

**School and Community Partnerships: A Model for  
Environmental Education**

**A Report to the Community-based School Environmental Education Program**

**Antioch New England Graduate School**

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## Introduction

As we consider the kind of education that will meet the challenges of the decades ahead, we speculate as to what will best serve our young people and the place they call home. Many emphasize a desire for young people to feel connected -- connected to people of different ages and backgrounds, connected to the history of their families, communities and environment, connected to the institutions that enrich their lives and livelihoods, connected to ideals that encourage them to take responsibility for the place in which they live.

As teachers develop educational experiences that give students the attitudes, skills, and habits of mind that are critical in making these connections, the necessity of engaging students in real life learning opportunities becomes ever more apparent. Learning that is relevant, has meaning, extends beyond the walls of the classroom and impacts a wider constituency more naturally incorporates communal concerns. As educators, we realize as well, that when learners are engaged in such tasks, their relationship to the community deepens even as their work contributes to their place. When students communicate with the people and research the place around them, they develop connections and establish relationships they may carry with them forever. Only by working to genuinely know a place and its people can one become a steward, a citizen who cares about the surroundings.

It is our responsibility as educators to provide learning opportunities that engage students in authentic work. This work requires that our young people become inquirers and problem-solvers who are able to analyze, hypothesize and formulate solutions. Through this process of inquiry, students become historians, researchers, civic planners, scientists, writers and citizens of their place -- learners with an understanding of how to effect change and how to contribute. Students tell us that it is this work, work that makes a difference, that they remember most. As we engage students in work that makes a difference in our communities, we more effectively utilize our resources -- our young people, our community members and our local environment. We enrich the learning and increase the possibilities.

Eleven communities in northern New England -- Gorham, Randolph, Shelburne, Antrim, Bennington, Hancock, Frankestown and Orford, New Hampshire, along with Fairlee, Vershire, and West Fairlee, Vermont -- are currently engaged in an innovative effort that, as a community-school facilitator states, seeks to "reach deep into the local communit[ies] in order to generate a rich academic program that joins local resources, issues and wisdom with the public school culture." This report documents and evaluates the successes and challenges of this first phase of Community-based School Environmental Education (CO-SEED) implementation.

Only by beginning with what is known and familiar -- and often unnoticed and under-appreciated -- can we build the necessary bridges, make the vital connections from local concerns to more global issues. Only by posing questions of importance and inviting students to help solve dilemmas that face us all, can we instill in these young people the skills, the confidence and the courage to lead our communities in the future.

Carla Littrell Fontaine  
Cambridge, Massachusetts  
June 2000

## COMMUNITY-BASED SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION EVALUATION REPORT

*"I want my kids to know not facts but how to problem solve, how to observe, how to think about something, how to make a difference...it's more than community service. It's got to be, 'I make a difference in my community.' Quality education means that when the child leaves this place, they can apply what they've learned to real life situations. It's not just math in a book."*

*- Nancy Blair, community member, Antrim, NH*

### **Community-based School Environmental Education Strategy**

There is a genuine awareness across all three Community-based School Environmental Education (CO-SEED) sites -- Gorham, Antrim and Rivendell -- that using the community as a learning laboratory is an important extension beyond the traditional classroom 'two by four' format. That is, everything learned is within the two covers of the book and the four walls of the school. The commitment to having an environmental education component within this community-oriented approach is prevalent in these sites yet has manifested itself differently in each place -- a reflection of the different histories and needs within each community. An initial assessment of the needs and resources within each community was conducted through Community Profiles.

### **The Importance of Community Profiles**

*"Town meetings are good for us, they get all of the views out and democracy works."*

*- Wesley Turner, student, Gorham High School*

Community Profiles are particularly effective in a region of the country where town meetings have had a long history of providing for democratic participation. Community members and students alike stressed how this style of forum was effective with people who are familiar with the democratic nature of town meetings. Gorham High School student, Gabe Graff, felt that the potential of powerful discourse in a place that has had a history of divisiveness around issues concerning logging and environmental activism could not be overestimated,

*"[Our] editorials are quite lively and usually the way people voice their opinions. Town meetings are a big thing here. The profile is unique because it may bring a cross-section of the community together to get at issues. Community Profile, CO-SEED, raises issues that*

haven't been dealt with for a long time. I think things are getting better between the two groups [loggers and environmentalists]. Just the idea of getting these groups together for a lot of talk is a good process."

Though the community profiles may provide an opportunity for conversations around a more collaborative approach in designing learning opportunities for local students while addressing vital community issues, some profile participants felt that the real power for change still resides in town meetings. Speaking to the legislative power of a town meeting, Gorham selectman Mike Waddell commented, "The concept behind the CO-SEED work is to integrate your school curriculum and your community. But anything that happens to this town would happen through the town meeting. This is not comparable. There is the potential that someone has a good idea and others agree and pursue it, it takes root and grows. But even a 'dull as dust' town meeting still draws one hundred people."

The Community Profiles appeared most helpful in facilitating conversations that may ultimately allow both the town and educational communities to maximize their resource base while addressing real needs of their place. By bringing together students, teachers, administrators, town officials and members of the community, not only were people engaging in a broad discussion around issues relevant to their place, but also due to the structure of the profile, they were able to think about possibilities in a larger way. They heard of work students were doing in other locations to address community needs. Participants engaged with students from their own community in a new way, and began to recognize that they had things to offer young people that they may not have realized previously. Bridges were being built between the school and the community. New areas of expertise were being recognized, thereby expanding the teaching base, important issues were being identified and new leaders were being realized. Principal Jim Hunt spoke to the need to broaden the base in both leadership and education,

"It is important to have leaders. Leaders come in all shapes and sizes and walks of life. All leaders can be either good or bad. We need a vision that can be translated into action. Perhaps most critical to a community like ours are the unsung heroes, people who quietly do what needs to be done. There is a whole slew of people out there who quietly -- without reward -- do the things that need to be done. The same people, the same faces seem to show up at the meetings. It is so important to have *enough* leaders. [It is] important to give leaders an opportunity to demonstrate that they are leaders. [The saying goes] 'I never felt I was a leader until I had to do something about the situation.' We need leaders from the three communities. I've lived here long enough to know, we think we're not on the same page, but often we're saying the same thing and it's important our leaders recognize and communicate that -- recognize the common ground."

## **An Assessment of Community Profiles**

An important element of CO-SEED work, the Community Profile has been instrumental in bringing together members of the community to consider important issues in the places they live and work. In addition, Community Profiles provide a forum for voicing, hearing and honoring concerns, for formulating prescriptive measures for collectively addressing community issues, and planning for the future. The strategy of working in different configurations of small groups enlarged the conversations, enabling a dialogue among older and younger citizens, between and among all the towns represented. Though we may assume that in small places, everyone knows what everyone else's views are, these meetings help us realize how valuable a focused, substantive conversation can be in moving beyond the recycled discourse around the same old problems to possible solutions and group consensus. In Gorham, for example, one small group discussion included the town manager Bill Jackson, the secondary school principal Jim Hunt and the Director of Trailmasters Dave Dernbach. During the discussion this group acknowledged and addressed the need to heal past wounds and move forward in a positive, constructive way for the good of the community.

Ensuring ongoing dialogue beyond the one and a half-day Profile forum is important in helping each community in implementing their action plan. Establishing a date for their subsequent subcommittee meetings helped ensure a next step. Facilitating further group meetings in which an increased number of community participants provide a forum for reporting by subgroups would promote a level of accountability among the subcommittees and establish a time frame in which these small groups work effectively toward their goals.

The composition of participants at these Profiles is another important variable in assessing how effective the results of the discussions may ultimately be. The number of school board members, selectpeople, teachers and school administrators who participated spoke to the level of investment of many town officials. The forum was such that older and student citizens alike voiced their opinions. In Gorham, the secondary school principal, several secondary school teachers, the elementary school principal, the town manager, two town selectpeople, a leader of the local Appalachian Mountain Club, a school board member and the Director of Trailmasters<sup>1</sup> attended the profile. Ideas generated by the Profile and its subcommittees may be more easily implemented because the conversations can continue simultaneously at many levels of town and school administration.

### **Gorham Community Profile**

In Gorham, the merits and composition of environmental education have been hotly debated as a result of the original CO-SEED proposal at this site. To provide a forum for this debate, the Environmental Education Committee was formed. As a result of extensive work by the Environmental Education Committee, many community members have found common ground around statements of belief everyone has agreed are important for learning. Statements such as "we want to improve education for our students", allow room for students to research many sides of various issues and then reach their own conclusions -- an important component of CO-SEED's environmental education initiative. Gorham town forester, Haven Neal, perhaps speaks for the larger community, "Everybody recognizes that environmental education is important but it is just as important to teach kids how to think and not what to think." Starting with that which is local -- that which is in their own backyard -- students are able to make connections to a larger whole. As a result of the CO-SEED work, Andrea Muller, of the Appalachian Mountain Club, believes that "ultimately kids will have a broader view of the world."

While it appears that most people in Gorham<sup>2</sup> support the idea of community-based environmental education, they are relatively new to the concept of thinking of themselves as resources for learning and of the students as resources for the community. In the Community Profile, as people became more familiar with the idea of community-based education, many new possibilities arose. Town administrators there began to think of ways students could help them with town concerns. An array of opportunities were suggested for the students to engage in authentic work that mattered to the community, and that offered real learning possibilities for skills in mathematics, problem-solving, consensus-building, communication, civic engagement and decision-making. The students who were there participating in small groups -- while not initially asked to contribute -- became active participants exploring ways to meet the needs of their region. This was work that was not a field trip, not work that only they or their teachers would see, but work that would impact the future of their town, the livelihood of people who lived there, and would be presented publicly to an audience who had a high level of investment in the outcome. This work would involve interactions with sectors of their town previously untapped, with the older citizens who typically had little interaction with these young people. This work was growing

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<sup>1</sup> Trailmasters and the Appalachian Mountain Club are the two environmental education affiliates in Gorham.

<sup>2</sup> Subsequent references to *Gorham* refer to the larger community and are meant to be inclusive of citizens of Shelburne and Randolph, as well. For the sake of simplicity, further references to *Gorham* should be understood to be inclusive of these communities. While Rivendell is shorthand for the Rivendell Interstate School District, references to Rivendell should be understood to include the communities that compose this new school system -- Orford, New Hampshire, Vershire, Fairlee and West Fairlee, Vermont.

beyond the walls of the school. Subsequent meetings were planned to explore how to more effectively assess and allocate resources while utilizing students in a more collaborative manner.

Those at the meeting recognized that they and their town were at an important juncture and that they could start to do things very differently than they have ever done them before. Even the two environmental partners -- the Appalachian Mountain Club and Trailmasters -- began considering possibilities for working more closely together and appeared to appreciate more each other's contributions. Enthusiasm and energy grew with these newly emerging possibilities. During a coffee break, town forester, Haven Neal, spoke with Trailmaster leader, Dave Dernbach about the possibilities of making a labyrinth by cutting out areas of underbrush within the town forest to construct the pattern.

The students with whom I spoke had a genuine investment in decisions that were made in their town. They were quite aware of and articulate about local issues of recent debate -- issues such as if and where a Wal-Mart store should move into Gorham. The compromise that was ultimately reached -- to locate the Wal-Mart within an existing structure of a store that had gone out of business -- seemed to satisfy most community members.

To date, much of the environmental education there has occurred through the elective Ecology class taught by Kathy Benoit. The students of Gorham recognize Town Forest Day as the environmental event that involves the largest number of community members.

Perhaps as a result of the discussions prompted by the CO-SEED initiative in Gorham, community members there shared thoughtful responses to the question of what constituted a quality education. When asked how they saw CO-SEED work contributing to that definition, they responded:

"Democracy is the foundation of a quality education -- local control, local school boards. Parents must be supportive of education. Kids need the basis to be lifelong learners. We need people in the community who are willing to give -- not slash town budgets. Hillary Clinton is right, 'It takes a village.' It takes someone coming out on a very cold day and visioning what can happen in the community...ultimately it goes to the federal level: whether to spend money on missiles or on kids." - Dave Dernbach

"Schools are an important change agent. School is where it starts. We have to educate young people to make their way in life. [This CO-SEED work] is a good focal point of giving youngsters a positive sense of the community. The school can be instrumental in working on community issues, but there is resistance among teachers and parents about changing the way things are done in school in order to accomplish that. A paradigm shift is needed -- we need to think outside

of the box. It is not selling young people short on their education if they incorporate these issues." - Haven Neal

"The expectation level of the community can be a lot higher than it is. If we give [young people] the opportunities to do it, they will live up to it."

"In northern NH, the resources are the woods. We should use them as a vehicle to learn who you are and how to do things as a member of a team. They upgrade the forest plan for the White Mountain National Forest every 10 years. It is vital to pull in resources from 'the greenest of the greens to the blue smoke crowd,' and have them all talking with the kids. Kids look at all of it, consider diverse opinions and then stand up in public and give an opinion." - Dave Dernbach

"One thing that came up when we discussed how [environmental education] would be structured is what about controversial issues? Should they be discussing them in classrooms? I was an advocate that they should be because kids get a lot out of a forum that is non-threatening. Openly discussing provides kids with knowledge and facts of the issues and gives them critical thinking skills. Some of the committee feared that someone would come in and get on a soapbox and say 'this is how things need to be.' I stressed the importance of debates rather than lectures." - Haven Neal

"Everybody wants to do what's best for kids in Gorham." - Paul Bousquet

It is evident that there is a high level of community investment in the quality of the educational experiences of their young people. Two environmental education groups, Trailmasters and the Appalachian Mountain Club are doing supplemental environmental curricular work in Gorham. While each organization provides a resource person to the school to work on particular projects for a specified number of hours each year, there is potential for their work to have more impact, to be seen by students as more of an integral part of their learning. These two organizations might work alongside teaching faculty to more intentionally incorporate their expertise into the existing curriculum. As the curriculum becomes more integrated with students' lives, real impact on the community may more readily occur.

### **Rivendell Community Profile**

It is important to have a diverse group of participants at a Community Profile. The participants' previous exposure to the CO-SEED work and their degree of involvement in school and community issues vastly impacts the conversation in the Profile. At the Rivendell Profile, the participants were primarily older residents who had no current connections with the schools. There

were few town officials and no students present. Consequently, aside from the SEED team members present, participants had little familiarity with CO-SEED.

Due to the creation of the new Rivendell Interstate School District, the members of these four towns were now being asked to think of themselves in more collective terms as they discussed educational issues. Important topics such as closing some schools, opening 'new' schools and learning to define themselves in relation to one another have come about as a result of this new educational administrative district. Doug Tiff, the community liaison for the new district, was one of the facilitators of the Profile and in an important position for relating community thoughts and concerns to his colleagues at the District office.<sup>3</sup> The conversations at the Rivendell Profile were different from those at Gorham. These conversations were less focused on students, their learning and civic participation and emphasized, instead, strategies to make the four communities, who will now be defined by the new school district, feel invested in and valuable to a larger collaborative. These were important discussions requiring immediate attention and were critical to lay the groundwork for future discussions around how to design a curriculum that integrates the needs and resources of all of these communities.

Below, some of the Rivendell participants share their thoughts regarding the Profile, Rivendell and CO-SEED:

"This meeting is good for bringing people from the four towns together to get to know each other, to foster relationships between people..." - Chuck Eaton, Rivendell Community Profile participant

"The stories we heard last night [about the histories of each of the four towns] were fascinating. How do the four communities come together to hang onto the stories?" - Rivendell Community Profile participant

"Rivendell is a white slate. It is brand new...we can have input into it. It offers a possible way to come together in collaboration." - Rivendell Community Profile participant

"CO-SEED is doing important work to force education to connect young people with the natural world. It offers a source of ongoing creation and hope. Philosophically, CO-SEED is in the right place. [However] most of the community doesn't know CO-SEED exists. If they do know, it's a vague understanding. It does not really have meaning. We [the SEED team] haven't really been visible. A large proportion of the people who are at the profile are

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<sup>3</sup> The administration of the Rivendell Interstate School District solicited earlier feedback through surveys distributed to parents at several schools.

CO-SEED people." - Craig Putnam, Rivendell Community Profile participant and member of the SEED team

Conversations with Superintendent Mark Roth indicated that the CO-SEED work in the schools would continue primarily because it dovetailed nicely with the objectives set forth in Rivendell's mission. The fact that CO-SEED continues to be part of the strategy, built into the new educational plan for Rivendell, is chiefly attributable to the contributions of CO-SEED staff person, Steven Glazer, who has worked successfully to keep CO-SEED a part of the ongoing Rivendell conversations. His skill as a liaison between Rivendell, the former school administration and the Hulbert Outdoor Center seem primarily responsible for this. Sensitive navigation between outgoing administrators, teaching faculty who are still uncertain about their own teaching contracts and the Hulbert Outdoor Center requires a great deal of diplomacy. This is a time of much change and uncertainty for the people of these towns. The people with whom this researcher spoke appeared to have a great deal of respect for Steven, his abilities and his work. Glazer, working with local teachers, has implemented several 'Quests' which have engaged students in their local environment and community history.

Rivendell, however, has been a challenging place in which to work given the change in the administrative structure as well as the turnover in CO-SEED personnel. Glazer has spent significant time building relationships with the new administration, exploring where philosophies overlap and how needs may be best mutually served. It is an uncomfortable time for many of the teaching staff in these four towns as some of them close their school doors forever and others speculate as to where their next classroom will be (much as students wonder about whether or not they will have lockable lockers and whether they will be known by all their teachers and school staff at their new school).

### **Antrim Community Profile**

Although this researcher did not participate in the Community Profile in Antrim, community members spoke of the committees originally formed at that Profile which were still in existence and having a positive impact on the town. The After School/Recreation Group from the Antrim Next Community Profile folded into and revitalized the Friends of Recreation. David Essex, Chair of the Arts and Business Council in Antrim notes, "It's still going strong. There is an after school program three days a week. The ideas and energy from Antrim Next translated into stuff like the Celtic Festival, Friday nights, line dancing, kickboxing, aerobics and gymnastic class.

There was never really an after-school program for kids before." The New Hampshire Charrette grew out of brainstorming done in the Arts and Business Council -- another subcommittee of Antrim Next, May 1998 -- and it focused on Main Street beautification and renovating the Goodell mills. The Charrette was organized and coordinated by the Arts and Business Council. While one subcommittee of the Arts and Business Council produced the Celtic Festival, a spin-off group, the Economic Development Advisory Committee which Essex chairs, pursues more economic focused issues such as revitalization and stimulating the local economy -- an expressed need at the Antrim Next Profile.

Antrim participants wished that there had been another Antrim Next meeting or some ongoing structure provided by CO-SEED to continue the dialogue. Essex commented, "There were times when I thought I wish those Antioch people would tell us what to do next. Some longer-term organizational role would have been helpful. If they had been more tied into the follow-through. What does it take to help volunteers have the motivation [and] understandings to follow-through?" There was some concern that the primary responsibility for continuing the meetings and the work fell upon a few members of the community and that these few were helped by only a small number of volunteers -- "the same folks who do everything." They suggested that it would have been helpful if they had training regarding topics such as how to utilize volunteers, how to keep people involved, and how to delegate work, so that their undertakings would be more communally owned and executed. The fact, however, that some of these committees have successfully implemented change, facilitated programs that continue and are considered valuable to the community speaks to the empowering potential of these forums.

It is important in terms of long term sustainability to ensure that the representation at these profiles be as diverse as possible. While there were adults who had an apparent investment in the conversations that occurred -- local principals, town selectpeople, teachers -- the students and their learning are central to much of the proposed work. Young people who were present at the Gorham meeting had definite opinions about town issues and the direction of their educational pursuits.

Student input is essential to gauge the level of investment these projects will require to bring them into reality. Having more student voice represented at these meetings would be helpful for distributing more broadly the ownership of the work, allowing for student input into some of the directions. Some students saw the community profile as a place where their voice would be heard. One Gorham student stated, "The Community Profile will be a place where adults will listen us." She felt, however, that most of her peers would not attend the Profile, "[there is] not a lot of respect for adults. [Students] think it is crazy to think of spending a weekend talking to a lot of adults about

what would make Gorham better." Many of the students who were at the Gorham profile were affiliated with Trailmasters and engaged in clearly defined roles, working at the registration table with Trailmasters leader, Dave Dernbach. Because of the nature of their responsibilities, these students had necessary conversations with all of the people who entered the building -- helping them with registration, taking their picture, providing them with name tags. Though these students were an important part of the larger group meetings during the Profile, it was unfortunate that only a small number of them actually participated in the smaller group sessions where there was more opportunity for involvement.

### **Curricular Impact as a Result of Community Profiles**

It is, perhaps, too early to determine if the Community Profiles will impact curricula at Gorham<sup>4</sup> and Rivendell. However, in Antrim, there has been real curricular and community impact as a result of Antrim Next, their Community Profile meeting in May 1998. One resulting project, the Antrim Center project, involved students in studying a 16-acre piece of land owned by the Antrim Conservation Commission. The students were responsible for creating a proposal for developing this land as a nature study and recreation site. In their own words the students speak to the value of their experiences:

"I really thought this project was a success, because every day I found myself looking forward to Antrim Center...at the same time that I am learning, I am having fun. I think that part of the goal for this project was to have us deal with a real life project and to learn from our mistakes and good decisions. I really feel that this was accomplished. I knew that what I did really mattered; it was going to count for more than a grade. For instance, the 'No Hunting' signs really were going to be hung up, so I wanted them to look nice...like with our maps, I worry over my information because I know that people want to know they are looking at the correct information." - Emily Taub

"I know from my other school that just because a project is in a classroom, sitting at desks, does not mean that it is more real than a project outside. In fact, I feel that Antrim Center is even more "real" than just being in a classroom talking about trees and stonewalls. The reason for this is because we are actually outside walking those stonewalls and measuring those trees. Being a part of Antrim Center has made me more curious about the land around me. By that I mean instead of just looking at a piece of land and saying, 'Oh, it's some woods,' I think about what could be living in those woods. I didn't know that working on a piece

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<sup>4</sup> At the Gorham Community Profile, there were substantive discussions focused on utilizing students as valuable resources to the community. There were many possibilities for curricular impact explored. Whether or not implementation has resulted has yet to be determined.

of land could be so interesting. Antrim Center has also gotten me interested in things like animal tracks and plant identification." - Sophie Chambers

"[My work with Antrim Center] made me realize that what we are actually doing, a textbook would be written about it and we are learning it first-hand. My involvement in Antrim Center has inspired me to do extra research for the project. I have also taken my parents for a walk out on the land..." - Sam Lowenthal

"Antrim Center showed me so many things. I learned that in an argument there can be many 'sides'. For example, in the bike/walk argument there were so many opinions that we had to put it aside." - Nathan Stein

"This project involved, I felt, the real world in a lot of ways. For starters, people learn about certain subjects in college to find out how they can teach others to protect and preserve the land. That is what we are doing, protecting and preserving. This was a new way of learning for me, and I learned a lot from it! My participation in Antrim Center has led me to more questions, like how to build trails. I would like to learn more about [mapmaking] even though it is a very challenging task." - Amanda Quinlan

Building Communities, another curricular outgrowth of this focus on community-school interaction, was conceived by Great Brook Middle School principal, Rick Nannicelli and implemented by teachers Letitia Rice and Kathleen Bigford. The students who are engaged in Building Communities are working on a variety of projects. Though the teachers design much of the outline of the work, students are involved in directing it. An assessment of what students are learning as well as their feedback is regularly solicited through student reflection pieces. An engagement with the local environment is apparent in this poem written by student Sam Lowenthal:

### **Thoughts on a Stone Wall**

The woods  
Silent yet full of life  
Alone  
Yet attentive I sit  
Zip up my coat and wait  
Hoping  
To see some animal show it's face  
I am not disappointed  
For I see  
A line of ants crawling toward their home  
Imagine  
What it would be like to live in the cold ground while the snow swirls around  
I am glad I am what I am!

## **Environmental Educators**

*"There is the potential to involve the whole community in the education of children. This is a unique thing. It is a departure from most people sending kids off to school and trusting local educators. If everyone feels they have a hand in education, it will lead to a lot stronger support for education in the local schools. If everyone has some degree of ownership."*

*- Haven Neal*

Environmental educators in the three regions provide an initial liaison with the community and present the possibility of taking student learning outside of the school walls. Haven Neal, an environmental educator who works at the Gorham town forest, understands the larger goals of CO-SEED, is well respected within his community, able to work with both Trailmasters and AMC and provides a valuable asset to the teaching staff. His collaboration with Kathy Benoit, the ecology teacher, was instrumental to the success of Town Forest Day. As he is a member of the SEED team and a long time member of the town, he offers a valuable perspective. He speaks to the potential of CO-SEED, noting "Everybody recognizes that environmental education is important, but it is just as important to teach kids how to think and not what to think." As Neal points out, people's stake in their community -- their ability to influence the direction of the future -- is increased through this school-community emphasis:

*"There is the potential to involve the whole community in the education of children. This is a unique thing. It is a departure from most people sending kids off to school and trusting local educators. If everyone feels they have a hand in education, it will lead to a lot stronger support for education in the local schools. If everyone has some degree of ownership."*

Having access to an environmental educator appeared especially helpful for teachers who felt that they did not have the expertise in specific environmental content areas. Teachers accessed these people as resources to supplement the work they were doing in the classroom. For teachers who often have excessive workloads, with little time to make connections to possible community-based curricular extensions, it is particularly beneficial if the environmental educator is familiar with both their curriculum and the appropriate content standards. The environmental educator must be able to effectively supplement the existing work with community-based ideas that expand the learning.

There is potential for a different level of involvement with the environmental educators. When teachers in a school join together to work collectively to develop lessons they can augment

their existing curricula by importing the considerable expertise of the environmental educators. Environmental educators may engage students more effectively outside of the school walls and in the community. Often these educators are valuable in brainstorming ideas for creative educational pursuits extending the lesson beyond its existing form and (in the best cases) aiding in the design of learning that is aligned with state educational frameworks. When environmental educators are skilled in aligning curriculum with state frameworks, it allows more room for others (who may not possess this academic understanding) to contribute their expertise. If environmental educators stay in sites after CO-SEED leaves, they may contribute to the long-term sustainability of the community-based work, working always to ensure its framework alignment.

While it is important for the environmental educators to develop one-on-one relationships with teaching faculty, if the environmental work is to become integral in the k-12 curriculum, it is necessary that these specialists work with a variety of teachers. In this way, their role becomes one of providing the springboard into larger environmental community-based activities. They may help teachers change the way they think about teaching, suggesting novel and community-based perspectives and supplement a more traditional curriculum.

The distinction should be made between the potential impact of an environmental educator located outside the school environment and that of someone on the teaching faculty. It appears that environmental educators housed outside of the school, such as those in the Appalachian Mountain Club, are often utilized to provide one-day excursions out into the community. Community liaisons -- such as Beth Frost -- are environmental educators housed within the school and are part of the teaching staff, as well. Someone in this sort of position is more accessible to teachers, is able to attend faculty meetings and may have an easier role of connecting with other teachers' existing lessons. This ongoing access results in increased familiarity with one another and the climate of the school and facilitates their ability to share concerns regarding educational standards. However, given time and collaborative experiences, teacher's relationships with environmental educators outside of the school may deepen, as each becomes more aware of teaching styles, content areas and related concerns. There is the caution, with any of the specialists who facilitate community-based learning, that they will become comfortable working with a single group of teachers and not broaden their impact to the larger faculty. This concern was registered at Antrim.

It is crucial to have a central coordinating person responsible for linking work among teachers and their specialized discipline areas, or in providing the link with the community. If this role is provided for by a teacher in the school who has dedicated time to serve as a community liaison or to collaborate with teachers in making the work more environmentally-conscious

community-based and interdisciplinary, this will provide the necessary complement for broadening the teaching and learning. A caution with this approach is that the power, the investment for expanding learning activities may not be widely shared among teaching staff. Often this coordinating role is the responsibility of the environmental educator. Some teachers may be comfortable working with this person while others, who have no history of working with someone from 'the outside' may not feel comfortable working in this manner and the environmental educator may then be utilized by only the same handful of teaching faculty. Perhaps more importantly, the ownership of the work may reside with the environmental educator who is the motivating force rather than being held by the classroom teacher or, even the students.

An environmental educator on the staff or having an ongoing relationship in the school is more effective than one who visits for a single teaching excursion with students, as there is little opportunity for this experience to be more fully integrated into the ongoing curriculum. While having environmental educators available to lead walks through the forest, identify plant material or explain water testing provides an interesting supplement to the existing curriculum, these isolated experiences may prove to be -- given the limited time of these environmental educators -- single occurrences rather than part of a more intentional approach in which community is embedded within the curriculum. One Antrim teacher remarked, "Susie (an outside environmental educator) is great. I enjoyed having her help with geology. She did two great lessons -- one inside and one outside." While these isolated experiences may be memorable and exciting, for the student they will likely remain isolated from the rest of the learning. An environmental educator with the skills to help teachers integrate other possibilities -- extensions to their already existing curriculum and it's alignment with state frameworks -- may ultimately be more effective in helping facilitate long term change in teaching and learning.

Linking schools with local environmental groups such as Trailmasters, the Hulbert Outdoor Center, and the Harris Center is instrumental in developing a more comprehensive expansion of curriculum beyond the walls of the school building. These associations open up possibilities for local environmental exploration as well as building relationships with community members who can be utilized as helpful teaching resources. These liaisons can provide the first link with area resources and may provide a necessary stepping stone to an exploration of other local resources, such as identifying and interviewing the citizen who is informally known as the town historian.

### **Where the Three Sites Currently Stand**

The three CO-SEED sites are in very different places in terms of their work. In Antrim, some community-school relationships have been established. There, a project focusing on wetlands has been expanding the work by engaging an increasing number of teachers, students, and community members in planning and implementation. The curriculum, in its responsiveness to community needs, may become more interdisciplinary and may necessitate more collaborative work among teachers of different grade levels or disciplines.

Utilizing students and community members as knowledgeable resources who can work toward the resolution of real community concerns and contribute to the educational experiences of young people is a new concept in many places. Communities such as Gorham have little experience in this approach to education. A Gorham selectman noted, "The barrier is that it isn't the way things have been done." In that community, town officials and the elementary and secondary principal are engaging in preliminary conversations around issues and solutions. There the possibilities for student and community contributions are just beginning. "Some people in the police department don't have a clue that they have something to offer to the school. There are 3,000 experts in the town of Gorham", states town manager, Bill Jackson. It was clear that a new way of conducting business was forming when the Gorham High School principal Jim Hunt suggested, "We could use our early release days to get the town and school together to put these ideas together. We can invite all the community and the staff and inventory the strengths of the staff that are in place and the strengths of our community."

The groundwork has been laid in Rivendell to integrate CO-SEED work within the curricula of the new school district.

### **Next Steps for Integration**

As the nature of many community-based programs is that the work is open-ended -- with the focus of the work primarily determined by the needs of the local community and implementation often directed by students -- having the ownership shared among a larger constituency is essential for moving the work forward and broadening its impact on the community. Not all educators are familiar with and comfortable teaching in such an open-ended manner. It might be helpful, therefore, to be more intentional in providing curriculum development opportunities for teachers who are interested in exploring more environmentally focused community-based options for their students. Regarding the CO-SEED 'Machinations, Magellan and McCabe' Workshop at Great Brook Middle School in January 1999, one teacher wrote, "I would have liked more time...to see how I might integrate these ideas into the 7th grade geography

class." Another teacher noted that "more ideas of how to tie in existing curriculum" would have made this workshop more useful. Advice to CO-SEED staff from one teacher suggested she would like it if "[CO-SEED] took a look at our curriculum and made suggestions, we could get jump started on some projects." Another participant offered, "CO-SEED has helped me to think more about ways to extend what I do in the classroom with things that happen in the community. [It would be helpful if CO-SEED provided] communication about things that other people are doing, ideas about other things that we could do would be helpful. Overall reminders about the goals of CO-SEED would help too." Another teacher requested that CO-SEED "make a connection to language arts and social studies." One participant commented on how helpful it had been to have "quick access to resource help...Beth [Frost] and Susie Denehy have been terrific." She asked that CO-SEED "continue to make [themselves] available. As staff sees projects in progress, they are talking and thinking of ways they could use the resources in future units or next year. I think gradual progress is being made. I hear, 'They are very enthusiastic. We just haven't taken advantage of their help yet.'"

Guiding teachers to integrate CO-SEED efforts into their existing curriculum has been the work of environmental educators at the sites. Teachers feedback included "[the workshop] was useful for me personally but I don't know where I would put it in my curriculum", "make available some outlines of projects that have been successful in other schools. This might stimulate ideas of how CO-SEED could be incorporated with [our] current curriculum", and "more examples of science design projects to use across the curriculum." Beth Frost worked extensively with teachers at Great Brook School this year to integrate environmental education into the curriculum. Facilitating ongoing curriculum development workshops could be another step beyond the work that Frost has done and the engaging brainstorming sessions that characterized Antrim's Partnership Project Meetings of this year. These workshops could include teachers, students, community members and environmental educators, and would provide the opportunity for developing a dynamic curriculum, responsive to the needs of the community, with a broad base of ownership and aligned with existing state frameworks.

### **Strengths to Build Upon**

Relationships with administrators, teachers, students and community members have been established at different levels at all three sites. The residents of Gorham, by the nature of the way CO-SEED was originally conceived there, seem quite aware of the philosophy and role of CO-SEED. Faculty at the Great Brook Middle School in Antrim has administrative support and an

open, flexible school environment that encourages educators to think of their teaching in ever expanding ways. These factors foster active relationships with community members through the in-house liaison work of Beth Frost, an important bridge between teaching staff and the community. Having an administration that allows leaving the school during the day, making phone calls, and establishing links with the community has been helpful there in ensuring that the role is institutionalized and that teachers can have daily access to Beth, a member of their school community. The conversations around learning and teaching possibilities encouraged through this ongoing interaction are particularly helpful for long term curricular impact. Nurturing ownership at this local level could be an important sustainability goal of the CO-SEED program. This would strengthen the possibility that when the work is no longer directed from Antioch, it will be sufficiently established to allow it to evolve, expand in ownership and deepen in content.

The environmental educators who work in each CO-SEED site might benefit from meeting more regularly to discuss work in their site, share effective strategies and brainstorm expansion possibilities. Due to the fact that these people work in significant geographical isolation, providing shared learning opportunities with CO-SEED site facilitators David Sobel, Delia Clark and Bo Hoppin could be beneficial for their ongoing understandings of the work and its ultimate potential.

Likewise, community members at Gorham spoke of the 1998-99 CO-SEED Summer Workshop during which they learned about the CO-SEED philosophy. This initial cross-site exposure was spoken of as being very valuable in helping participants gain an understanding of the philosophy and have exposure to the possibilities of what community-based work could look like. An annual cross-site meeting would be helpful in enlarging possibilities for those at sites while furthering their understandings of the work. This meeting would permit participants from different sites to realize that there are other rural towns struggling with similar issues, give them insights into the learning from others, and help establish connections across sites. A student at Gorham felt the fall 1999 CO-SEED overnight retreat facilitated by Bo Hoppin was helpful for increasing her level of understanding and investment in the work. Her understanding of and commitment to CO-SEED work, as evidenced by her participation in the Community Profile, was deeper as a result of that experience.

CO-SEED has made inroads into helping educators and community members think about their local resources as educational, helping dispel the common perception of small towns and communities as deficient and helping to instill, instead, an appreciation for a newly found stewardship of the land. This appreciation opens up possibilities for learning that goes beyond the

walls of the classroom and inspires a more open-ended inquiry-driven, community-based curriculum.

There is a commitment to community-based education in all three CO-SEED sites. As teachers become more comfortable with their unfolding curricula and as students experience more investment in and awareness of CO-SEED style, community-based learning, the possibility exists for an increasing number of requests for real life learning -- learning that makes a difference to their communities and with whom they live.

### **Administrative Support**

There is a difference in how community-based work is carried out in schools where the principal understands, supports, and facilitates teaching around place and those schools where there is less administrative acknowledgment of this method of learning and teaching. In places where there is less administrative support, the community-based work may occur in an isolated manner, with fewer opportunities for developing curricula that is more interdisciplinary, and that has a real world orientation. Administrators who build into the professional development days the opportunities for teachers to work together to design curricula, prepare faculty who are better able to facilitate this type of learning. Extending these opportunities to be more broadly inclusive -- similar to the Antrim Partnership Project meeting, which included powerful brainstorming among artists, craftspeople, teachers, students and parents -- could prove especially fruitful. This allows for the needs of the community to be well represented by those present, the interest of students in the work can be readily assessed and the relationship of the proposed work to the existing curriculum/content areas can be examined. In the Antrim Partnership Project meeting, the principal, Rick Nannicelli, was involved throughout the event, from conversation through dishwashing. In reference to Nannicelli's style of leadership, school board member Jane Miller offered, "The Administration really supports teachers who want to take a risk and try something creative." Another teacher agreed, "There used to be very little flexibility in the school day to go out [into the community]. Rick supported it though. A really wonderful part of our projects is the way they work. [If] there is an identified need from the community [such as] 'we need help with the trails in McCabe Forest'... someone in the school 'takes the bull by the horns.'

### **The Ownership and Power of the Work**

For this community-based work to become truly integrated within the curriculum, it will be critical that educators not see it as an add-on, an extra thing that has little benefit for them or their

students, something imposed from outside. A key strength of community-based work is that it allows flexibility and space for learning and curriculum to evolve and be responsive. In so doing, it requires a comfort level among the teachers and students with a certain amount of ambiguity, ambiguity that is inherent in inquiry-driven, community-based learning and teaching.

Cultivating an increasing pool of community 'experts' as teachers is another strategy to broaden the base of this work. This is especially important in small towns where the perception may be that the local area is resource poor. Rural areas are often surprised at the richness of the talents and resources their local communities offer. Gaining a better understanding of this wealth is important in changing the perception from one of being resource poor to one of communal wealth and large possibilities.

As we consider the long-term sustainability of this community-based approach to teaching and learning, it becomes apparent that having a broad base of understanding and ownership of the work is critical. The CO-SEED work in both Gorham and Rivendell needs a broader base of support, as evidenced by this community member's comment, "The ownership of this work resides in everyone serving on the committee, a core of people who attend the meetings and are enthusiastic. And some of the teachers -- Avery, Benoit, Jim Hunt, Lynn Hunt, [and others] -- there is not one group as the real driving force, it is a collaborative effort." While those who are on the local SEED teams initially best understand the CO-SEED philosophy toward community-based work, it is important that the larger community come to understand the basic concepts and their role as educators of their young people. Haven Neal speaks to the need to broaden this base, "There is the potential to involve the whole community in the education of children. This is a unique thing. If everyone feels they have a hand in education, it will lead to a lot stronger support for education in the local schools. If everyone has some degree of ownership." Another Gorham resident offered this perspective, "Ownership of the work at Gorham resides with the elementary principal and Kathy Benoit. Antioch still owns a lot of the work and if they pulled out tomorrow, it wouldn't continue."

The broader base of ownership of the work at Antrim is largely attributable to CO-SEED's longer affiliation with this site. Additionally, Beth Frost, an environmental educator familiar with the CO-SEED philosophy, is on-staff at Great Brook Middle School. Great Brook principal Rick Nannicelli seems to not only understand the learning potential afforded by community-based learning, he also provides administrative structures for teachers to work with this type of project orientation.

Gaining an understanding of how people at sites envision the ultimate impact of CO-SEED efforts is valuable in determining how they think about the work and its potential in their place. When speaking of the power of the work, community members spoke to the themes of the intergenerational nature of the work, the focus on nature and community, and the positive impact that students can have through this work. In their own words:

"The important thing is the intergenerational collaborations. I think they are the richest kinds of education we can give kids. - Jane Miller, school board member, Antrim

"The potential long term impact is that there is the possibility of giving a town a sense of its self and self-esteem, getting kids galvanized, teachers who feel good about what they're doing, seeing community members interested and an upswell of energy. There is the hope to connect learning to things kids care about...learning with real life application."  
- Andrea Muller, Appalachian Mountain Club affiliate

The power of the work may be that when it is truly understood in a community, the possibilities for transforming the life and learning of those who reside there are limitless. Just as

one Antrim student, Lauren Proctor, wrote in her McCabe Forest poem,

Listen, can you hear?  
A babbling brook nearby.  
It sings in your ear.

When this work really takes off, it too sings.

## Appendix A

### CO-SEED Core Objectives

Following is a preliminary assessment of how CO-SEED is meeting its core objectives:

**Objective: New Hampshire and Vermont children will develop a stronger sense of place in their landscapes and in their communities, thus acquiring the developmental foundations for becoming responsible citizens in the future.**

The work of students in Antrim indicates that students are engaged more with their local habitat and community members. There, a number of environmental and community-based projects are being implemented. These often involve students working as researchers, gaining expertise in certain areas of knowledge and contributing their work to be integrated within a larger collaborative. Janet Pietrovito, a teacher in Antrim, speaks to the impact CO-SEED has had on her curriculum,

"CO-SEED focuses us on what we can do that's environmentally healthy. How can we do it more in the community? We go to McCabe each season birdwatching. [The kids] get to know it well. They always like things we can get involved in. Ecosystems. Who eats what. If I were just lecturing, they wouldn't ever get it. [This work] is great fun for the kids and they're very proud of the school when they're involved in these kinds of things."

In Gorham, students are continuing Town Forest Days annually. Community members there are considering possibilities to engage students in the civic life of their place.

In Rivendell, students are exploring their local landscape through Quests designed by Steven Glazer.

**Objective: A compelling demonstration will be created of systemic school reform that is tied to the alignment of the local school curriculum with the New Hampshire Curriculum Frameworks.**

Aligning curriculum in each CO-SEED site with the New Hampshire Curriculum Frameworks is currently underway. Staff development meetings have been some of the most prominent methods CO-SEED has employed to facilitate alignment with the Frameworks.

**Objective: Teachers and administrators will gain new techniques and support for enhancing and grounding their core curriculum in their local communities, uniting the school around a common purpose and taking full advantage of local resources.**

CO-SEED work has been extremely effective in this regard. CO-SEED has been instrumental in constructing an intentional framework for these more collaborative educational experiences to occur. The statements from the following three participants speak to the affirming power and potential of the community focus approaches engendered by CO-SEED:

"It has really promoted a different way of thinking in our school. Over the eight years I've been here, the curriculum has really evolved to a project focused approach. CO-SEED added the environment and community [component]. There is a need for students to experience giving to a community. [They] need to feel they give and get a sense of belonging [within the community]. [CO-SEED] has been an incredible help to me. I don't know what I would have done without them. The whole community piece would be missing." - Rick Nannicelli, principal, Great Brook Middle School

"I've been impressed as a parent to hear how [the students] learned to read the landscape. I've been impressed by the level of learning. I've heard comments from our daughter about appreciating nature. This is something that never happened before." - Ruth Benedict, parent of Building Communities student

"Because we have small towns, kids can see they do make a difference. It's not like a city that's bigger. We live in an area where the community really supports education and each other. There's a wealth of knowledge and willingness out there to work together if we just tap into it. Kids are learning to ask. Especially these fifth graders who used to look at elderly and think they're scary and think they might not be able to help them. Now they see themselves in a different light. They see themselves as part of the community. The community has always been welcoming. I've felt the school was the heart of the community." - Jane Miller, school board member, Antrim

**Objective: Parents and community members will be drawn into a community-based curriculum through Community Profiles and as project volunteers, local experts and learners, leading to a strengthening of social capital and economic well-being in project communities.**

The Community Profiles have been effective on a number of levels. As a mechanism for change, Community Profiles can be a significant catalyst, including to:

- Facilitate communal conversations;

- Establish a structure to empower people to take the initiative at the local level;
- Provide education around a broader view of teaching and learning;
- Generate an intergenerational discourse that is intentionally inclusive;
- Open up new possibilities for the community and school; and
- Provide hope where none existed previously.

## **Appendix B**

### **Recommended Evaluation Activities for Next Year**

This researcher would recommend implementing the survey next autumn in all six sites. In this way, CO-SEED administration can compare the results for places where the work is underway and places where the community-based work is just starting. The results will likely indicate differences in beginning versus more established work to provide valuable baseline data for new sites.

Test scores could be collected for all sites, as well. This could include test scores of students before the community-based work was implemented in sites and, if followed over several years, after it has been implemented for a determined time. This longitudinal analysis could indicate any broader influences CO-SEED may have on general assessment tests.

As work begins in these new sites, this researcher recommends a series of interviews with the people who are identified as some of the key players in these places. It would be interesting, as well, to interview the CO-SEED facilitator at each site to determine how they make the initial inroads into these new schools and communities. Additionally, it is recommended that a Summer or Autumn Retreat in which "old" and "new" sites come together to share the work and learnings. This meeting should be well documented, used as an opportunity to conduct more interviews, and to collect samples of student work to be published and shared among and beyond sites.

This researcher would be interested in asking more questions about people's perceptions of their place and their hopes for new possibilities for their young people and their community.

## **Appendix C**

### **Events Attended, Personnel Interviewed, and Documents Reviewed**

#### **Gorham, Randolph, Shelburne:**

##### **Event**

- Gorham Community Profile

##### **Personnel**

- Gabe Graff, Senior at Gorham High School, ggraff@ncia.net
- Mel Lessard, Junior at Gorham High School, starlit\_smiles@yahoo.com
- Haven Neal, Gorham Town Forester
- Dave Dernbach, Director of Trailmasters
- Paul Bousquet, Chair of SEED team at Gorham, and Elementary School Principal
- Tuesday Paine, Gorham community member and parent
- Andrea Muller, one of two Appalachian Mountain Club educators
- Mike Waddell, Gorham Selectman

#### **Document**

- Review of Community Gathering Report (Gorham, Randolph, Shelburne)

### **Antrim, Bennington, Frankestown, Hancock:**

#### **Event**

- Great Brook Middle School Faculty Meeting
- Community Partnership Meeting
- Building Communities Open House

#### **Personnel**

- Keith Burke, Superintendent of Schools, Peterborough
- David Essex, Antrim Arts and Business Council
- Rick Nannicelli, Great Brook Middle School Principal
- Rod Zwirner, SEED Team, community member
- Nancy Blair, SEED Team, community member
- Ann Kenney and students conducting oral historical interviews with community members
- Sylvia Shea, SEED Team, 5th grade teacher, Great Brook Middle School
- Beth Frost, ALT Program, Harris Center, Great Brook Middle School Teacher
- Letitia Rice, 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> grade Building Communities Teacher
- Kathleen Bigford, 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> grade Building Communities Teacher
- Jane Miller, School Board Member, Antrim
- Jane Gnade, Librarian, Great Brook Middle School, Antrim
- Janet Pietrovito, 5<sup>th</sup> grade Teacher, Great Brook Middle School
- Shelly Cutter, 6th grade Special Education, Great Brook Middle School
- Ruth Benedict, Building Communities parent, Great Brook Middle School
- Jonas Taub, Building Communities parent, Great Brook Middle School

#### **Document**

- CO-SEED Partnership Project Agenda, April 5, 2000
- Project Listing for Connecting with Artisans, Musicians and Craftspeople in Antrim, Bennington, Frankestown and Hancock, NH
- The Extended Learning Program at Great Brook School description
- Teacher generated rubrics, reflection prompts, reading logs (from Letitia Rice and Kathleen Bigford)
- Teacher Evaluation forms "Machinations, Magellan and McCabe" Workshop, Great Brook Middle School, 22 January 1999

- Antrim Center Student Assessments

**The Rivendell Interstate School District -- Fairlee, Vershire, West Fairlee, VT and Orford, NH:**

**Event**

- Four Futures: Common Threads, Fairlee, Orford, Vershire, West Fairlee Community Profile, (April 7 - 8, 2000)

**Personnel**

- Sheila Moran, Principal,
- Mark Roth, Superintendent, Rivendell Interstate School District
- Doug Tiff, Community Liaison, Rivendell Interstate School District
- Joyce Berube, Fairlee Elementary School Librarian
- Noelle Vitt, Principal
- Craig Putnam, SEED Team, community member

**Document**

- Socioeconomic indicators for Vershire, West Fairlee and Fairlee VT (from The Center for Rural Studies)
- 1999 New Hampshire Community Profile for Orford, NH (demographic, employment, community services, statistics)
- Easy Access Pig Farm, by Vershire School teacher
- Four Futures -- Common Threads Community Questionnaire
- Annual School Climate Survey Rivendell Interstate School District Spring 2000 (soliciting input for School Improvement Plan)
- Community-Based Education Continuum (A Start)
- Proposed Rivendell/Vital Communities/Hulbert Partnership (12/99)
- Rivendell CO-SEED Team Transition Initiatives Document (2/10/00) Draft
- Project CO-SEED partnership initiative with Rivendell Interstate School District, and the Hulbert Outdoor Center Draft plan (3/6/00)
- Rivendell CO-SEED Team Meeting Agenda/Brainstorm (2/1/00)
- Rivendell Interstate School District "What I Will Miss/What I Look Forward To" assignment memorandum from Doug Tiff