

Place- and Community-based Education in Schools

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Chapter 2

Place- and Community-based Education

Definitions and Antecedents

The Young Achievers Science and Mathematics Pilot School in Roxbury exemplifies many of the ways that teachers who have adopted place- and community-based education deal with curriculum development, teaching, and school–community collaboration. Eleven or twelve years ago when we began speaking and writing about the potentialities of this approach, we spoke primarily in hypotheticals. Since then, we have learned of, studied, and on occasion helped create or reshape schools where teachers have begun to diminish the barriers between classrooms and the school grounds and communities that lie beyond them. In the past, students and teachers at the Young Achievers School would have been a rare exception; today they are part of a growing vanguard of educators and young people who are demonstrating a powerful way to construct formal learning and link it to life outside the classroom.

In this chapter we will present definitions that practitioners and supporters of place- and community-based education are developing to guide teachers and school leaders interested in moving in this direction. We will also explore other educational approaches that have anticipated the possibilities of place- and community-based education. In many respects, this approach is a synthesis and extension of a broad range of educational innovations that have been developed throughout the preceding century. What sets place- and community-based education apart is the way that it strives to bring all of these strands together into a common framework for curriculum thinking and school design aimed at deepening students' connection to their communities in ways that make those communities better places to live.

Definitions

Place- and community-based education has much in common with other contemporary efforts to link schools more firmly to their communities—efforts such as civic education, contextual education, service learning, environmental education, and workplace education. We have chosen to hang our hats on place- and community-based education because it is the only term that allows for the inclusion of both the human and the more-than-human, something we believe is essential if educators are to help students grapple with the messy and cross-disciplinary nature of

humankind's current dilemmas. There is no particular reason that service learning or civic education, for example, should address environmental concerns, although some projects may from time to time focus on natural resource issues or ecological restoration projects. Similarly, the disciplinary preoccupations of environmental educators can lead them to attend less to people's social and economic needs than the needs of other species. What place- and community-based education seeks to achieve is a greater balance between the human and non-human, ideally providing a way to foster the sets of understanding and patterns of behavior essential to create a society that is both socially just and ecologically sustainable.

Although we will later argue that this approach has been around as long as human beings have been inducting their children into local cultures, attention to place and local communities by contemporary educators is a moderately recent phenomenon. C.A. Bowers is perhaps one of the first people to write about the importance of the local in a chapter about bioregional education that concludes his 1987 volume *Elements of a Post-liberal Theory of Education*. Bioregionalists are noted for their belief that human cultures and economies should be grounded in the characteristics of particular places and communities. Smith followed up on this theme in an article published in 1993 in the *Whole Earth Review* entitled "Shaping Bioregional Schools." David Orr refers explicitly to the importance of place in "Place and Pedagogy," a chapter in his 1992 book *Ecological Literacy*, and devotes significant attention to this issue in *Earth in Mind* (1994). There he argues that "the preservation of place is essential to the preservation of the world" and goes on to say that:

A world that takes its environment seriously must come to terms with the root of its problems, beginning with the place called home. This is not a simple-minded return to a mythical past but a patient and disciplined effort to learn, and in some ways, to relearn the arts of inhabitation. These will differ from place to place, reflecting various cultures, values, and ecologies. They will, however, share a common sense of rootedness in a particular locality.

(Orr, 1994, p. 170)

The belief that being rooted has value and deserves the attention of educators is one of the things that sets place- and community-based education apart from many other contemporary school reforms that focus primarily on the cultivation of individual talents and career trajectories rather than on the benefits that individuals might bring to their communities and regions.

In 1998, the Orion Society published *Stories in the Land: A Place-based Environmental Education Anthology*, the first time the term "place-based education" appeared on the cover of a book. That same year, rural educators Paul Nachtigal and Toni Haas's volume *Place Value: An Educator's Guide to Good Literature on Rural Lifeways, Environments, and Purposes of Education* was published by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Education and Rural Schools, extending the definition of place to something more than the environment. The language of "place" was clearly beginning to insert itself into the discourse of educators.

At about the same time, Nachtigal and Haas became co-presidents and David Orr a board member of one of the earliest U.S. proponents of place-based education, the Rural School and Community Trust. Started as the Annenberg Rural Challenge in the mid-1990s, this organization distributed in its first five years approximately 50 million dollars to educators and community organizers in rural towns and villages across the United States. The Rural Trust's definition continues to inform many of the best place-based educational initiatives in the United States.

Place-based education is learning that is rooted in what is local—the unique history, environment, culture, economy, literature, and art of a particular place. The community provides the context for learning, student work focuses on community needs and interests, and community members serve as resources and partners in every aspect of teaching and learning. This local focus has the power to engage students academically, pairing real-world relevance with intellectual rigor, while promoting genuine citizenship and preparing people to respect and live well in any community they choose.

(Rural School and Community Trust, 2005)

This definition points to two critical aspects of place-based education. The first involves its applicability to all disciplines. Place can be drawn upon to teach any subject area. This approach can also encourage educators to look beyond the language and methods of their own fields to explore problems and projects that open the possibility of cross-disciplinary dialogue. A second important aspect of place-based education illuminated by this definition involves the role played by community members in the delivery of education to the young. Rather than seeing teaching and learning as being located primarily within the school, place-based education requires potentially all mature citizens to take responsibility for inducting children and youth into the obligations and possibilities of adulthood. Agencies and workplaces become potential sites for student learning, and adults who possess expertise in a multiplicity of areas can be invited to share their knowledge and skills with young people as well as their peers.

In his work with schools throughout New England, co-author David Sobel has crafted a definition that provides additional insight into what place-based education involves. For Sobel,

Place-based education is the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students' appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens.

(Sobel, 2004, p. 7)

Seeing place-based education as a starting rather than ending point—as Sobel suggests here—can reduce the chance that focusing on the local will encourage parochialism and a disregard for the national or global. Once children have had an opportunity to learn more about things with which they are already familiar, they can then be directed to phenomena that are more distant and abstract. To some extent, the K–12 curriculum in many schools is already organized around this principle—with the local being considered most frequently in the early elementary years. What a K–12 place-based educational approach can foster is an incorporation of the local throughout a child’s school experience, so that older students can bring their increased maturity, creativity, and skill to bear on the study of issues that are of importance to their own families and neighbors. With its incorporation of hands-on learning experiences, place-based education also gives students from kindergarten through high school the chance to apply what they are learning to significant community problems.

This opportunity to participate in efforts to address important local issues is central to a definition developed of community-based learning by the Coalition for Community Schools. Drawing on contributions from organizations that run the gamut from the National Environmental Education and Training Foundation to the National Service Learning Partnership, their definition of “community-based learning” is in many respects comparable to place-based education in its concerns and dimensions:

[C]ommunity-based learning helps students acquire, practice, and apply subject matter knowledge and skills. At the same time, students develop the knowledge, skills, and attributes of effective citizenship by identifying and acting on issues and concerns that affect their own community. When implemented thoughtfully, these strategies create a pedagogy of engagement. Students invest time and attention and expend real effort because their learning has meaning and purpose.

(Melaville, Berg, & Blank, 2006, p. 3)

The promotion of citizenship has been an element in all three of the definitions presented here. The definition from the Coalition for Community Schools emphasizes even more strongly the creation of learning opportunities that allow students to apply what they encounter in disciplinary courses to local issues and concerns, and the meaning and purpose that can inhere in these activities. Not all place-based educational experiences necessarily involve problem-solving or action, but those that do can have a profound impact on young people’s sense of self-worth and efficacy.

In this volume, we have chosen to conjoin place- and community-based education to emphasize even more clearly our commitment to both the human and the natural environments in which children and their teachers live. For us, place- and community-based education is characterized by a focus on local knowledge, issues, and phenomena and is potentially relevant to all subject areas. It seeks to expand the range of adults who can serve as instructors and mentors and to build strong

collaborative relationships between community members and their schools. Place- and community-based educators see learning about the local as a starting rather than ending point, but a starting point that remains significant throughout a child's—or an adult's—educational experiences. Finally, place- and community-based education often engages students in projects that require them to apply their knowledge, skills, and energy to community issues or problems. In doing so, it demonstrates to young people the value of their own efforts and helps cultivate a taste for civic participation.

Antecedents

In many respects, it is important to acknowledge there is nothing new about place- and community-based education. Those who practice it simply do what adults concerned about inducting children into membership in their surrounding social and natural communities have done for millennia: they provide opportunities for the young to engage in the common life of older and more experienced people. Even as late as the 1970s, Tlingit residents of Sitka, Alaska encouraged their children to visit adults in their villages to learn about the activities they performed. Children would spend time with the fisherman, the bentwood box maker, the cook, the storyteller, the herbalist. If a child came back a number of times to the same person, the adult would give him or her simple tasks to complete. As the child continued to return, he or she would gradually acquire the knowledge base and skills that gave the adult his or her unique position in the community. In this way, the culture replicated itself from one generation to the next without forcing anyone into tasks to which he or she was not attracted.

Dewey and the School's Isolation from Life

Even among Euro-Americans, similar approaches to cultural transmission remained common throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when formal schooling was little more than a supplement to the informal educational experiences from which children learned how to support themselves as farmers, tradespeople, homemakers, or industrial workers. As access to desirable jobs has become tied to high school and now college graduation, however, these contextually rich educational settings have given way to classrooms where learning is typically divorced from the lives children lead when they aren't in school. In the late 1890s John Dewey warned of this emerging disconnect in *School and Society* and sought in his own educational approach to recover the relationship between formal learning and community life that had been disrupted in most schools:

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

to put out of his mind a large part of the ideas, interests, and activities that predominate in his home and neighborhood. So the school, being unable to utilize this everyday experience, sets painfully to work, on another tack and by a variety of means, to arouse in the child an interest in school studies.

(Dewey, 1959, pp. 76–77)

During Dewey's tenure at the University of Chicago, he and his colleagues created a model of an educational process that sought to immerse children in those fundamental community activities from which the contemporary academic disciplines have emerged. Using such perennial vocations as gardening, cooking, carpentry, and clothing manufacture, students at the Laboratory School were drawn into the forms of problem-solving and investigation that led to the invention of biology, mathematics, chemistry, and art. And by transforming the school into a small, interactive community, Dewey was able to induct students into the kinds of thinking and decision-making that underlie the disciplines of economics and political science. Students at the Lab School learned not for some future purpose but to be able to address issues that were compelling to them in the present, issues that were comparable to those they saw adults encounter in the broader society beyond the school.

Kilpatrick's Project Method

In the years following World War I, William Heard Kilpatrick, one of Dewey's colleagues after he became a professor at Columbia University's Teachers College, proposed the project method as a more open-ended way to connect formal education to children's lives. Central to Kilpatrick's definition of this approach is his assertion that it should consist of "wholehearted purposeful activity proceeding in a social environment" (Kilpatrick, 1918, p. 320). He argued that projects most likely to inspire deep learning were those chosen by individual students or groups of students and not simply handed to them by their teachers; effective projects necessarily reflected students' purposes. Such projects must furthermore be worthy of students' time and attention and important in some way for the life of both the individual and others around him or her. Jack Shelton, a leading place-based educator in Alabama, currently calls such learning *consequential* (Shelton, 2005). Kilpatrick contended "that wholehearted purposeful activity in a social situation as the typical unit of school procedure is the best guarantee of the child's native capacities now too frequently wasted" (1918, p. 334). He believed that learning in this manner would serve as effective preparation for life in a democratic society. Although Kilpatrick and his approach to project learning remain little more than minor topics in the history of American education, his vision and the rationale behind it have remained in play in at least some U.S. schools ever since.

Counts' and Rugg's Social Meliorism

Later in the 1930s, the work of two other Teachers College professors anticipated additional dimensions of place- and community-based education. In the midst of

the Great Depression, George Counts (1932) delivered a keynote speech to the annual meeting of the Progressive Education Association in which he asked whether schools should dare build a new social order. He answered his own question in the affirmative, asserting that educators must play a role in extending a vision of America in which the lives of common people are made physically easier and at the same time ennobled. Counts' fellow professor at Teachers College, Harold Rugg (1939), took this vision of social reconstruction seriously, and for the next decade wrote curriculum and textbooks that made it possible for teachers across the country to draw their students into exactly the kinds of social analysis that Counts called for. These volumes stressed the interdependence of industrial nations and encouraged the development of a more cooperative society in the United States; by the late 1930s volumes from Rugg's textbook series were used in approximately half of the social studies classrooms in the country (Riley & Stern, 2003–2004). Although not explicitly focused on local issues or place in any way, Counts' and Rugg's work does point to the way that schools could potentially serve as a vehicle for problem-solving and analysis aimed at social improvement.

Service Learning

Such direct involvement in local social problems can be seen in the history of the service learning movement in the United States, another antecedent of place- and community-based education. Although generally more focused on action than analysis, service learning has sought to involve young people in work explicitly aimed at enhancing community and social conditions. From the late nineteenth century on, educators and social philosophers such as Dewey and William James have encouraged community service as means to engage young people in meaningful activities. As early as 1915, folk schools in Appalachia based on the Scandinavian model became two- and four-year colleges where students combined work, service, and learning as part of their degree programs. Service, itself, received national recognition and support through the creation of the Peace Corps and VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) in the 1960s, and a White House Conference on Youth in 1971 emphasized the value of linking service to learning. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, community service programs became more common in U.S. schools, and in 1990 the U.S. Congress passed the National and Community Service Act, legislation that authorized grants to schools to support service learning (National Service Learning Clearinghouse, 2007). This widespread adoption of service learning has without question been extraordinarily valuable, although the movement has yet to become widely integrated into the primary course requirements students must fulfill to graduate. More often than not, service learning is extra-curricular rather than curricular, an additional requirement or special activity instead of a substantial part of students' educational experience. It connects students to their communities without intentionally deepening their understanding of the unique characteristics and dynamics of their home places.

Nature and Environmental Education

The construction of this deeper understanding of place has been a defining characteristic of the work of some environmental educators, especially those who are inclined to take their students beyond the classroom into the field and community. The roots of environmental education can be located in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century nature study movement that grew out of the work of Wilbur Jackman (1904) at the University of Chicago and Liberty Hyde Bailey (1915) and Anna Botsford Comstock (1886) at Cornell. All encouraged public school teachers to make use of the local environment as a basis for scientific investigations, arguing that an approach that included object lessons and direct experience was superior to one limited to textbook learning. Although nature study has waxed and waned in its prevalence in U.S. classrooms, it has continued to be an element in the work of at least some teachers. Conservation and outdoor education later in the twentieth century also sought to connect students to local issues and places. Then, in the 1960s and 1970s, environmental education emerged as a legitimate field of study, encouraging a resurgence of nature study coupled with a new focus on environmental problem-solving. Although courses in environmental studies can be restricted as much to textbooks and distant issues as any academic subject, it is not uncommon for teachers to engage students in learning activities that are grounded in the local, and that combine academic investigations with service projects located in the community.

Cultural Journalism

Another recent antecedent to place- and community-based education can be found in the work of language arts and social studies teachers who have adopted the practices of cultural journalists, anthropologists, and historians. An outgrowth of the work of educators associated with the Foxfire project that took the nation by storm in the 1970s and 1980s, this approach focuses on involving students in fine-grained investigations of the lives of people in their own communities, both in the present and in the past. The Foxfire journals and books explored the unique characteristics of Appalachian culture in northern Georgia. They inspired the development of similar journals and books across the United States and became the basis for an educational model that affected hundreds if not thousands of teachers through Foxfire training institutes; these institutes continue through the present, albeit in a much reduced format. Although the great majority of Foxfire activities centered around the collection of oral histories, under the leadership of Hilton Smith and others the program also investigated contemporary community issues and involved students in local decision-making processes. In this, it set the stage for place- and community-based educators like those at the Young Achievers School who invite their students to look critically at their own communities and uncover issues—like air pollution or homelessness—and then participate with others to rectify these problems.

Local Entrepreneurialism

One final antecedent to place- and community-based education involves efforts to deal with not only environmental or social issues but also economic. Critical to the long-term well-being of any community are the business and employment opportunities that are available to local citizens. Organizations like REAL Enterprises—Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning—have since the mid-1970s been providing training for secondary and now elementary students aimed at helping young people gain the skills necessary to create their own businesses so that they do not have to be dependent for employment on jobs created by others (information retrieved on January 16, 2007 at <http://www.cfed.org/focus.m?parentid=32&siteid=341&id=341>). They also are an important antecedent to place-based education. Over the 30 years that it has been in existence, REAL Enterprises has extended its range of operations to urban areas and to community colleges and community development organizations. Like many of the other educational approaches discussed above, REAL Enterprises emphasizes the importance of experiential learning. By providing young people and others with the skill sets required to operate successful businesses, start-up loans to get those businesses going, and support for novice entrepreneurs, REAL Enterprises has given invaluable aid to people in low-income and sometimes isolated communities where opportunities for economic development are not obvious.

Reintegrating Children into their Worlds

In the Preface, we suggested that place- and community-based education is a way of thinking about the school's role in society that involves using rural, urban, and suburban communities and environments as the starting place for teaching the academic disciplines. It requires a reformulation of the school's relationship to other social institutions and people, and a reimagining of what education might be. In contemporary societies, schools have become the equivalent of age-based ghettos in which children are removed from the lives of adults as well as the lives of the other-than-human beings that make up their world. Dewey's concern about the separation of the school from the life of the child is as much a worry today as it was a century ago. Place- and community-based education as seen in places like the Young Achievers Science and Mathematics Pilot School seeks to create a bridge between the classroom and students' lives that will make their learning both natural and meaningful, natural in that it emerges not so much from force and direction as from curiosity, and meaningful because it is connected to activities valued by both students and those they love.

The common school arose in part because of a perceived need on the part of community leaders and policymakers to get immigrant children off the streets and to socialize them to mainstream American expectations and values. When the communities from which those children came retained their vitality and the environs in which many lived, their open spaces, connections to children's social and natural worlds could still be maintained. As American communities have become more

attenuated and the natural world more distant and inaccessible, our society runs the risk of losing its coherence and its understanding of natural limits. American children furthermore run the risk of losing a sense of what it means to be a member of a larger social collective responsible to its members and responsible for its actions. In the following chapter we will consider in more detail why it seems especially important to revive place- and community-based education during this moment of our national experience.

Chapter 4

Place- and Community-based Education in Practice

Starting with Local Knowledge and Issues

One of the challenges facing educators interested in encouraging their colleagues to implement place- and community-based approaches is that there is no play- or recipe book available that can be picked up to guide the design of lessons or units. The current trend in curriculum development is to create common scripts or syllabi that can be used anywhere. Teacher compliance with prescribed plans is often monitored by their superiors to assure the “fidelity” of program implementation. Even some environmental educators rely heavily on curriculum guides produced by Project Learning Tree, Project Wet, and Project Wild (Krafel, 1999). Such materials do provide a means for disseminating concepts and pedagogical practices viewed as desirable by their proponents; place- and community-based education, however, requires something different. By its very nature, it cannot be standardized or centralized; it must instead reflect the unique circumstances encountered in specific schools and communities. This means that teachers must take the initiative in developing lessons and plans responsive to the circumstances and opportunities that exist beyond their classrooms.

The prospect of engaging in this kind of activity can be intimidating. Few teachers have been prepared to embrace this task, and the demands of teaching an increasingly prescribed curriculum leave educators with little time to experiment with an approach to learning that is more complex and more difficult to control. Fortunately, their colleagues in numerous schools across the United States have been breaking a path that demonstrates the possibilities and doing so in ways that are meaningful for themselves as well as their students. Although what they have accomplished cannot be simply transported from one place to another, their approaches and processes can serve as both imaginative stimuli and guides.

Their work often focuses on a set of common themes or issues that can serve as a starting place for teachers interested in incorporating place- and community-based education into their own classrooms. These themes include cultural aspects of a community’s life, environmental issues, economic development, and civic involvement. This chapter will describe each of these domains in more detail and offer examples of what educators are doing to use them as a means for connecting classrooms more firmly to their communities. It will conclude with a discussion of common principles of place- and community-based education drawn from the

examples. Chapter 5 will, in contrast, consider ways these principles can be put into practice when traditional school subjects are used as the starting place.

Cultural Dimensions of Community Life

As indicated in Chapter 3, public schools have tended to devote little attention to local issues of any sort, especially after primary school. Smith recalls three lessons in junior and senior high school that took him outside the classroom and into the community: a visit to a tree farm when he was in the eighth grade, a walk around the neighborhood to observe trees in the springtime as a sophomore, and a local government day as a senior spent at the wastewater treatment facility. Aside from a unit about introducing a bill into the state legislature in a high school civics class, no other units focused on information about the Pacific Northwest or the community where he grew up in southern Oregon. What he discovered about his place came from independent investigations as a young adult returning home after living elsewhere. It was then that he read about the Indian wars that had decimated local indigenous populations, learned the names of local flowers and shrubs and trees, and became familiar with Northwest literature.

One of the primary reasons for incorporating local culture and history into children's school experience is because it is potentially familiar and accessible; it furthermore helps young people to see what is valuable and worth preserving in their home communities. In a society dominated by media that originate in New York and Los Angeles, it is easy to believe that the important work of American culture happens not in the country's small towns and cities but in the large urban centers of the East and West Coasts. When schools reinforce this message by ignoring the communities where students live, it is not surprising that out-migration has become the problem it is in rural towns across the country. If young people think that nothing of significance can happen outside the Beltline, Manhattan, or the computer capitals in the Bay Area and Puget Sound, why should they stay? Why should they put down roots and invest their lives in supporting the well-being of the people who supported them during their early years? Why not be boomers rather than stickers?

Francisco Guajardo is an educator who could have left the community where he grew up in south Texas (Smith, 2002). His parents had migrated to the Edcouch-Elsa region from Mexico when he was a small child. He had grown up in a community of low-income Mexican Americans where many residents continue to harvest crops around the United States as a means of livelihood. Although poor, the community had a history of activism and was one of the places where people of Latino ancestry fought to be given the same rights as their Anglo counterparts. Guajardo was a successful student and was able to parlay that success into a university education and a teaching license. Instead of seeking a position in a more comfortable urban district, he decided to return home with the intention of persuading more young people to find ways to serve their natal community.

He began his career just when the standards movement was gaining steam. Texas had developed a common statewide curriculum, and teachers were expected to



Figure 4.1 Conducting an interview with a local elder
Photo by Francisco Guajardo

deliver this to their students. Guajardo realized that for most of the Latino students in his classes this would be a recipe for failure. He set the curriculum on a shelf and directed his attention to the unrecognized riches of his own community. He believed that introducing students to the assets that existed around them among their families, friends, and neighbors would potentially trigger a desire to maintain their connections to the region. Because what they learned in school would also be tied to their own identities, they might also become more willing to invest themselves in the enterprise of formal education.

He began by inviting his students to collect oral histories of older residents of the region. This gave them the opportunity to learn about the qualities of persistence, care, and generosity that are so essential to the maintenance of positive social environments in the face of limited resources. It also gave them insights into the heroism that lay under the surface of the lives of people they might otherwise disregard as uninteresting or of no account. In the early years, students would gather their interviews, transcripts, photographs, and video recordings and present them to community members in a museum format. The community and the students loved it. Guajardo found that incoming students who had heard about these projects wanted to do more of the same. And other community members wanted

to participate in the interview process. In the mid-1990s he successfully wrote a grant proposal to the Annenberg Rural Challenge to enhance student achievement, community development, and cultural pride through the creation of the Llano Grande Center (see www.llanogrande.org for more information). The additional resources allowed him to expand the program, gain national recognition, and come to the attention of other philanthropic organizations.

In the years since Guajardo began teaching in his hometown, over 80 students (from a high school whose student population is 1,400) have gone on to Ivy League and other top-flight universities. They are among the 65 percent of graduates from Edcouch-Elsa High School who pursue post-secondary studies. This rate of college attendance is exceptional for students from Latino backgrounds and speaks to the power of an educational process that focuses on the strengths of their own families and culture rather than the disadvantages of poverty. Guajardo bristles at the notion that people from his community are limited in any way by their own experiences, arguing instead that they are privileged. The power of his message can be seen in the fact that numerous graduates from Edcouch-Elsa High School have returned after earning their degrees at institutions such as Yale, Tufts, and Brown to work with him to strengthen their own community.

Among more recent projects taken on by students and teachers as this work has evolved are regular television productions featuring interviews with local residents and a Spanish-language school that was for four years marketed to people from outside the region and state. Working with the regional public access station, students are acquiring video production skills that both open new career possibilities for themselves and knit together the region thanks to the stories they are able to share through electronic media. The Spanish-language school created more immediate economic rewards. Students and their families opened their homes to paying guests interested in immersing themselves in another language. Like immersion programs in other countries, home stays were combined with intensive language instruction. These activities confirmed the value of students' cultural identity and provided them with a way to translate assets into economic opportunities, as well.

For Guajardo, such an education is at base liberatory because it challenges assumptions often encountered in the dominant society about the academic and occupational potential of non-White and non-middle-class students. The efforts of educators associated with the Llano Grande Center and the Edcouch-Elsa High School demonstrate the talents that lie just beneath the surface in schools that would otherwise be seen as low-performing and among students often consigned to low-track and remedial classes. Not all place- and community-based educators who focus on local cultural issues have adopted a stance as explicitly political as Guajardo's, but the aims and consequences of their efforts could also be described as liberatory, as well.

Attention to local historical and cultural issues does much to dispel the notion that young people are responsible for little beyond the development of their own talents and the pursuit of economic independence. It can affirm their relationship to others whose welfare is at least partly tied to the decisions they will make about their own life directions. Understanding these relationships can make a significant

contribution to the restoration of the forms of trust and mutual support so critical to the experience of social capital. When students embrace rather than ignore or deride their own ancestry and traditions, they will be more likely to commit themselves to the difficult but rewarding work of making their communities good places to live. Even when they move to new communities, they will at least have a sense of the importance of social capital and may become more likely to make sure they cultivate relationships similar to those they encountered in the places where they grew up.

Environmental and Natural Resource Issues

It can be argued that one of the primary reasons for incorporating more educational experiences in the local environment is to acquaint young people with the non-human assets encountered in their home places. Once children and youth value those assets, they will more likely be disposed to care for and protect them. This is certainly the point that Robert Pyle makes in his essay about the extinction of experience described in the previous chapter. Paleobiologist Stephen J. Gould (1991) makes a similar argument, suggesting that human beings protect and preserve what they love; if they don't know something, they don't attend to it. Teachers who engage their students in scientific field studies, join with them in the restoration of places degraded by human misuse or the introduction of invasive species, study the principles of ecology and the operation of complex systems as witnessed locally, convey a knowledge of the unique geological and biological attributes of a particular place, or simply open students' senses to the beauty out of doors encourage the development of the kind of responsible stewardship that Barry Lopez associates with *querencia*. Again, there can be no simple guidebook for the development of a curriculum that explores these issues, but there are certain foci and approaches that describe the possible.

The Sunnyside Environmental School, a K–8 school in Portland, Oregon, has been striving to create educational experiences directed toward this end since the fall of 1995. Initially created as a middle school, Sunnyside is the brainchild of a former elementary school teacher, Sarah Taylor. Taylor had been enrolled in an educational administration program at Portland State University, where she was asked to design a school as a requirement in one of her courses. The mother of her own teenage sons at the time and adoptive mother to more than a dozen immigrant children, she had become acutely aware of how ill matched many middle schools are to the developmental needs of young adolescents. While walking along a forested trail close to her home one day, she developed a vision of a school that was more responsive to middle school students' needs for social interaction, hands-on learning experiences, and the opportunity to situate themselves in both the human and the natural contexts of their own lives. When she described it on paper, her professor encouraged her to share it with the then superintendent of Portland Public Schools, Jack Bierwirth. Concerned about the out-migration of middle-class families following the passage of a state initiative that significantly reduced school funding and local control, Bierwirth and the school board gave her the go-ahead to transform her vision into reality, hoping that her school would keep more students in the district.



Figure 4.2 Preparing the soil at Jean's Farm in Portland, Oregon
Photo by Gregory Smith

Taylor quickly assembled an advisory group of teachers and community members who helped her decide on a building where the school could be located, recruit 180 sixth through eighth graders from across the district, and hire six faculty. Taylor and the new teachers crafted a curriculum and schedule whose outlines have remained constant from that first year. They decided to work in “blended” classrooms with sixth through eighth graders together for all subjects with the exception of math and Spanish. They would structure their teaching in the core classes of language arts, social studies, and science around the broad themes of

ivers, mountains, and forests for each of the years that a student attended the school. The creation of a core class incorporating three academic disciplines gave them the option of going on day-long trips to environmental or community service sites every Tuesday or Thursday. Finally, each morning would begin with a community meeting during which students would be introduced to individuals and groups who were contributing to social and environmental health in Portland and elsewhere.

In the spring of 2002 Smith had the opportunity to spend one day a week at the then Environmental Middle School. Although he had been involved in the school's creation and served on its site council for a number of years, time commitments elsewhere had prevented him from immersing himself in its offerings over a sustained period of time. Anecdotes described below are drawn from that period.

The curricular theme for the 2001–2002 academic year was rivers, and a wide range of academic and off-campus activities served to deepen students' understanding about the function of rivers in ecosystems and their importance to human life both in northern Oregon and in other places. In the fall, students studied the features of riparian environments and constructed wall-sized murals in every classroom that captured what they had learned about rivers' physical and ecological characteristics. This process gave graphic expression to the vocabulary and concepts they were acquiring. After becoming acquainted with local streams and rivers they conducted independent research projects describing rivers in other parts of the world. In December, the school sponsored an open-house called the River Festival that was attended by several hundred people. During this time, family and community members were able to observe students' work from the previous three months displayed in classrooms and hallways.

In January, core classes spent a day or more learning about Portland's water system, which starts in the foothills of the Cascades Mountains at the Bull Run Reservoir and ends at the Portsmouth wastewater treatment facility on the Willamette River. During one lesson, they tracked water from the reservoir to pump stations to purification facilities to the storage ponds in Mount Tabor and Washington Parks. Another day they focused on the history of the Bull Run watershed and how the foresight of city leaders in the 1800s had contributed to some of the purest urban water in the United States. These lessons were followed by field trips to Bull Run Reservoir as well as the wastewater treatment facility, where students had the opportunity to stand in the middle of a 14-foot pipe the same size as those that carry sewage into the facility.

These activities were accompanied by monthly field trips via city bus to the Brookside Wetlands, public property managed by the Portland metropolitan area's regional government. The wetlands are in the Johnson Creek drainage and are part of a long-term reclamation project aimed at restoring indigenous salmon runs and minimizing flood damage. During their monthly trips to Brookside, students tracked seasonal changes, monitored water temperature and turbidity, identified macro-invertebrates, observed local birds, checked for animal tracks, played games, and recorded their thoughts about being in nature during quiet times after lunch. They got to know this particular place well, and data they collected were

regularly submitted to the city's Bureau of Environmental Services in an effort to alert natural resource professionals to anomalous events. Preparation for field trips included the development of hypotheses about what they were likely to see and why; follow-up meetings in the classroom focused on discoveries and the importance of standardizing data collection procedures.

The school ground provides an additional site for environmental lessons. Students in earlier years had planted vegetable, flower, and native species gardens. These require ongoing maintenance and become the source for lessons about plant identification and food cultivation. Students and teachers at the school also run an extensive composting program and maintain worm bins, all of which contribute to garden efforts. Students take such learning into the neighborhood around the school as well, sponsoring native plant sales or constructing raised vegetable beds at the city-sanctioned Dignity Village for homeless people.

Some years, students investigate controversial environmental topics. In the spring of 2005, for example, one core class decided to learn more about efforts to develop a policy to govern the likely migration of wolves into Oregon from Idaho. Students linked this topic to the idea of manifest destiny that had governed the settling of North America by people of European descent. When a legislative hearing about the wolf plan was scheduled in East Portland, their teacher, Jan Zuckerman, decided that this was a good opportunity for them to learn about public decision-making processes. She invited interested students to write statements and then chaperoned them during the hearing. Since student opinions tended to favor the reintroduction of wolves, their comments sparked a temporary outcry from ranchers and their elected representatives from eastern Oregon. Their teacher, however, had been careful to include multiple viewpoints about the issue and not to intentionally sway students in one way or another, so concerns about possible indoctrination quickly dissipated. A positive outcome was that a class conversation with a state judge from a ranching community resulted in invitations for this teacher's students to visit families in the eastern part of the state and learn about their life ways and perspectives. Political activism as well as observation, restoration work, and gardening are thus part of students' experience at the school.

Three years ago, the middle school became a K-8 school in an effort to respond to long-standing district pressure to enroll more students. Taylor and her teachers developed new curricula that continue to draw heavily upon the local environment as a basis for learning experiences, incorporating activities like a morning walk into children's daily schedule and assigning one teacher to be responsible for instruction in art and gardening, assuring that students across all grades have the opportunity to observe and learn from nature. Elementary students, like their middle school counterparts, also participate in the investigations of rivers, forests, and mountains that lead to the school's public festivals.

Teachers at the Sunnyside Environmental School speak explicitly about connecting students to the region and developing a commitment to care about their home place. That students evolve in this direction can be seen in their willingness to spend time outside in inclement weather, engage in the work of soil preparation and weeding, and master information about local flora and fauna about which their

peers in other schools often remain ignorant. Although the data are purely anecdotal, some high school biology teachers speak of the way that students from Sunnyside know what they are doing when involved in field studies and that they really care about the natural world. Graduates of the program are also drawn to environmental fields when they get to college and display a willingness to become politically involved. An educational experience that incorporates ecological information about the students' region, that takes them regularly into the natural world, and that asks them to contribute their labor to restoration and gardening projects provides an opportunity for young people to become acquainted with where they live and to move beyond the limitations of a human-centered culture that tends to disregard its roots in the physical world.

Exploration of Economic Possibilities and Entrepreneurialism

Educational experiences that draw students into a meaningful relationship with the human and natural communities that surround them may do much to engender social capital and Lopez's notion of *querencia*, but if they do not also help students grapple with economic issues they will be useful only for the independently wealthy. Young people must also gain an understanding of what is required to make a living in the places where they live. Unfortunately, in many rural and inner-city communities, viable economic opportunities are in short supply, and the result is that students—regardless of how much they may love and be committed to their home places—will be forced to move elsewhere to support themselves once they graduate from high school and are expected to achieve some degree of financial independence. One of the strengths of the Llano Grande Center described earlier is that teachers found ways both to attract college graduates back to south Texas and to create meaningful employment for them. Educators have rarely considered the role that they might play in community development, perceiving their own responsibilities to lie primarily with individual students. Some place- and community-based educators, however, are demonstrating ways that schools can become genuine contributors to the economic well-being of the communities whose tax dollars support them.

In the mid-1990s, Randy Parry was the business teacher and basketball coach at Howard High School in Miner County, 65 miles northwest of Sioux Falls, South Dakota (see www.mccr.net for more information). The town of Howard, like many towns throughout the upper Midwest, had experienced decades of out-migration. After peaking in the 1920s and 1930s, population in Howard—the county seat—had declined to 1,000 people; Miner County, itself, had only 1,000 registered voters. Mr. Parry was determined to see what he could do to turn this around and believed that young people could become a critical element of this process.

With the Program for Rural School and Community Renewal at South Dakota State University, he wrote a grant to the Annenberg Rural Challenge to support projects aimed at connecting rural schools and communities. The aim of the grant was to develop sustainable communities that met the needs of local residents for

food, water, shelter, clothing, and jobs while at the same time keeping that growth within the region's ecological limits.

One of his students' first projects was a community cash flow study that involved surveying all 1,000 of the county's registered voters to find out where they shopped and which improvements in local businesses might lead them to spend more of their dollars in Miner County. Students found that about half of all respondents were primarily going to larger towns outside the county for most of their shopping needs. They shared this information with the community as well as suggestions about businesses staying open later and people's desire for a local ATM machine. They also let county residents know that, if they spent only 10 percent more of their disposable income close to home, seven million additional dollars would be added to the regional economy and more sales tax revenue would be available for local government. People listened and, over the next year, taxable sales in Miner County increased by \$15.6 million—41.1 percent—and then gradually stabilized at this level. Other projects included student-taught adult computer classes, the construction of a greenhouse and community garden supported by a U.S. Department of Agriculture grant, and a student study of cancer clusters in the county.

Fired up by the success of these early projects, Parry and his students began sponsoring community vision meetings during the fall of 1997. People from all walks of life were invited to these gatherings, including youth, the elderly, farmers, business



Figure 4.3 Planning with community members
Used with permission of Jim Beddow

people, clergy, teachers, and low-income and high-income residents. Large meetings were generally attended by about 150 people. Discussions focused on identifying Miner County's assets, its weaknesses, and strategies for creating a community capable of creating enough high-quality jobs to prevent a further population decline. Focus groups studied and then developed recommendations about housing, employment, health care, and education. Out of these discussions evolved the Miner County Task Force made up of 22 members from a variety of different constituent groups including young people and the elderly.

This work was substantive enough so that, when Parry applied to the Northwest Area Foundation, Miner County was selected out of 197 communities of comparable size to receive a grant of over \$4 million to give legs to the ideas residents had been discussing over the past two years. This grant was supplemented by \$2 million more from the nonprofit South Dakota Community Foundation, allowing for the creation of a new organization, Miner County Community Revitalization (MCCR). In the years since MCCR has been in existence, the organization has supported county-wide beautification efforts, the creation of a revolving loan fund to help business start-ups, the conversion of a vacant school into a wellness center, and the establishment of a daycare center. The county is also beginning to attract new businesses, including a factory that manufactures state-of-the-art turbine blades for the burgeoning Midwest wind power industry and an organic beef packing-house. Together, both enterprises now employ over 200 people.

Throughout this period of time, student researchers have continued to play an important role supporting the work of MCCR. Although Parry took over the reins of MCCR once it was formed, he did not forget his ties to education. In 2000, a recent graduate of Howard High School was hired to investigate population loss, transfer payments, future trends in agriculture, land ownership in agriculture, sales in agriculture, and personal income. Stories based on his research were published in two of the county's local papers. During the summer of 2002, six more Howard High School students were hired by MCCR to update research in these areas as well as the status of elderly residents, free and reduced lunches, income and poverty, wind energy, and social capital. More recently, a nearly \$50,000 grant from the South Dakota Department of Health and Humanities will support student research in Howard and Corsica, another small town, but in Douglas County to the south of Howard. This grant will allow students to investigate such issues as town design, entrepreneurship, and new strategies for supporting community development. As a research associate for MCCR observed, "We will take what we learn and change and modify it into something that will work for rural America. We can't afford not to engage youth. That's how things change here" (Sand, 2006).

Schools and communities that engage students in work as important as that provided for them in Miner County and the counties where this model is spreading both demonstrate to young people their capacity to make real contributions to the welfare of their families and neighbors and exhibit to them possibilities for meaningful and financially viable employment they may have never imagined. The success of MCCR and the activities associated with this organization are tied to a belief that average people are capable of taking care of their own lives and of creating their

own opportunities. In this sense, efforts there are as liberatory as those in the Llano Grande region of south Texas even though these students in Iowa are as mainstream as it gets. They are learning that, despite the messages of the urban media that there is little of value in rural America, they and their fellow citizens can craft good lives for themselves if they join together to gather data, to learn, to analyze, to imagine, to invest, and to build.

Induction to Citizenship

The fourth approach to place- and community-based education focuses on activities aimed at inducting young people into the give and take of local decision-making. Civic education has long been one of the goals touted by American schools, but actual instruction has tended to focus more on abstract discussions of forms of government than on experiences that give children and youth the opportunity to hone the skills associated with effective citizenship. A partial list of such skills might include the ability to research and analyze an issue, to educate and organize the public, to write and deliver statements at hearings or events, and to use the media to advance one's cause.

One of the grandfathers of the place- and community-based education movement is a retired science teacher from Seaside, Oregon named Neal Maine. Maine has long argued that students need to be seen as intellectual resources, and the Annenberg Rural Challenge was quick to grasp the value of his perspective during the years he served on its board of trustees. Maine went on to suggest that, if children and youth are to fulfill this role, they need something like the equivalent of Little League Baseball to help them gain the appropriate abilities and confidence. Kids don't learn to play baseball by reading books or watching videos—although these activities can help; they become baseball players by playing baseball—often in modified form with shorter baselines and more forgiving rules. Growing citizens requires the same kind of support.

Maine worked to form cooperative agreements between city and county governments to engage students in research activities—like those in Miner County—aimed at bettering their community. Over the years, students in Seaside have investigated such things as their own buying patterns and then shared this information with members of the Chamber of Commerce, catalogued native species on an old lumber mill site that was the object of an urban renewal grant, took measurements of all buildings on the city's tsunami plain so that emergency planners could make use of a software program aimed at anticipating damage caused by different-sized waves, and made recommendations about playground equipment needs in the county's parks. In each of these instances, the focus of students' activities was bounded, and they received plenty of support from their teachers and members of appropriate agencies or committees as they developed their reports or presentations. What they learned was that they could speak in a public meeting like any other citizen and engage in activities that had real value for the community. They began to develop a taste for participation and a sense about how best to make contributions to community life.

In many instances, students' introduction to democratic participation can be structured in ways that are non-controversial. Democracy, however, tends to be characterized by disagreement and controversy. Educators who venture into issues around which people do not agree must be thoughtful about how they proceed. As with the example from the Sunnyside Environmental School, it is important to leave space for students to make up their own minds and not be swayed by their teacher to believe and act in one way rather than another. There are circumstances, however, when the issue of community harm is so clear cut that engaging students in efforts to correct the situation can be justifiable.

Elaine Senechal worked for nearly a decade as a science teacher at the Greater Egleston Community High School (GECHS) in Boston, Massachusetts (Senechal, 2008). The high school was initially created in the 1990s by a group of parents worried about the attractions of street life for their primarily Black, Latino, and Cape Verdean children. They hoped that a school experience aimed at preparing them to become community leaders might be more attractive than gang membership. GECHS operated for a few years as a charter, but then like Young Achievers became a pilot school. Thanks to an agreement between the district and the teachers' union, pilot schools—like charter schools—have more flexibility over hiring, curriculum, and budget, giving them the ability to respond more immediately to the needs and interests of their teachers, students, and community.

When Senechal began teaching at GECHS, she wanted to find some way to integrate the school's mission about community leadership into her science program. She decided that whatever project she embarked upon would be more successful if it were clearly linked to concerns already identified by local residents. Her investigation surfaced a nonprofit organization called Alternatives for Community and the Environment (ACE) that was working with low-income people in Boston to correct environmental inequities. Two community organizers at ACE were very interested in youth development. When Senechal met them, she realized that she had found just the people she needed to create a science elective that focused on environmental justice.

At that time, ACE was investigating on air quality issues in Roxbury. Asthma rates were soaring, and diesel exhaust was suspected of being the cause. One of Senechal's students' first projects involved simply counting the number of diesel-burning vehicles that passed the front door of the school in an hour. In that period of time, over one hundred trucks or busses drove by, many of them empty busses on the way to the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) terminal located in the neighborhood. Working with the community organizers from ACE, students learned that excessive idling by diesel-burning vehicles is a major contributor to diminished air quality. They also learned that a Massachusetts statute theoretically prevented vehicles from idling for more than five minutes at one stop; the statute, however, was rarely enforced.

This understanding resulted in the initiation of a six-year campaign to pressure public officials to enforce the law. Different groups of students in Senechal's environmental justice class helped to organize public rallies and demonstrations that gained the attention of the media and decision-makers. Presentations made at such



Figure 4.4 Demonstrating for clean air
Used with permission of Elaine Senechal

events eventually included data from research about levels of local air pollution students had completed in Roxbury. At the time, air quality for the Boston region was only being monitored by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from a high-rise building in the center of town. Students learned how to use soil samples to assess pollutant levels and at one point were able to borrow air-monitoring equipment from the EPA to measure CO₂ levels both in and around their school. EPA officials were shocked to see how serious the problem was. This, coupled with growing public awareness, helped contribute to the community's success in gaining grants to purchase air quality monitors that would provide hourly feedback about pollutant levels. Students also worked with Roxbury Community College and researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health to compare medical records regarding asthma conditions and air quality records from the community's new monitoring station.

This growing body of data coupled with the attention now directed to air quality and environmental justice issues by the public culminated in 2004 in a court ruling that resulted in a decision against the MBTA. The MBTA was required to pay a fine, reduce the amount of time their busses idled, and continue converting diesel-burning busses to less-polluting natural gas. In this instance, students involved in place- and community-based educational projects over several years made a notable contribution to their families' and neighbors' quality of life.

Air quality was not the only issue to gain the attention of students in the environmental justice class. Students were actively involved in campaigning for the

creation of a light-rail service to their neighborhood, resisting the siting in Roxbury of a level 4 biolab that would study some of the world's most dangerous communicable diseases, and supporting a Massachusetts bill aimed at giving human beings the same protections as endangered species. They also responded to requests to help organize against a proposal by the superintendent of the Boston Public Schools to require students to pay for bus and subway passes (these had historically been issued at no charge) and to investigate and then present their findings to the Boston City Council about job opportunities, pothole repairs, affordable housing, and youth programs. Students in the environmental justice class became recognized as skilled researchers and effective spokespersons for their community—both by members of the community, themselves, and by decision-makers in their city. As Senechal notes in a chapter she wrote about her experiences at GECHS (Senechal, 2008), the students who were gaining this respect and recognition were the same kids who had nearly dropped out of other schools. What made the difference was that they were able to find ways to contribute their intelligence and energies to projects that were genuinely worthwhile. They rose to the occasion and both they and their community were the beneficiaries.

Common Elements

In all of the foregoing examples, educators created learning opportunities that were unique to the circumstances of their own communities and regions. They did not rely on lesson or unit plans developed by others, but took advantage of possibilities that lay beyond their classroom door. They and their students looked for topics that are common to human experience: culture, the natural environment, making a living, handling the challenges of governance. Although unique to each community, the teaching practices encountered here demonstrate many of the characteristics of place- and community-based education seen at the Young Achievers Science and Mathematics Pilot School. Not all of these elements need to be present in every lesson or unit, but including more rather than fewer of them seems likely to lead to projects that have the capacity both to engage students in learning and to do so in ways that elicit positive responses from people outside the school.

In each of these communities, the **curriculum was clearly grounded in local issues and possibilities**, be they stories from people's past, data gathered about the condition of nearby streams and forests, buying habits of county residents, or air quality and its effects. That these topics were brought into students' school experiences was a result of the **willingness of their teachers to step beyond the lessons presented in generic texts and workbooks and to design instructional plans on their own or with others**. There was no prescribed plan that Elaine Senechal could have drawn upon to develop her lessons on air pollution and its solution, just as there was no guide that would have told the teachers at the Sunnyside Environmental School what aspects of their community ought to be included in their exploration of rivers, forests, and mountains. Their skill as educators lies in their ability to learn, synthesize, and make sense of new information, modeling what it means to engage in inquiry, to present findings to audiences beyond the

school, and to become involved in efforts to improve the lives of people in their home communities. By working in this way, educators tend to act more as co-learners and facilitators than subject matter specialists.

Place- and community-based teachers furthermore embrace an educational model based more upon inquiry and action than memorization and recitation. In doing so, they **invite students to become knowledge creators and to exercise their own voices** as they share their findings and understanding with people beyond the classroom. Such activities have been termed “authentic” by educational researchers and are seen as an important aspect of classrooms in which students are genuinely engaged in academic work (Newmann, Secada, & Wehlage, 1995). When students know that the products of their investigations will have an audience besides their teacher—in the form of museum displays, PowerPoint presentations, or public testimony—they tend to invest more of their attention and energy into the tasks at hand.

Much of this happens because **teachers provide opportunities for other adults to share in the education of their community’s children**. They do not try to fulfill this critical social and cultural function by themselves. At the Sunnyside Environmental School, morning meetings offer children an ongoing source of information and stories about the kinds of things that caring adults do to enhance the quality of community life or the natural environment. In south Texas, high school students interview community residents in their own homes to gain this kind of knowledge. And in Howard, South Dakota, students have played a central role as researchers and meeting facilitators, interacting with their elders as fellow citizens with an equal stake in the long-term health of their region.

Partnerships with local agencies also provide young people with access to adults outside the school. In Portland, teachers work with professionals from the Bureau of Environmental Services, volunteers at local soup kitchens, gardeners at Jean’s Farm, and numerous organizations to expand the range of learning experiences they can offer their students. Similarly, at the Greater Egleston Community High School, youth were able to benefit from the knowledge and skills of community organizers who rarely have the opportunity to work with young people in formal educational settings. Establishing such partnerships greatly extends the range of expertise to which students are exposed and allows teachers—especially those new to a particular community—to acquaint their students with information and skills that may be unfamiliar to themselves, as well.

Finally, **place- and community-based educators design learning activities that could potentially engender a sense of appreciation or positive regard about students’ home communities and regions**. This occurred in all of the sites described in this chapter. Students in Edcouch-Elsa became acquainted with the deep personal strengths of their relatives and neighbors. At the Sunnyside Environmental School, children came to know the natural features of their homes in ways rarely encountered by young people growing up in modern societies. In Howard, students got to know their neighbors and to recognize the economic and social potentials of their home county. And, in Boston, adolescents at the Greater Egleston Community High School were able to see that, despite the challenges faced by

people in Roxbury, coalitions existed that could bring about positive change even when faced with seemingly intractable technological or social problems. One of the central aims of place- and community-based education is the cultivation of the experience of connection. Exploring community problems is certainly important, but it is also important to acquaint students with what is worth preserving, transmitting, and growing.

Drawing upon experiences and issues shared among all human communities and engaging students in work that has meaning beyond the classroom, teachers can diminish the boundary between school and place, enlivening the curriculum and demonstrating to young people the immediate importance of what they are learning. In the examples described in this chapter, educators used as their starting point the community itself. But, with an understanding about the value of incorporating the local into the classroom, teachers can also ground their curriculum development efforts in specific school subjects. How this can be done will be the focus of the next chapter.