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# **Service-Learning and the Hungry and Homeless: Tangible Sensibilities of Care among Young Urban Adolescents**

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## **Abstract**

*For over 20 years, Sunnyside Environmental School in Portland, Oregon has adopted service-learning as an instructional approach to engage young people with local communities. This report explores the voices of sixth through eighth graders illustrated by their Reflection Journals as they interacted with hungry and homeless individuals in the community. The human-scale connections resulted in tangible sensibilities of care evident in students' reflections: dispelling stereotypes as students became open-minded, making a noticeable difference however small, developing compassion through new understandings, and taking action to correct social injustices in the communities where they live.*

**Keywords:** Service-learning, environmental education, urban adolescents, adolescent engagement, homeless and hungry, ethic of care

*Our experience [at the Oregon Food Bank] showed that there are multiple ways that you can help people in need. It showed us what it is like to not have a reliable source of food, also how food gets to them from not the grocery store but from food shelters and food banks in Oregon... This will always be a reflective situation in my life and I will always look back on the problem and wonder why people didn't do things to help (Matt,<sup>1</sup> 8<sup>th</sup> grade student).*

### **City as Site for Service-Learning: Sunnyside Environmental School**

In the spring of 1995, the Portland School Board approved a proposal which allowed a group of parents, students, teachers, and other community members to start a new Environmental Middle School in the Portland Public School District, in Portland, Oregon. Not unlike what was experienced across the United States, the school district had begun the process of downsizing with impending staff and teacher layoffs and program cuts due to changes in tax structures passed by Oregonian voters in 1990 that impacted school budgets. As public confidence in the public school system began to wane, many feared that parents would withdraw their children from public schools. To regain public confidence, from 1995 onwards, the school district, with the support of the superintendent, began to offer new alternatives in education to provide choice to parents within the public school system.

The Environmental Middle School, grades 6 through 8, opened in September 1995 with approximately 180 students from various neighborhoods across Portland. Given parental demand over the years, the Board voted in 2004 to expand the school by adding kindergarten through fifth grades. Also in 2004 the school moved to a larger building, and was renamed Sunnyside Environmental School. By 2016, the school had over 600 students.

I have volunteered to accompany middle grades students at the Sunnyside Environmental School to their service-learning sites in Portland, Oregon many times since the school's inception 20 years ago. We founded the school in the Portland Public School District with the belief that civic pride is nurtured in our youth by connecting them to their local communities to engage them in practical understanding of environmental and social issues. The value of engagement with place is embodied in the school's mission. Embracing an active, holistic, integrated curriculum, one of the key components of this mission is that "students develop academic knowledge and skills while demonstrating personal and social responsibility for all living systems." Explicit attention is also given to service-learning in the mission:

*The city's wild and urban areas become sites for inquiry, exploration and understanding as children acquire personal and academic skills that lead to a satisfying life as thoughtful, active members of the larger community. In pursuit of this goal, students are involved in service-learning efforts*

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<sup>1</sup> Except for publication in *The Oregonian* by student Joanna, all student names are pseudonyms.

*throughout their years at the school* (Sunnyside Environmental School, 2016).

In *Lessons from the Real World*, documentary filmmaker Bob Gliner (2011) highlights several exemplary schools, including the Sunnyside Environmental School, that are engaging their students with and within their city of Portland, Oregon. The film captures a variety of ways in which Sunnyside students are empowered as they get to know their place and city: walking the streets with their teachers, observing, mapping, surveying the public about their use of bicycles, recording the usage of public transportation such as the tram car, highlighting the significance of reusables for clothing, among other activities. Through these experiences, their depth of understanding of place increases, and the students gain confidence when they tackle real-life issues that are often not part of a traditional curriculum. Students' passionate and thoughtful engagement with their neighborhoods and local communities gives them ownership of their place as they get to know Portland and become grounded in the day-to-day issues in their own city.

Research in human development has found that adolescents typically struggle with developing a sense of self (Lerner & Lerner, 2006). The transition from childhood can be tumultuous because it involves facing the "complicated task of navigating social networks, growing expectations of autonomy, comprehending increasingly abstract school subjects, all while managing the stress and confusion that results from the physical metamorphosis of puberty" (Chung & McBride, 2015, p. 11). Closely associated with this struggle is an increasing tension between high-risk behavior on the one hand, and idealism and commitment to friends, family, and community on the other. Youth need to feel that they can do something that is valued and respected by society and that they can influence the reality in which they live. In short, they need to feel that they matter.

Gaining practical experience in investigating, reflecting, and acting on their social environment is important to youth because active engagement motivates learning (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Skinner & Pitzer, 2014). It is well established that students learn best when they can make connections between what they are learning and why (Dewey, 1916). What matters to them? Why are their environment and communities important? How are connections between self and environment to be made? What happens in day-to-day ordinary activities that empower youth to make personal and emotional commitments to their education? Connected knowing advances the centrality of relations both in learning and in life as a whole (Saltmarsh, 1997).

To make education relevant, Sunnyside Environmental School offers service-learning opportunities in the hope that students will gain an emotional attachment to their place, its history and culture; develop geographical and environmental affection; develop their observation skills and knowledge of the natural world; extend their abilities for collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking; and build their capacities for stewardship, leadership and civic responsibility. The teaching staff are dedicated to fostering an ethic that motivates adolescents to take

responsibility for Portland, its green spaces and its communities. Through this process, the often rigid and isolating features typical of urban schools are challenged as the school's boundaries become permeable to both students and the broader community. To facilitate this, staff at the school have developed enduring working relationships with many public and private institutions and organizations in the city of Portland. In practicing a green ethic of conservation, students use public transportation to visit the service-learning sites. Assemblies and morning meetings at the school serve the important function of bringing a variety of people from the local communities to the school to present topics related to the environment, health, hunger, and other issues. These communities are comprised of a wide range of constituencies that are encouraged to share their stories at the school, including stay-at-home parents, social and health workers, city officials, non-profits with varied interests, political leaders, and youth from alternative school programs serving the homeless. Community elders are also invited to the assemblies to share their life stories and their history of growing up in Portland. Thus, the school engages students with the local community and opens its doors to various community groups, whereby the school's boundaries become permeable.

### **Service-Learning: Learning through Serving**

Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates relevant, meaningful community service and classroom instruction, with reflection serving as a means to enrich thoughtful connections that can eventually teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities for a strong and robust democracy (Cress, Collier, & Reitenauer, 2013; Wade, 2006). Used from kindergarten through higher education, the benefits of service-learning are well-documented (Billig, 2000; Buch & Harden, 2015; Chung & McBride, 2015; Eyler, 2002; Furco & Root, 2010; Richards et al., 2013). As an instructional strategy, service-learning is an essential part of Sunnyside Environmental School's model. Through community engagement, students become aware of local issues and learn that their voices and ideas can make a difference. Out-of-school service-learning activities for the sixth through eighth graders have included streambank restoration work, mapping the school's watershed, removal of invasive ivy, gardening on school grounds, recycling, composting, tree planting, arranging wildlife tours for elementary students in high-poverty schools, caring for animals at the Humane Society, and feeding the hungry and the homeless through service at organizations such as the Oregon Food Bank and Blanchet House.

The founder and principal of the school, Sarah Taylor (2008), has designed a *Service-Learning Reflection Journal* (see the Introduction in Figure 1) in which each sixth through eighth grader compiles a three-year record of service and reflects upon each of their service-learning activities. In the journal, she invites students with her poem:

*We gather our experiences,  
weaving them into  
the fabric of our life...  
The journey without end.  
Pressed between these pages,  
gathering wisdom over time.  
Heart and hand  
working as one.*

Students record their service activities and projects in their Reflection Journals. Reflections are a significant part of the pedagogical strategy of any service-learning process as they help students to make the connections between what they learn in the classroom and what they experience in the community, and vice-versa (Collier & Williams, 2013; Wade, 2006). Prompts (see Figure 1) encourage thoughtful reflection in the journals, and class discussions of these reflections often help students to clarify community issues.

Some journal reflections are undertaken as classroom activities and some are assigned as homework. The reflections embrace a wide variety of communication styles: students are encouraged to include poems, letters, photos, drawings, brochures, and other creative artifacts to demonstrate the insights gained from their service activities. The reflections encourage students to go beyond the self as they explore how to address social and environmental problems in the community. Not to be seen as one-time activities, the Journals are a source of in-depth exploration of a host of issues that emerge. Teachers play an important role in this exploration, not as providers of answers or as problem-solvers but rather as facilitators who empower students to take ownership to address the various social and environmental problems of which they become aware. Through the journals, teachers and students freely engage in critical examination of social justice issues that are brought to their awareness. The journals are also displayed during the school's festivals and eighth grade graduation ceremonies where parents, neighbors, surrounding communities, and school partners are invited to read students' reflections and the students are available to answer questions about their experiences.

## Figure 1. Service-Learning journal introduction

**SERVICE-LEARNING JOURNAL**

This Journal is a companion to take along on your journey. It is a place for your thoughts, dreams, sketches, a place to capture who you are and what is happening in the world around you.

**What? So what? Now what?**

When you are writing your service reflections, recognize that you must go far beyond the “what” and dig deeper to understand the reasons and the value of service. Here are some helpful hints to consider when you are writing reflections:

**What?**  
**Descriptive:** Facts such as what happened with whom; length of project; the setting. What did you do? Who was involved? Where were you? What part did you play? When did it happen? Substance of group interaction: how was it with others on project?

**So what?**  
**Interpretive:** Shift from descriptive to interpretive. Why did you do it? Why was it important to do? How was it helpful? Who benefits from the project? Meaning of the experience; feelings involved; lessons learned. What was good? What was challenging? Why is it important to the community/people involved that this service be performed? What is the value to you?

**Now what?**  
**Contextual:** Seeing the situation’s place in the bigger picture—how does it impact the world in some way? Applying lessons learned and insights gained to new situations. Setting future goals, creating an action plan.

- What are you going to do with what you have learned?
- What will you keep doing or not doing now?
- How is this action connected to a larger issue?
- What is that issue?
- Who is doing something about the issue?
- What organizations exist to address this issue?
- How might others get involved?

## Hunger and Homelessness: The Oxfam Hunger Banquet, Blanchet House, and the Oregon Food Bank

The literature on place-based education sometimes appears to romanticize “place” in terms of evoking sentimental values related to what is “lost” over time; childhood memories of place, often pristine, are aroused and portrayed with nostalgia (Corcoran, 1999; Gruenwald & Smith, 2007). To de-romanticize our understanding of place, in this Field Report, I want to focus on students’ service-learning involvement with hunger and homelessness at Blanchet House and the Oregon Food Bank in Portland, both of which have served as long-term partners since the school’s founding in 1995. I have found that students are affected by their service at these two sites in profound ways as teachers deepen the meaning of the projects by integrating issues about hunger and homelessness into their classroom teaching.

These service-learning activities are especially impacted by the Oxfam Hunger Banquet that Sunnyside Environmental School hosts each year: Oxfam America, a non-profit organization, developed and introduced hunger banquets. A free tool kit— “How to Host an Oxfam America Hunger Banquet,” which offers detailed instructions on how to organize, promote, and conduct a hunger banquet—can be downloaded from its website (<http://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/inside-oxfam-america/>). Almost a million people have participated in these hunger banquets in the United States.

The banquet provides a critical context for understanding local food issues as it highlights the interconnectedness of global food markets and chronic food insecurity especially affecting the poor. In Portland, schools, universities, and church communities host a Hunger Banquet. Participants become aware, in concrete ways, about the inequalities of wealth as it relates to food consumption.

At Sunnyside, the Oxfam Hunger Banquet has become an integral part of the Martin Luther King Junior service day event. The parental, neighborhood, and district communities are invited to the school to participate in a simulation of global hunger, poverty, and inequalities. People who attend the “banquet” are randomly assigned to eat meals that symbolize how different high, middle, and low socioeconomic groups access and eat food. A small elite high-income contingency are served a sumptuous meal; those in the middle-income group eat a simple meal, like rice and beans; and the rest (often the largest group) in the low-income tier help themselves to small portions of rice and water. The students work with adult volunteers to prepare the food in advance. A student volunteers to serve as master of ceremonies and reads a script provided in the Oxfam booklet to guide participants through this interactive experience. By experiencing, observing, and listening to individuals sharing their feelings about the inequities experienced in the quality and amount of meal received, attendee awareness about social and class injustices is raised. After the meal, participants come together to share their thoughts, discuss what they noticed about income stratification and food served, and make action plans to alleviate the problems of hunger in their own neighborhoods and communities.

Recently, the city of Portland has been in the news as the numbers of homeless people have increased considerably and the lack of affordable housing is a prime issue (*The Oregonian* 2015). The homelessness crisis is receiving heightened attention with the in-migration of thousands of people into Portland that has resulted in soaring rent and escalating home value. In September 2015, the Mayor of Portland declared an emergency for the homelessness crisis. Although many homeless individuals, couples, and/or families with children are supported by shelters, each night hundreds of people sleep on streets and under bridges across Portland. This crisis is exacerbated by issues of housing affordability, gentrification, and urban infill—political and social challenges confounding elected officials.

There are several non-profit organizations, such as the Blanchet House, which provide shelter and food to those who are homeless. In existence for over 60 years, with a mission “to feed, clothe, and offer shelter and aid to those in need,” in

2013, Blanchet House had over 19,000 volunteers and provided 340,000 hot meals to anyone in need who came through their door (Blanchet House, 2016). Sunnyside Environmental School has had a long-term relationship with this organization. An adult volunteer, who has cleared security procedures, and a staff member from the school usually take six to eight students at a time to serve a meal at Blanchet House. Students learn that long-term unemployment is often the root cause leading to hunger and that hunger directly impacts the learning capacity of children in schools and can also cause irreversible damage to their health.

Another important resource for the homeless and hungry is the Oregon Food Bank. On a regular basis, Sunnyside students serve at the Oregon Food Bank in groups of six to ten, accompanied by an adult volunteer (usually a parent) and staff who have cleared security procedures. Operated by vast numbers of volunteers, the Food Bank serves as a site for a network of regional food banks that have seen record numbers of people seeking emergency food. In 2014, more than a million food boxes were distributed (Oregon Food Bank, 2016). As stated on its website, 270,000 people per month ate meals from emergency food boxes, of which 92,000 were children (Oregon Food Bank, 2016). A typical emergency food box offers a three- to five-day supply of groceries. Besides providing over 44 million pounds of food, the Food Bank also serves in a variety of capacities "to eliminate the root cause of hunger through advocacy, nutrition education, garden education and through working with communities to strengthen local food systems."

### **Students' Tangible Sensibilities of Care: Serving the Hungry and the Homeless**

Below, I focus on what students wrote in their *Reflection Journals* about their service-learning with the hungry and the homeless through the three sites and activities described above. I selected these student writings to capture the breadth of responses. In particular, these examples were chosen for their demonstration of the students' ethic of care (Noddings, 1992). Noddings (1992) describes caring as a way of being in relationship. For the giver of care there is motivational displacement—they are fully attentive to and engrossed and engaged with the other—while the receiver acknowledges care and responds. One learns to care through modeling and practice.

I have deliberately chosen to allow student reflective writings to speak for themselves in order to honor adolescents' understandings and voices. I have broadly clustered their voices into four categories, recognizing that there is fluidity among the categories and that these are not discrete: dispelling stereotypes and becoming open-minded; making a difference; developing compassion arising from new understandings; and taking action to correct social injustice. In the final section on analysis and conclusion, I capture the collective essence of what emerges from the students' voices.

### **Dispelling Stereotypes and Becoming Open-Minded**

As students interacted with those without homes and those without the regular security of food, they developed a more open mind. Over time, their comfort with this population increased, resulting in questioning and wondering about their own

prior limited understanding of the homeless and those seeking shelter. They also began to confront the stereotypes and fears that they have had held as they began to recognize that the homeless are "normal" people without a home. Doing service enabled the students to acknowledge something positive about themselves and also enabled a level of comfort with others who are different.

*I learned a lot from helping out at the Blanchet House. The people I helped and fed were for the most part easy to get along with. They accepted our help. I developed better interaction skills with homeless people and a better outlook as well. My experience was positive enough to convince me to come back and help feed the homeless again. The visit made the community a better place because it affected all of us. I think it helps younger people to have more open mind toward the homeless in general and to respect their elders. It was also good for the homeless to see young people help them out as well. Doing service is about helping more than yourself and the people around you. It is about reaching out to those who are not as fortunate and lending a hand of support and help. It helped me to have an open mind.*  
(Michael)

*Though the sauces were messy and the smell not necessarily pleasant it was worthwhile because not only did we get to do something for other people but we were also put into a situation where we had to transcend class and come in contact with real people.* (Cindy)

*At Blanchet House, we served food to homeless men and women, bussed tables and handed out silverware. I like this project because I could actually see the good we were doing. A lot of the people we served were friendly and were really appreciative of the food. When I first came to Blanchet, I was a little scared, because homeless people had always scared me a bit. When I actually began talking to them, I felt a lot better because I was able to reassure myself that here were just normal people without a home who need some help... I've conquered one of my fears and seen how much good I can do.* (Katie)

### **Making a Difference**

The students at Sunnyside Environmental School expressed a desire to be seen in a positive light by the community. Through their service, they not only became aware of a significant issue in their community, they realized that even a simple act such as packing boxes of food is beneficial to their community. They learned that their efforts to make a difference have a visible impact on the people they serve and make a tangible contribution to the places where they live.

*At Oregon Food Bank we packed boxes that had 18 packs of rice in it and weighed a pound each. We were scooping one pound of rice into a bag, and putting a recipe in it. We had to tie the bag and make sure all the air was out. We also had to make sure there were eighteen bags in each box and had to tape it shut. We worked on the project for an hour and a half. At the Oregon Food Bank you have this feeling that you are doing something good*

*for the community and that you are making a difference. Everybody has a good vibe about being there. (Shauna)*

*...it was very emotional and inspiring at the same time, we could see how hard it is on the streets and at the same time I could see how much of an importance it is to give our time to the ones really in need of it. (Martin)*

### **Compassion Arising from New Understandings**

A profound sensibility of compassion and deep connection with others who are less fortunate are captured below in the voices of students expressed either as a poem or as other forms of creative writing. For students, this depth of connection with the "other" who hitherto had been a stranger until there was direct personal interaction, matters. A nameless, unfamiliar stranger that was part of a mere category (homeless, hungry) now has a face that makes students recognize that they are implicated as they are awakened to their community plight of injustice.

*I am from under the bridge  
I am from the cold winter days  
I am from the subway  
I am from starving and begging  
I am from the pain within  
I am from collecting pop cans for money  
I am from the alley  
I am from the damp rainy days  
I am from the shopping cart that holds everything I own  
I am from cold nights. (Ross)*

*In just two Tuesdays, we served 775 homeless people at Blanchet House... I think poverty is terrible but it is a reality. Seeing it makes me realize how selfish I am to have all this luxury and stuff... I hope I will be able to realize this feeling forever so I can feel lucky for my security and understand that not everyone has what I have taken for granted. Being cold and hungry makes it harder to care about anything but warmth and food. But it seems that through all of it they [the homeless] still find hearts to be caring. For that I think that we should all respect them. (Marie)*

*I think I developed new understanding of how to treat people who seem different from me by helping and treating them with respect. (James)*

A student, Joanna Levy, published an opinion piece modified from her reflections in the local newspaper, which *The Oregonian* headlined "Serving Soup and Hope to the Hungry":

*When we work at Blanchet House, we become aware that people are hungry. We can tell our friends and they can tell their friends, and so on. Pretty soon a lot of people are aware of the problem. If everyone who was aware of the problem wrote to the governor or the mayor, officials in the government would know that people want this problem solved. If just a few people want*

*something changed, probably nothing will happen but if a lot of people what something changed, it will probably happen.*

*When we work at Blanchet House we also show people that we care about them. When people know someone cares about them, they are generally happier, and it gives them hope. One little smile from a server from a soup kitchen can lift someone's spirit. It is a comfort. Then maybe he is happier when he is at work.... More people need such security blankets. We can provide them. A sincere smile, a good afternoon, a can of tuna, an evening at the soup kitchen is sometimes all it takes. (Joanna, 2004, The Oregonian)*

### **Taking Action to Correct Social Injustice**

Discussions in class with their peers and teachers about their experiences aroused Sunnyside students' passion about social injustices within their own communities. Through direct experiences of serving the "other" about whom they had held negative stereotypes, students realized that hunger is not something that is abstract nor are the homeless a mere statistic. Moreover, they began to question whose "fault" it is that there are so many that need social support in the community.

*The reason for this project was to help the homeless/hungry and lend them a helping hand. This is important because most of the homeless people cannot get back on their feet to support themselves, money wise or health wise. They have been homeless for so long and without a job there isn't much out there for them. I feel by being at the community kitchen and helping I am doing the right thing. (Val)*

*For a class project we made sandwiches for the homeless. Our whole class would switch off with other grades so that we could all have turns making sandwiches. We worked on this project for a month every Wednesday from 2-3 pm. in the community kitchen. While you are in the community kitchen, you see all different people that are going through life this way by being homeless and hungry and you ask yourself why does this thing happen and what can be done about it. By volunteering I feel that I am helping out and giving back to the community. (Steve)*

*...you can just feel good about yourself. It is everyone's responsibility to contribute to the community's prosperity, and helping of the poor. For in a way it is everyone's fault that things like hunger and homelessness happen. (Sofia)*

*Hunger is a global problem that, believe it or not, is caused by every one of us. If you eat half of your dinner then push it away, then that could have been eaten by someone else; no not like you would ship the leftover food to someone but in terms of resources used. There is enough food for everyone. We just need to equalize our resources. Hunger makes no one happy in the long run... you may be shivering in the cold with scraps clinging to your body barely recognizable as clothes, hunger clawing like a beast at your*

*stomach.... Service is something that you don't get paid to do; you do it from the goodness of your heart. Not do it with an attitude of pity or out of pity.*  
(Kim)

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Community-based service-learning offers Sunnyside students face-to-face interaction with the homeless and the hungry, evoking emotions for and sensibilities about the hitherto "hidden" or "forgotten" individuals living on the streets. In the above reflections, we find young adolescents expressing a deep sense of connection and care. Through direct personal contact and service civic responsibility and activism can be kindled among youth to achieve social change (Buch & Harden, 2015).

Sunnyside students share that by helping others who are less fortunate, they realize their own taken-for-granted comforts. Serving has benefitted them personally by opening their minds and challenging their stereotypes. Students learn to develop a sense of place and community. In his poem, eighth-grade student Ross highlights the cold nights and rainy days, pain and dampness, starving and begging, as he relates to the plight of the homeless and the hungry. Joanna's opinion piece in *The Oregonian* urges activism. Serving at the Food Bank makes Matt (in the opening paragraph) wonder why people did not do things to help. Marie gains perspective about her own taken-for-granted securities. James develops new understanding of how to treat people with respect. Shauna and Val feel good about doing the right thing and making a difference. Martin finds himself becoming emotional yet inspired and expresses compassion for the homeless. Katie and Michael develop an open mind and Cindy learns to transcend her assumptions about social class as she comes in contact with "real" people. Steve questions why there is hunger and what could be done about it. Similarly, Sofia ponders whose fault it is that people are homeless and hungry. For Kim, service is not to be undertaken with a sense of pity; rather she feels we are all implicated if we waste food.

The staff and many volunteer parents are aware that while Sunnyside has almost 30 percent low-income students, many also come from affluent families. Students freely discuss with their peers and teachers issues of class inequalities and recognize how difficult it would be for those who are themselves homeless to serve at homeless shelters. They develop sensitivity toward the varying lived experiences of their peers. Occasionally, if a student and his or her family have been homeless, the staff and teachers address how they might support the student primarily through social services support systems. Homelessness is a delicate, painful, and sensitive issue and it is not taken lightly by the school and the district. No formal public identification of students' homelessness is undertaken in any school. However, if a student chooses to share their condition, then carefully addressing the best path forward is undertaken with the help of the administrators. In such cases, many tears are shed by students and school staff as they try to address social and economic injustices and specific problems.

Service-learning activities of this nature must be undertaken with care and caution,

to ensure that adolescents do not feel distressed to be carrying the weight of the social troubles and issues in their communities. Proper protocols and procedures set up by schools and districts must also be adhered to in order to ensure security and safety for all involved (RMS Research Corporation, 2006; Wade, 2006). As many educators know, taking students outside the classroom requires much effort with planning and logistics.

While it is not easy to engage with communities outside school walls, the trade-off of learning through serving is a valuable exercise. Through the students' voices we realize that service-learning is a powerful, eye-opening experience providing them opportunities to interact with individuals who are different from themselves. With reflective practice, emotion and cognition are linked as students are intensely involved in observing, thinking, wondering, examining their own assumptions, and identifying solutions. Recognizing social problems and exploring ways in which they can be addressed at the local level requires emotional commitment to the process of learning (Chung & McBride, 2015; Richards et al., 2013). Students are also encouraged to confront their own privileged identities. Teachers have commented that serving in their "own backyard" makes students' experiences real and they are motivated to make a difference in what they often see as injustices within their own "green" city of Portland. To have caring relationship requires a "connection or encounter between two human beings" (Noddings 1992, p. 15). Face-to-face, human-scale, and community-based experiences enable the development of tangible sensibilities of care among young adolescents. These are worthy educational outcomes.

***Dilafroz R. Williams*** is Professor, Leadership for Sustainability Education program, in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon. She is co-author of *Learning Gardens and Sustainability Education: Bringing Life to Schools and Schools to Life* (Routledge, 2012), and has published extensively on garden-based learning, urban education, ecological education, and service-learning. She is co-founder of Learning Gardens Laboratory and Sunnyside Environmental School in Portland.

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