Oh exactly. I have that feeling often! How about benefits to your teachers?

S: I think that the teachers know that it will help us a lot and they feel confident and it's a lot better for us, so then they know that they have accomplished being a good teacher.

I: Yeah. And being a good teacher is very important to teachers.

S: I was thinking that SL is really good because it helps you get used to helping other people and if when you get a job, you might have to do research or other stuff like that, and it's a lot of help getting you used to this kind of thing, doing research and working together with other people. So when you get a job or have a family, you'll know what to do to help out your community. You know, so you'll know that you can make a difference.

I: So what do you think might be a challenge for teachers?

S: Well, putting it all together and trying to find all this information, where they can get it from, and get all these books and other resources.

I: Right that's a lot of work, and they have to collaborate with different people which I'm sure is just 1 more thing. Anything else that you can think of that you'd like to share about our experiences with SL?

S: I think it's got a lot of other people interested and they're probably like I can't wait until that website gets out.

I: I know I'm so excited about it and very proud of what you guys have accomplished. Sometimes adults have visions about teenagers, how do you think SL might impact that?

S: Usually they think teens aren't really that smart and they're just little punks on the street and we can really learn stuff and do this and show you guys what we can do.

I: Yea, that's awesome. If you think of anything else please come and grab me or you can send me an email. Thank you very much for your time, I appreciate it.

Student Interview #5

I: Thank you!

S: You're welcome.

I: So, I primarily want to talk to you about your experiences with service learning. But before I do that I wanna start by, cuz you've had 4 years now at the junior high.

S: Yea

I: Yea. Almost a big high school student here, so you have lots of wisdom.

S: Yea

I: You sound unconvinced.(laugh) I'm wondering if you could think about a class or lesson or an activity that you've done that you think, "oohh that was really cool! I learned a lot from that." Have you had any of those here at the junior high?

S: Yea.

I: Ok, would you mind describing one or two? Just so I can kind of get an idea of what works for you.

S: Math class, I had the algebra lesson then we got the Alecks pie so I'm not totally blank on it. When we have a lesson, like a real lesson in class, I know how to do it because of the Alecks program.

I: Ohhh

S: So, algebra is one of the biggest things we're working on right now, and I didn't know how to do it but now I'm speedy quick at it.

I: You're speedy quick at it! Now is math something you have felt unconfident about before? Like, previously?

S: Uhh, no I've always wanted to do math when I got older, but it just seems like it was getting harder throughout the years and then I almost gave up on it last year, and then this year I picked back up on it because of the Alecks program.

I: Ohh, that's awesome! That's very cool. So you've really enjoyed that Alecks has been helpful?

S: Yes it has!

I: Wow, thats great. Very cool. Can you think of anything else that has been, it's ok if you can't. That was a great example, perfect example.

S: Uhh, I like the service learning project that we did in reading.

I: Oh really? Well good because I'd like to talk to you all about that! If you're sucking up right now you're doing an excellent job.(laugh)

S: Nope I'm not.

I: You're not. Ok, well why did you like it?

S: Because I like doing the PENCORPS presentation. I like making visuals, and then I like the fun-day part because we got to play our games and make our own games, and the art.

I: So you got to bring in art? You love art?

S: Yea

I: Umm, so that's something you got to bring into a reading project?

S: Yea, we got to I wouldn't say necessarily skip class, but we got out of some class to go

work on our project. Not that I don't like reading, it's just sometimes it can get a little boring

I: Right.

S: But, (laugh), umm I like, I liked putting all the pieces together, like taking all the art from it and then taking all the knowledge that we're learning from it and putting it together to show everyone, so.

I: That's very very cool. Umm, so you have done a couple service learning projects that you've been involved in that I know about. The one for reading, the PSA's that you guys did around hunger and the PENCORPS rally for change, kids fun-day, whatever all of that stuff.

S: Yea

I: You worked on a history project, right?

S: Yea

I: The local history project. Um, can you talk to me, did you work on that last year too with Mrs. Harris?

S: Um, with Mrs. H I think we looked at photos. We had Mrs. K come in and, yea we had Mrs. K come in and then we looked at photos and organized them by date and times and what there subjects was. But this year we're actually scanning photos, putting them on a website. The website we have to write a detailed summary about what the picture was and then we're gonna put it on the website so other people can see the history of Lincoln. And, we had groups and we did the telegraph, telephone, the first automobile

and mailing service. And my group had the telegraph and we couldn't find any history of it for Lincoln but we had to do what we found so.

I: How did you get information on that?

S: Umm, Mr. K and Mrs. M from the library they put together booklets and umm binders of paper that had information on it and we had to read through all of them. (Motions: The print was like that big)

I: So the print was really small huh?

S: Yea, and uh we had to read all of it and put it in our own words and summarize it and try figure out why we used the telegraph, what was the most important thing we used the telegraph for, umm when was it invented or how much was it used and it was really hard but we finally got done with the conclusion.

I: You did?

S: Yea.

I: Good! And you were, were you trained how to use, to touch all those documents and those photographs? Like last year did you guys do training with white gloves?

S: Oh yea, last year we had to wear white glove cause you can't touch the pictures because of the oil on our hands. But then we also learned how to use the scanners that we got from umm, yea we had to use the scanners that we got and they have a step by step procedure list that we go by to put it on the computer. And we have to save it a whole bunch of times and then they're gonna put them all together. I think they said we have to come up with 200 pictures to be able to put on the website, because that's our goal.

I: Yea, it is our goal and so that's part of the Maine Memory Network, that's very exciting!

S: Yep! Yea it is.

I: That's a really cool project. Umm, had you ever thought about, before this project last year, would you have ever thought about working with the Historical Society?

S: No (both laugh), actually I didn't really think that history I'd be like into it as much as I am right now, because I'm not really a history person. Umm, I barely keep up with the present so I can't stay with the past as much so, umm (both laughing).

I: That's hilarious!

S: But , I'm more involved with it now then I thought I was going to. Sometimes when he says it's scanning picture time I'm like "ugh" but I get into it and then I wanna do more but..

I: Do you think you would have felt the same about history if it was 'come in and turn to chapter 5 and read about this?

S: No, I would've probably fell asleep.

I: Yea.

S: I don't like the textbook things. I like more visual, hands on things. So, I like the whole scanning thing.

I: That's very cool, excellent! Did you guys end up going on a field trip to the Historical Society?

S: Yea, I think the week before Christmas break we went to umm the Lincoln Historical

Society and we looked around and we had a scavenger hunt that we had to do.

We had to find old artifacts hidden throughout the house.

I: Was that kinda cool?

S: Yea it was awesome.

I: It was awesome, what did you like about it in particular?

S: Umm, I liked when we walked in by the front door there was a staircase and it split off 2 different ways. And it kinda scared me though. (laughs) The stairs were really steep so.

I: Oh yea, in so many of those old houses it really was oh my word!

S: They, it was a really cool house. Umm, also the dining room, well in every room they had a fireplace and each of them had things written on them like the dates.

I: Ohh that's cool!

S: So, yea.

I: So it sounds like you've had a lot of opportunity to work with different people other than just Mr. K. You've been working with the Ks, Mr. and Mrs. K from the Historical Society. Last year and this year! Did you interview anybody yet, have you guys make it to computer class?

S: Umm yea we, I interviewed Mr. P that works here and we learned about the history of Main Street and what it used to look like and we learned about his store. And we also learned about how during Christmas time they used to have really many more poles than they do now, telephone poles, and they used to hang up lights around them for a show

and when the snow hit them they were really pretty.

I: I bet you that would be really beautiful. Oh that's cool. A lot of people in your class interview different people from town?

S: Umm, yea we got to chose who we wanted to interview. Like some people interviewed for the grandmother, and some were just complete strangers that Mrs. M or Mrs. B found and then we'd call them and ask them. It was kinda different than last year I guess when the 8th graders interviewed they umm the teachers would call them, but this year we had to call them and so people got nervous.

I: Mmm, because it's a big deal.

S: Yea, one guy was really mean on the phone.

I: Oh really?

S: Yea, he was on main, it was the office guy from Main Street. Umm, the lawyer, he was like 'I'm busy' and then hung up. So it was really funny.

I: Ahh, So that's a skill, that you guys had to be able to you know, calling and talking to an adult and set it up, you know so. Yea, that's kinda neat. So um I'm assuming that in 6th grade you did a few small projects like Heffer project or Shriners did you guys do that?

S: Yea we collected can tabs umm to bring in for the Shriners so they could melt them down into braces and everything for the Ronald McDonald House I think?

I: Umm hmm

S: And then umm we brought in money, our spare change so we could buy heffer animals

and if we raised enough, well if we raised a certain amount of money, like an animal would cost like 25 dollars or something and we would raise enough money to buy something to give to a family and then they would have them and raise them and send them off to another family so that another family could use them, and it would go on.

I: Mm, that's cool. And in social studies class you must have been learning about the, cuz you were joking about the current events here, about what had happened in Haiti. Can you talk a little bit about what the 8th graders have arranged? I know you have been part of a variety show that was part of 5th grade that some 8th graders helped out with, and also the hoops for Haiti.

S: Yep, so far we had 2, well when that earthquake hit in Haiti we all were really upset about it because they're really poor so we umm found 2 donation things that we could do. Instead of just giving our money away we tried to get the other community involved with it. So, we had a talent show, Our School has talent, and that included 5th thru 8th graders, anyone could sign up, and we had a tryout and the tryout people that made they it had to go on and perform in front of people Thursday night.

I: And it was a packed house!

S: It was really bad. It was really full and apparently we raised like \$500.

I: Almost \$900!

S: Oh almost 9, wow! I was off. Umm and we also had a hoops for Haiti and that was a teachers vs students and the teachers were joking about how they were going to kick our

butts, and they did. (laughter) And they made a gold basketball for a trophy.

They passed it around the 8th grade homerooms.

I: It was pretty funny.

S: It was fun, and it was a long basketball game but I heard Mr. W gave us an extra 20 points, so that's how we tied in the next game.

I: Yes, hahah. And I think that one was like 500 and something dollars that you guys raised.

S: Yea.

I: And the PENCORPS project that day \$325 came in so without, and you know how the 6th graders were selling the bracelets? Yes, the ones that you have on. Umm, so without that money in yet we have raised over \$1700 for Haiti, just from our school.

S: Wow, that's a lot.

I: Yea, that's so cool and you guys have just totally; like what I thought was very cool about it is that how many of the students have just really organized and worked. It's not just all teachers doing it, there was a lot of student, you know students being the MC's and helping to organize which is neat.

S: Mom, I was asking my mom a couple nights ago I was like can I, can I go to this basketball game or Mom don't forget I'm in the talent show and she's like 'I think it's kinda cool how you guys are doing this for Haiti', and then she brought up the other subject about California and I was like we're not going there yet and she's like 'well how much have you made' and I was like I'm not sure they haven't added up the whole total

and she's like 'I think it's kinda good that you're putting all this effort in, not just trying to bring in other donations like clothes and everything cuz they might not like what we send but they might have to use it'.

I: Right.

S: We send our money over there to help them, and yea.

I: Mmm yea, it's cool. Makes you feel kinda good about that you're making a difference.

S: It does, that your money is going towards something useful.

I: Yes useful that's a good way to say it. (laughs) So with all that in mind, if you were to describe to a 5th grader that was coming in next year what service learning was how would you describe to them what service learning was? Plus you know, your definition.

S: Service learning is when you don't expect something to happen to you back to you, you give your time and not necessarily your money but you might have to in the future; but you give your time and your effort and you do something for someone that may need your help in the future and like I said you don't expect anything back for it. It's not like a job that you do, it's not like working at McDonalds, haha.

I: Where you're expecting to get paid.

S: Where you're expecting to get paid. You're there to help and get their donations to give to someone else.

I: And that's very cool! Excellent definition, I like it a lot. How about if you were to describe to somebody umm the benefits of service learning what, because you've had experience now with several projects that you've told me about what do you see as the

benefits to students because we are school and we are about learning so what do you think is the benefit to students if they are involved in service learning projects?

S: Well it sure makes you feel a lot better about yourself and it gets other people involved so you feel happy that you have other people behind you and it's not just you or 2 or 3 other people that are doing it it's everyone that's coming together to help and it inspires a lot of other people so. It feels good to pass it down.

I: Right, and I like when you talk about how umm you said about as far as the learning that because it was hands on and visual you were much more motivated to learn like History then you would have been if it was a textbook or a lecture or something like that.

S: Yea.

I: So that's cool too. How about challenges for students?

S: Ugh, challenges. Umm, sometimes when you have things in mind that you wanna do they don't go your way (laughter)

I: So true!

S: Like when we were working on the umm the world hunger we wanted to go to the EPB, but it kept getting canceled because we didn't have, I think they were busy but I can't remember. Umm, but we wanted to do our games outside but we couldn't and we wanted to do extra things to help get more money to send it over there and we just couldn't get it all in so. And then we were trying to figure out where we wanted to put our game and our game kept falling down.

I: Yea so all those logistic type things right of figuring out, because the EPB or the

elementary school has a different schedule or so you're trying to adjust and and certain rules.

S: That was like the day of the project when it was due, but before that it was mostly the trying to figure out your research question trying to figure out the facts that you wanna tell people; trying to put it all together in 2 weeks and it was just so frustrating cause if you didn't get it done then you had to stay after school and it was like I have other stuff that I have to do but I can't I have to work on this.

I: Ahh so the time frame was really crunched, that's challenging.

S: If we had a couple other weeks to work on it we probably would have nothing that we did bad but we could have improved it, cause we did get a score on our service learning project and I bet a lot of people that got 1's and 2's wanted to get up to like a 3 or a 4.

I: Right, yea so just the time crunch was a challenge.

S: Yea.

I: That makes sense. How about umm, what do you see as benefits to teachers because I will tell you having been a teacher for 10 years that it's a lot easier for me just to stand up and lecture or read than it is to coordinate you know a hundred of my students all doing different projects and you know all of that. So what would you say, is it worth their time? For teachers.

S: I hope it's worth their time because we are benefiting someone else but if we just, I don't think schools all about learning what we need to learn in the future its what other people should know so they should help us get to know what we need to do to help other

people so that I don't know like, reading class isn't all about writing books it's about trying to help other people or inspire other people so I don't think it's a complete waste of their time.

I: No, no!

S: They probably have other things they wanna do too but this is a priority and we have to get it done. We have to help other people it's not just us us us.

I: Well I think you just would've convinced somebody who was on the fence you know as a teacher like ugh that seems like a lot of work, - says! (laughs) That was excellent.

That's its not just about the content you learn, but it's about all the process and helping; it sounded like what you were talking about was umm you know teachers when they do service learning are helping you become citizens that we need in our country.

S: We're also learning about good citizenship in Mr. K's class and social studies so I think this whole even though it may sound really boring to listen to in class but we have had the experience for 2 years or 3 years to help maybe even more but we haven't realized it.

I: Right.

S: But umm we've been doing this a while so I think this whole good citizenship is coming together. I think every teacher has a new meaning of what they're wanting us to learn.

I: Awesome, that's really good. Anything else that you can think of that you wanna share about service learning? You have been so helpful; you are so articulate!

S: I can't think of anything.

I: Well if you think of anything you just come right back down to my office anytime!

S: Ok.

I: Say, I meant to tell you one other thing.

S: Ok I will.

I: And we'll turn on our little garage band and record away! Thank you so much, you're awesome.

S: You're welcome.

Appendix D: Sample Educator Transcriptions

Educator Interview #6

October 15, 2010 Participating School Office 4:47 p.m.-5:23p.m.

R: Alright. Could you tell me what your role is?

I: I am the principal here at the participating school. I've been in the district for 10 years; this is my 11th year. I was the assistant principal for 6 years and 4 years as the principal.

R: Excellent. I'm here to talk to you about 2 things: service learning and professional development. Thanks for agreeing to this interview. I'll pay you back later...

I: [laughs]

R: Can you share with me any highlights of service learning in your building?

I: I believe that service for a long time was simply that – service not service learning. Many service projects where kids were engaged in fund-raising or those kinds of opportunities for national or local organizations to provide support. Over the last few years there has been a movement for it to be more service learning. From that, I believe that students are more engaged in their learning, and are able to apply their learning across the curriculum more often. Students are more engaged, have more ownership over it, excited about what they do, and very willing to do the projects.

R: Can you talk to me about some of the challenges that you may see or have seen for your students and/or teachers encounter when it comes to service learning?

I: A few of the challenges that we have encountered in putting forward service learning I think is because we're a rural community; so, we find limitations to partnerships that are able to provide support for this kind of learning. Not that the people here in our rural community are not supportive; we're just not diversified in the kinds of opportunities for partnerships that can be provided to our students and teachers. Also because of our distance from a city or university setting that could work with us closer – we are about 50 miles away – transportation is an issue. It would take the greater part of the day to get students transported to the site to work for a little while and return to school in time to be transported home. It just doesn't make those kind of valuable partnerships feasible.

R: How do you see this district being able to fund and sustain service learning if grant funds run out due to the fact that there is such reliance on financial support coming from grant funds?

I: Well, I think service learning will continue to sustain itself. I think there is enough momentum to keep it going. However, the breadth of it, how big it might become, and the opportunities may be limited due to shrinking budgets. Currently, we are in a situation where local budgets are being trimmed so there would be some limitations to resources. However, transportation has not been a line that is solely targeted; it's been cuts across the board. I would say though that this district does pursue a lot of grant opportunities. As a result of being a rural district involved in service learning coupled with the fact that we are a district known for providing quality learning experiences for our students, we are

often a recipient of grant opportunities. So, I don't see grants not being an option for us; I think grant opportunities may be even more readily available to us. Local monies might very well though prove to become a difficulty, as budgets get tighter and tighter.

R: I apologize if it feels like we're skipping around a bit. I'm trying to be considerate of your time and only ask you the most crucial of questions. Could you please think of a service-learning project that has gone on in your building that you consider to be of quality and has an impact on the students and/or the community?

I: I think the largest of the projects that has had the most impact on the community would probably be the historical project that our 7th and 8th graders were engaged with this past school year. It was a quality project in part because of the close partnership with the historical society and the opportunity for students to work with the historical society for an extended period of time. Our students were truly involved in lasting documentation of our local history, as well as the fact that the project has been widely publicized with kids sharing their work with families and others and it being published on the Maine Memory Network. However, I would also say that another quality project that had a real impact on our students was the 5th grade project. It did not have as big a community connection as the historical one. The local history project would probably be the measuring stick here in this building right now for a project with the highest quality.

R: Thank you very much. One of the barriers often to implementing any instructional strategy is a lack of training or professional development for teachers. So with that in

mind, can you think of any professional development that has gone on across the district or within your own building around service learning? How has kind of the word got out? [not looking for you to talk about me]

I: [well that has been one of the messengers] I think service learning has really developed from teacher interest. We have had various service groups and it expanded into service learning. We have had a couple of teachers in particular that have shown initiative with that, partnered up with the district curriculum coordinator and the high school initiative to make it part of graduation requirements for students. Service learning has been connected with our district's overall curriculum and educational plan. Since then as far as service-learning professional development, we have had consultants connected with outside organizations come in and provide some training. We have done some in-house professional development as well. We have some people on staff whom have a lot of experience and have spent a lot of time with service learning. It's really nice to have in-house people. As far as our school goes, we are fortunate to have a couple of individuals, one in particular, who has a lot of interest in it and provide a lot of insight to help support teachers as they develop their projects.

R: Can you talk in general about your view of meaningful professional development?

I: I guess I'm not a fan of one-time, one-day professional-development opportunities. I believe in sustainability. I believe that you continue to build upon what you are investing in knowing more about, what your vision is for your building. When we take on professional development in our building, we look for it to be a year's worth of work and

development with constantly following up. Some of our professional development is into it's 4th or 5th year. So, I am a believer that if it's something that you really want, you really believe in, you have to build sustainability. You have to spend time with your staff to do that so if you have turnover or that kind of thing happens through attrition or what-have-you, you still have a core group to maintain the initiative. You don't get sustainability from bringing in someone from the outside for one day or for one workshop with no follow-up afterwards. If you've built on-going professional development then you can bring in outside experts for one day and follow-up on that learning after they leave. So, if you're aligning it to service learning, then I think you just continue to build on the base or foundation that's already been laid. I don't think where it is, is where we want to be, but I see the quality of service learning continuing to grow as we continue to educate more and more of our staff about it and as they have more and more experience around putting good quality projects together. So the more they put good quality projects together and sharing that with their colleagues, the more comfortable they are with it, the more experienced they are with it, and they seek other opportunities.

R: Some instructional strategies work for some teachers and not for others. Do you find that to be true?

I: I do find that to be true [laughs].

R: Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about your experiences with service learning or professional development, either in general or as it relates to service learning?

I: I think service learning provides opportunities for students to experience real-world opportunities. They will be the events that take place over the course of their education that will be the memorable events for students. These service-learning experiences will be practical application of what they learn in other content areas. It will be the culmination of that learning. The projects that they do, they will be able to reflect on their learning as they discuss their public education many years from now. Those are the things they will remember. The kids that worked on our historical society project will always remember the fox farms, how to handle the data, the photo, the celebration. They'll remember all of that. They may not remember all the little things that went along with educating them to get to the final culmination, but they will remember the process and the important learning from the project.

R: Excellent.

I: That's what we do.

*Researcher's Note: The recording was then shut off. However, conversation continued, and I asked to restart recording to pick up on the continued conversation. The LAS was a local assessment system mandated by state legislation.

I: So really when the LAS system was so much about what we were doing, there were no or fewer opportunities for students to have real opportunities to apply what they know

other than to a piece of paper. And teachers were so limited and so bound to the curriculum that they didn't feel like they could provide other opportunities. I'm pleased to see that we've moved slightly away from that. I'm all for being held accountable. I understand that NCLB or those other mandates that come through, the purpose of those mandates is to ensure that there's a certain level of accountability for public education. However, taking away the real experiences of what students can do and learn from when they are involved in projects that help them solve real-world problems, and the creativity that teachers can bring to it with service learning, really takes away the excitement and joy from education itself. So, I'm a big fan of those kinds of moments, those kinds of learning experiences. I appreciate the staff that have stepped up to do these kinds of projects with their students, who are thinking a little bit further beyond the walls of their classrooms. Kids can articulate their learning; they can talk about their learning well beyond what they might have been able to if it hadn't been put to a practical experience. They can understand the concepts that they have learned in other content areas as well. It brings meaning and purpose to their learning.

R: It kind of takes away the question, "when will I ever need to know this?"

I: I would like to see in this building the quality go up. I know that we have a lot of projects going on. However, they are not at the level that they need to be

R: And why do you think that is?

I: The level that they need to be?

R: Yes.

I: Well, I think they need to be more student-directed. There has to be more of a partnership with community members as well. And in some instances, our projects are connected with others, but only loosely, there's still somewhat of a disconnect to the curriculum.

R: Oh, so you're talking about the academic integrity piece being a little weak perhaps?

I: Yes, it is. I'd like to see SL bridge itself with more areas of the curriculum, for instance more with the fine arts and using some of the artistic skills that students have, not just using the math, science, ELA, and social studies skills.

R: Thank you. Nice. I appreciate your time and your responses.

Appendix E: Sample Educator Reflection Journal

Educator #1 Reflection Journal Entry

Please respond in writing (if possible) to the following five questions. For those of you who already completed an interview, these questions are meant to be a follow-up, in case you have something additional to share about your experiences with service learning and/or professional development. If you have not yet completed an interview, I would appreciate your responses as well.

Please submit your answers to me electronically via FirstClass. If you would instead like to schedule an interview to answer these five questions orally, please contact me, and we can set that up.

Thanks again for all of your help!

1. As you reflect upon this fall and winter's service-learning projects of which you have been involved (including but not limited to Saturday's Rally for Change: Kids' Fun Day, the MCHP project, including the BDN local history work session), what stands out to you as some highlights of these experiences? What has gone particularly well? What don't you want to forget? What were the benefits?

The students' faces light up when they share with me what they learned about our local history from interviewing a member of our community.

2. What have been the challenges of engaging in service learning this school year?

I have not seen many completed history videos. I have not had students for enough class hours to actually create the questions, contact the interviewee, conduct the interview, then edit and transcribe the interview. This type of project has built in periods of waiting, for example once the questions are written they need to be sent to the interviewee so he/she is prepared for the interview. During this period of 2-6 days students have been making electronic copies of historical documents for the Lincoln Historical Society.

3. With what service learning professional-development experiences have you engaged this past school year? What has worked well about these experiences (and why)?

The various groups of teachers that I work with now have some common vocabulary and understanding of the requirements for an activity to be considered service learning.

4. What did not work so well about these professional-development experiences and/or what are your suggestions for further service-learning related professional development?

I would like to have a service learning professional development session with the colleagues that I do service learning with and truly debrief and strengthen the projects we have done. I am not sure why some aspects of our projects have fallen through or have not been included.

5. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experiences with either service learning and/or professional development?

I feel like I will always need some guidance around service learning. I hope opportunities for professional development continue. I'm not sure how long it will take before I feel like I don't need someone to hold my hand so the 8 requirements are included in a project and the project is truly high quality for all those involved.

Curriculum Vitae

Anita J. Stewart McCafferty**Education**

- 2011 Walden University, Minneapolis, MN,
Doctor of Education in Teacher Leadership,
pending graduation 2011
- 1998 University of Maine, Orono, ME,
Masters of Arts in Teaching
- 1994 University of Maine, Orono, ME,
Bachelor of Science in Political Science

Publications

To Vote or Not to Vote That is the Question, Maine Middle School Journal (2005)

African Culture and Geography, SEED Maine Center for Teaching Excellence (2004)