

Sustainable Schools Project



NEWSLETTER · SPRING/SUMMER 2004

News from VT EFS
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Setting the Stage for Civic Engagement at Lawrence Barnes Elementary School

Jennifer Cirillo

When three young girls in Anne Tewksbury-Frye's 4th grade classroom wrote an essay on their goals for the year, they focused on, "Let's make the school more welcoming." Their strategy was two-fold: to make the school more visually pleasing and to make everyone feel welcome. First, they worked with Principal Paula Bowen to greet students every day with a "good morning" in the representative languages used by Barnes' students. Next they made a plan to gather student artwork once a month from each classroom to decorate the halls and share their learning with the school and community. This spring, they have begun fundraising to buy plants for the halls, library, and schoolyard. These students, with the help of adults in their school and community, are changing the climate of their school based on their own interests. They are doing so at a high level of participation – where they are initiating the decisions and then sharing their ideas and projects with adults. It's what service-learning is all about.

SSP's strategy of engaging students at every grade level in local service projects both empowers students and builds their sense of place. This is important to the future of the community and essential for a student's own sense of self. Service-learning projects offer students new and varied ways to gather and process information, diverse opportunities to demonstrate these understandings, and the chance to make decisions that positively affect their community. By combining strategies of place-based education and service-learning, education for sustainability has proven to be an effective method for engaging students in real-life decision making and community work.

This type of education begins with teachers. At Barnes, teachers and staff are investigating community sustainability initiatives in Burlington's Old North End and North Street communities as part of a schoolwide focus on increasing students' sense of place and pride

in their neighborhood. This

spring, based on the model implemented at Champlain Elementary School, SSP's first pilot site, SSP is facilitating this initiative. Through SSP, teachers will experience hands-on place-based activities while learning about innovative community projects that address environmental integrity, economic vitality, and social justice. Later this summer, after a series of workshops on local initiatives, teachers will use curriculum mapping tools developed by SSP, get help planning units, and work with community partners.

Bringing teachers, staff, students, and community members together to build a collective vision for the future will be the first step to ensure that Barnes' students will have the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to be active citizens. By supporting this work along the way and connecting Barnes with community partners, SSP will help Barnes meet its goal of developing a sense of place and pride in their neighborhood.

An overriding factor affecting children's desire and ability to be involved in community projects is how they feel about themselves.

– Roger Hart, *Children's Participation*

Schoolyard Stewards

"Schoolyard Stewards" pulled a shopping cart, tire, tent, car hood and ten bags



of trash out of the Englesby Ravine on Green Up Day in Burlington on May 1. Many students brought their families to join them in this community-wide event.

See article on p. 4 for more information on the "Schoolyard Stewards" afterschool program at Champlain Elementary School.

Sustainable Schools Project and VT EFS

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VT EFS is a partnership of

- VT Agency of Agriculture
- VT Agency of Natural Resources
- VT Department of Education
- VT Department of Public Service
- Agriculture in the Classroom Partners
- SWEEP (StateWide Environmental Education Programs)
- University of Vermont
- Vermont Institutes
- Shelburne Farms

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Letter from Sustainable Schools Project How we got here from there

In late January, we, the Sustainable Schools staff, spent a frigid weekend huddled over our laptops at a reflective writing retreat with our new partners, Vermont Community Works. Joined by our colleagues from the education for sustainability and place-based education networks, we found ourselves warmed by the shared experience of finding our own voices and constructing meaning about our work. Our learning re-energized us for our upcoming transition from Champlain Elementary School to Lawrence Barnes.*

In his reflective writing piece, Brent Sclafani, a 4th and 5th grade teacher at Champlain, explained how developing youth voices and engaging students in decision making are crucial for making education for sustainability meaningful. Although EFS teaches about the interconnectedness of the world and offers many opportunities for ongoing community-based learning, we also need to let youth use their voices to construct meaning about these experiences, in order to fully engage them in understanding and improving their communities.

This theme of civic engagement runs through this issue of the *Sustainable Schools Project Newsletter*. Always a lofty goal for the SSP, civic engagement is now becoming an active, ongoing objective for all parts of the program. Tiffany Tillman's exciting after-school programs have evolved to emphasize youth as decision makers, and community partners as leaders of service-learning opportunities. Under the umbrella of sustainability, Champlain's science and social studies curricula have engaged fourth and fifth graders as community planners.

And we were excited to realize that Barnes Elementary wanted to become the second pilot Sustainable School because of its commitment to developing civic engagement for its students and community. Principal Paula Bowen and the school staff have planted "seeds" of sustainability as we begin to work together to realize Barnes' dream as a Sustainable School: a vibrant hub of the community; a place of tolerance and shared initiative; a place of nurturing for all the species who share the schoolyard. We look forward to sharing with you the growth to come in the next few years.

Erica Zimmerman for Shelburne Farms' SSP team

**Read about our partnership and the results of the reflective writing retreat in the upcoming issue of Community Works Journal at www.vermontcommunityworks.org.*

LEFT: After assessing the safety of their neighborhoods, these 4th/5th graders at Champlain Elementary write a letter to the Department of Public Works. See Healthy Neighborhoods/Healthy Kids article on p. 5.

EFS: Striving for Civic Engagement

Erica Zimmerman

Our sense of education for sustainability has evolved over the five years we have worked alongside Vermont's classroom teachers to make this big idea, this most "essential question" of sustainability come alive for our children. There are many definitions and frameworks that outline the important kinds of learning that support improving our communities' economic, ecological and social quality of life. Recently, we have come to embrace youth civic engagement as the keystone of all our work—helping our youth become aware, motivated and active in improving their communities. This approach unites our overarching goal of *sustainability*, our context of *place*, and our strategy of *service-learning*. Successful youth civic engagement depends on three essential elements.

Understanding connections

First, students need to understand that the world is built of connections. By seeing all the interconnections within their community, students better understand the complexity of the human and natural systems around them, and their learning gains more meaning and depth. When fifth graders learn about where their food comes from, and the economic and ecological forces behind those places, they can better consider multiple variables when deciding what food to eat. *Integrative curriculum* – even when not interdisciplinary – can develop the foundations of the *systems-thinking* our young citizens and our communities need.

Connecting to place

Side by side with understanding interconnectedness is understanding place, the natural and human systems that make up our local communities. In Vermont, we are fortunate to have abundant resources for studying our local ecology and history. Now many of us are collaborating with local community planners to develop resources for studying local economics and patterns of change. When we bring our students into the context of their community, we find motivation soars and opportunities abound for meaningful projects where students can develop and apply their academic skills. At the same time, students become literate in their local place. They gain names and stories for the world around them – the source of their water, the long-ago business owner who built the big brick house, the name of the bird that sounds their wake-up call. With such knowledge, they have more reason to care for this world and become stewards of it.

Making a difference

Knowledge and connection to place do not make an engaged citizen, however. In addition, students need to feel confident in their ability to make a difference with this knowledge. They need to know their own effectiveness (often called self-efficacy). Students—all of us—must not get lost in the *complexity* of the world, nor become simply rooted in *compassion* for it; they must have some measure of *control* within themselves to effect the changes they now understand to be needed.

How do we instill our students with such "locus of control"? As educators, we need to give them experiences that show them that they can make a difference. We need to set our students up for successful service-learning in their school community, their neighborhood, or their town. A distant ecosystem cannot supply such a context. Our students need real opportunities for decision making: to inquire about their communities' needs and to shape the contributions they will make. Then students need the opportunity to reflect on their experience and to construct its meaning. Inquiry and reflection are necessary companions to help students develop the awareness of themselves as actors in the web of their communities. With such service-learning experiences, students have the personal skills they need to forge ahead as citizens engaged in their communities.

In this issue and in Community Works Journal, we present several examples of schools striving for authentic youth civic engagement. In the coming months, we will begin to post examples on our new website. Please send us comments and stories to include! We look forward to hearing from you.



Springing Up the Schoolyard

On a beautiful day at Champlain Elementary School, recess was for more than running around, giggling, and playing tag with friends. A group of third graders decided it was time to SPRING Up their schoolyard. They asked their teacher for a few trash bags, and then set out to clean up their schoolyard. They celebrated the freedom of recess with smiles on their faces that said they were feeling good and enjoying making a difference on their own time!

Service Learning Planning Steps

From Peace Corps/World Wise Schools

PREPARATION includes planning service activities and providing students with the knowledge needed to participate in and benefit from the service activity.

- Identify community needs
- Select and plan service activities related to learning expectations
- Help identify and enlist the assistance of service agencies
- Receive instruction and training related to the service activity

ACTION is the service itself and must:

- Be meaningful
- Have academic integrity
- Be developmentally appropriate
- Provide student ownership
- Have adequate supervision
- Be feasible—can be completed with available timeline, resources

REFLECTION is structured opportunity for students to critically think about their service experience and apply their learning to a broader context. Reflection provides opportunity to link academic work with service activities. Possible activities include:

- Discussion
- Journaling
- Team-building
- Artistic expression
- Class Projects or Presentations

CELEBRATION recognizes the students' contributions. It provides closure to service activity. Celebrations may include:

- School assemblies
- Media coverage
- Joint celebrations with service partners
- Certificates recognizing students as a community resource
- Celebration is strengthened if it is related to the service (i.e., a party in the park that students cleaned up.)



Participants of the “For the Birds!” after-school program make bird feeders out of recycled materials to enhance their schoolyard habitat. The feeders were placed in the courtyard of the school, and visited by flocks of birds!

Lessons in Service-Learning After School Programing

Tiffany Tillman

For the past year, as SSP’s AmeriCorps*Vista member, I have worked with Champlain’s After-School Program Coordinator to help infuse Champlain’s sustainability work into after-school programs. In September, I began “Let’s Map,” a schoolyard mapping and species identification project, and “Living Machine Stewards,” where students maintained the school’s Living Machine and increased the biodiversity of this model aquatic ecosystem. In the winter, students in the “For the Birds!” program created a bird viewing and feeding station.

In all cases, students chose to participate in programs whose scope and objectives were set long before the students signed up. The programs helped students develop communication and problem-solving skills, gain experience working cooperatively, connect with their place, and contribute to their community. What they didn’t do, however, was give students a sense of ownership over the project. Service-learning projects at their best not only improve the community and support academic learning, they also help young people develop resiliency and positive civic behavior.

How then, I wondered, could Champlain’s after-school service-learning programs continue to foster students’ personal resources and academic skills while making room for student direction? I decided that students needed to shape each service project based on their own passions and dreams for making a difference. But could we incorporate student direction without detracting from student learning? The answer became quite clear. Students learn best when they are inspired to act. Their learning is authentic. Making the projects student-directed would only add to the overall success and meaning of the after school programs.

After much thought, a promising project model was born: “Schoolyard Stewards,” an after-school program created by students. This spring, the students who signed up for the program spent the first two weeks brainstorming a list of projects, researching them, democratically deciding on a few, then developing plans of action. They went dipping for macroinvertebrates and pond organisms to put in the Living Machine and planned a clean-up project for Green-Up Day in Burlington. Not surprisingly, the enthusiasm, creativity and dedication of the participants far exceed those in the other programs. As one participant said at the end of a session, “Man, I can’t wait for next week, and then Green-Up Day. This is so fun!” This student struggles in his regular classroom, but gleams with pride while in Schoolyard Stewards.

Service-learning reaps many benefits. When students participate in the actual project decision-making themselves, it can change lives and lay the foundation for future citizens who are dedicated to community involvement.

Making a Difference in Our Lives and Community: The Healthy Neighborhoods/Healthy Kids Project

Sarah Judd, Vermont Forum on Sprawl

Green Up Day in Burlington on May 1 held special meaning (and special responsibilities) for a group of children from Champlain Elementary School. Partnering with the city of Burlington's First Response Team, community members, family, and friends, these children were completing clean-up and safety projects they'd planned this past winter as part of The Healthy Neighborhoods/Healthy Kids Program.

A year-long partnership of the Sustainable Schools Project, Vermont Forum on Sprawl, Linking Learning to Life, and Champlain Elementary School, the program aims to reduce environmental health risks for children in Burlington neighborhoods. The program empowers Champlain's 4th and 5th graders to improve their local neighborhoods by acting as future citizen planners, all the while boosting their level of physical activity. The program hopes to reduce the negative effects of "unhealthy" development patterns—unwalkable neighborhoods, sedentary lifestyles, auto-only development and drive-through diet—which are contributing to higher rates of obesity and diseases such as asthma and diabetes among Vermont's children.

This past year, participating children moved to make their neighborhoods safer and healthier. In October 2003, the children developed their own neighborhood report card, assessing features such as condition of sidewalks, presence of graffiti, safe crosswalks, and clean parks. They then met with Mayor Peter Clavelle and Steve Goodkind of the Department of Public Works to find out how the city and children could partner to make neighborhood improvements. Children presented their report card findings to community groups, family and peers to let others know what they could do to improve the quality and health of their neighborhoods, and generated their



Champlain Students meet with Burlington Mayor Peter Clavelle to discuss how to make neighborhood improvements.

own list of improvement projects. Some of these projects were tackled during Burlington's Green Up Day.

The Healthy Neighborhoods/Healthy Kids Program is a great example of education for sustainability: students learn about their place, how they are connected to their community and how they can make a difference.

The HN/HK project is made possible by the EPA's Healthy Communities Program and the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust. Special thanks to Sarah Judd, Vermont Forum on Sprawl, and Collen Cowell & Pat Fitzgerald, Champlain 4/5 teachers.

Food for Thought by Dana Hudson, Shelburne Farms' FEED Project

Planting the Seed of Student Involvement in Local Food Issues

Planting seeds and watching them grow can fill a student with joy and pride. But do you know all the ways your class can be involved in gardening and food issues right in your own community? If you're looking to support your current food-based unit or for hands-on community activities for students, you don't have to look any further than your own town.

Many communities have longstanding food-related programs that are always interested in engaging students. Students might help to plant and maintain community gardens, make healthy soil through composting, prepare and serve food at the emergency food kitchen or for meals-on-wheels programs, or grow plants for window boxes to donate to a local senior center.

With increased local and national attention focused on student health and nutrition, even more opportunities are cropping up to involve students in health-related community initiatives.

Growing, preparing, and eating food is a fantastic way to get students excited about discovering their own community and making a difference in it.

RESOURCES:

www.kidsgardening.com
www.cce.cornell.edu/programs/food/index.html
www.kidscanmakeadifference.org
www.farmtoschool.org



VT EFS News & Updates

Shelburne Farms Collaborates with Vermont Community Works

Shelburne Farms and VT EFS are proud to announce the beginning of a partnership with Vermont Community Works. The organization's publication, *COMMUNITY WORKS JOURNAL*, showcases innovative educational strategies, practices and curriculum that involve teachers and students in meaningful work within their communities. The partnership aims to document SSP stories, and prepare education for sustainability publications, and infuse service-learning work with the goal of education for sustainability. In the latest issue of *COMMUNITY WORKS JOURNAL*, Education for Sustainability and the Sustainable Schools Project were highlighted, along with many stories of place-based education. Visit CWJ at www.vermontcommunityworks.org/cwpublications/journal/index.html

Upcoming Conferences and Institutes:

Sustainable Communities Conference

July 14-18, 2004, Burlington, VT
Register Now-online for a conference that will change the way you work. Municipal officials, planners, citizens, scholars, educators, businesses and development professionals are invited to participate in an innovative conference designed to help you create peaceful, healthy, economically successful and participatory communities. The conference is designed to allow you to explore issues in depth, and to provide you with a range of learning experiences. Leading academics and professionals from over 40 countries will facilitate working groups, workshops and other sessions in twelve different focus areas. Erica Zimmerman, VT EFS Coordinator is coordinating the Youth Engagement strand of the conference and welcomes all to collaborate to solve real-life problems and develop practical action plans for the UN Decade of Education on Sustainability. For more information visit www.global-community.org/conference or info@global-community.org

What's Happening this Summer for SSP?

There are many exciting things happening for students, teachers, and SSP staff.

Food Science and Fun

3-day workshop for Burlington K-5 teachers: June 22-24 (8 AM - 4 PM)
5-day camp for Burlington K-5 students: June 28-July 2 (8 AM - 2:30 PM)
Champlain Elementary School

Burlington K-5 teachers who are interested in enhancing their science units will learn how to integrate hands-on food science, literacy and service-learning into their curriculum. The course will focus on: gardening/growing plants, compost, soil, nutrition and the science of food. This course is still OPEN! Cost for materials and to hold a space is \$125. Send checks to Barbara Leopold at Champlain Elementary School, 800 Pine St, Burlington, VT 05401 or contact her at bleopold@bsdvt.org ASAP! 3 Credits from Johnson State College available by adding 2 follow-up days in August. Stipends vary depending on credits. Questions? Contact Colleen Cowell at 864-8477 or ccowell@bsdvt.org

International Children's Conference on the Environment

July 19-23, 2004 New London, Connecticut

Four fifth graders from Champlain Elementary School were accepted as child delegates to the International Children's Conference on the Environment based on their work with the Healthy Neighborhoods /Healthy Kids project. The child delegates will gain valuable skills in active citizenship as they attend workshops and daily field trips on pertinent environmental and community issues, ask questions of environmental experts, learn other projects youth from around the world are initiating to help the environment and challenge governments and people of the world to address environmental concerns and issues. For more information regarding the conference visit www.icc04.org

Connecting Service-Learning to the Curriculum Summer Institute

July 19-23, 2004
Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, VT
The Institute is a week-long opportunity for professional development and collaboration held each year during July at Shelburne Farms. The goal of the Summer Institute is to provide K-16 teachers, community educators and administrators with training, models, strategies and resources for developing service-learning as an integrated feature of curriculum with clear links to standards. The Summer Institute will emphasize service-learning best practices and the overarching goal of sustainability. Participants will develop an integrated service-learning instructional or site plan that meets their own unique school or program needs. Opportunities for post Institute support will be available. For more information: Joe Brooks at jbrooks@vermontcommunityworks.org or 802-655-5918. To register: Lesley Graham at lgraham@shelburnefarms.org or 802-985-8686 x41.

38th Annual New England Environmental Education Association Conference

October 14-17, 2004 Breadloaf Campus, Middlebury College, Ripton, VT
Hosted by VT State Wide Environmental Education Programs (SWEEP) and co-sponsored by Middlebury College, the conference focuses on: "Opening Doors-Collaboration Strengthens Our Voice to Build Sustainable Communities" Workshops, panel discussions and open space opportunities will feature a variety of field-based approaches to education. Field Trips throughout VT will be featured on Friday, October 15, 2004.

Teacher's Workshop on Writing for Sustainability

Joey Hawkins, VT Writing Consultant, will lead a workshop at the conference linking portfolio writing to community-based approaches in science, social studies and service-learning.

For more conference information visit www.vermontsweep.org