

# Engagement Education: A Model of Community-Youth Engagement in Rural Appalachia

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## Abstract

In this paper we present a framework for teaching and learning that applies Boyer's definition of engaged scholarship to K–12 education by engaging students, teachers, and community members as partners in learning in a reciprocal relationship that strengthens schools and communities. We call this model, which emerged during a community-based project with rural high school students, engagement education. In this model, teaching and learning are place-focused, project-based, asset-driven, and democratically oriented. We present the framework that lies at the intersection of the four approaches mentioned above by first describing each approach individually. We discuss each component of the engagement education framework within the context of the school and community-based project from which it emerged. We share the findings from a qualitative analysis of the students' reflections at the completion of the project. Finally, we discuss implications for engaged scholars working with rural communities and schools.

## Introduction

Educators, community organizations, and community members are increasingly concerned with the declining engagement of youth in their communities (Flanagan, Beyers, & Žukauskienė, 2012; Melaville, Berg, & Blank, 2006; Putnam, 2001). The issue of declining civic engagement among youth is particularly acute in rural communities, many of which are facing significant economic hardships and outmigration of some of the best and brightest young people (Carr & Kefalas, 2010; Corbett, 2007), often referred to as the “rural brain drain.” Schools are central institutions in many rural communities, first and foremost educating the future decision-makers in the community but also providing opportunities for engagement and participation of community members. These challenges of outmigration and declining civic engagement of rural youth present opportunities for communities and schools to re-engage youth through meaningful collaborations between schools and the local community (Melaville et al., 2006). In the ecology of education, schools and communities are linked and solutions to problems in each must be addressed by using the talents of each (Longo, 2007).

It is our contention that schools can offer students opportunities to understand their local communities as well as support and foster their development as citizens. Wood (2005) noted that schools should prepare students to be engaged, active, and reflective citizens of our democracy. The idea of developing engaged and active citizens is at the heart of the authors' understanding of education.

Dewey (1897) wrote, “I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (p. 7). We, too, contend that schools should not only prepare students for future engagement as citizens but should create opportunities for students to be engaged, active, and reflective citizens in their communities.

Boyer (1996) defined engaged scholarship as “...connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems, to our children, to our schools, to our teacher, and to our cities . . .” (p. 32). In this paper we present a framework for teaching and learning that applies Boyer's definition of engaged scholarship to K–12 education by engaging students, teachers, and community members as partners in learning in a reciprocal relationship that strengthens schools and communities. We refer to this model, which emerged during a community-based project with rural high school students, engagement education.

The theories of place-based education (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Rural Schools and Community Trust (RSCT), 2013; Smith, 2002; Smith & Sobel, 2010), project-based learning (Thomas, 2000), asset-based community development/community capacity development (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Yosso, 2005), and democratic education (Checkoway, 2013; Dewey, 1907; Freire, 2000; Yosso, 2005) have informed our work as educators. It is at the intersection of these four theoretical models that we found engagement education to occur. Put simply, we propose engagement education to be: place-focused, project-based, asset-driven, and democratically oriented.

In this paper we will present the framework that lies at the intersection of the four approaches mentioned by first describing each approach individually. We will then discuss each component of the engagement education framework within the context of the project from which it emerged. We will share the findings from a qualitative analysis of the students' reflections at the completion of the project. Finally, we will discuss implications for engaged scholars working with rural communities and schools.

### **Component 1: Place-based Education**

Learning takes place in context (Brown et al., 1989), which includes cultural, social, political, and geographic dimensions. Yet, preparing young students to work in a global economy often is context-neutral, in a sense ignoring and devaluing what is closest and most important to them: their local community. This narrow focus on life beyond the local can result in a disconnect between what is taught in school and the knowledge and skills valued by families and students outside of school (Corbett, 2007; Gruenewald, 2003; Shamah & MacTavish, 2009). The construct of place-based education encompasses many characteristics that Dewey (1897, 1916, 1938) proposed and refined in the early 20th century. For education to be engaging to children, learning must be student-centered, meaningful, relevant, and grounded in the lived experiences of students (Dewey, 1907; Melaville et al., 2006; Shamah & MacTavish, 2009; Smith, 2002; Smith & Sobel, 2010).

The RSCT defines place-based education as:

learning that is rooted in what is local—the unique history, environment, culture, economy, literature, and art of a particular place. The community provides the context for learning, student work focuses on community needs and interests, and community members serve as resources and partners in every aspect of teaching and learning (Rural Schools and Community Trust, 2013).

The RSCT (2013) further delineates the characteristics of quality place-based education:

- The school and community actively collaborate to make the local place a good one in which to learn, work, and live.

- Students serve as scholars and citizens, doing sustained, standards-based academic work that draws upon and contributes to the place in which they live while providing connections to and understanding of the global context.
- The community supports students and their adult mentors in new roles as learning deepens and contributions to community and economic development expand.
- Schools mirror the democratic values they seek to instill, arranging their resources so that every child is known well and every child's participation is needed and wanted.
- Decision-making about the education of the community's children is shared, informed by expertise both in and outside the school.
- Educators, students, and community members expect excellent effort from each other and review their joint progress regularly and thoughtfully, using multiple measures and public input to enlarge assessments of student performance.

Teachers operating from a place-based model develop meaningful lessons around issues of local importance, things about which students and their families care. In a place-based classroom, students become knowledge-creators as opposed to passive information receivers. Their questions and concerns are valued and determine the direction of the learning process (Meier, 1995). This requires skill and flexibility on the part of educator, but also engages the professional creativity that most educators value but is so often constrained by textbooks and packaged curricula.

Because the curriculum is grounded in the local, place-based education offers students the opportunity to practice the skills involved in being active citizens. Students engaged in place-based education build meaning around local places and increase their awareness of their role as inhabitants of a particular place and the responsibilities that go along with it (Melaville et al., 2006). Research has shown that students in place-based classrooms demonstrated higher levels of stewardship behaviors than their peers who were in classrooms that did not utilize place to the same degree (Von Secker, 2004).

The benefits of place-based education extend beyond increased achievement in the core academic areas. Athman, Ernst, and Monroe (2004), for example, found that using the local environment as context for learning had positive effect on students' critical thinking skills and disposition toward

critical thinking, skills that are highly valuable for future education, employment, and active citizenship. Furthermore, place-based learning has been associated with increased attendance, lower dropout rates, increased parental and community involvement, higher aspirations and expectations for student learning, and overall increased enthusiasm for learning (Duffin, Chawla, Sobel, & PEER Associates, 2005; Liebermann & Hoody, 1998; Melaville et al., 2006; Shamah & MacTavish, 2009; Smith, 2002; Smith & Sobel, 2010).

### **Component 2: Project-based Learning**

Dewey (1938) emphasized the connection between experience and education. Subject matter should not be learned in isolation; educators must engage students in solving the real issues of present life, and teach skills as a “means of attaining an end goal which make direct vital appeal” (p. 19). Experiential learning takes many forms; the one we will focus on here is project-based learning. Though he acknowledged a lack of a universally accepted model for project-based learning, Thomas (2000) identified five characteristics of project-based learning: (1) centrality, (2) a driving question, (3) involves constructive investigation, (4) student-centered, and (5) authenticity. In a review of the literature on project-based learning, Thomas concluded that there is ample evidence to suggest that project-based learning can enhance the quality of students' learning and is an effective method for teaching communication and decision-making skills, planning, and problem-solving. Furthermore, Thomas found evidence for “unintended and seemingly beneficial consequences” (p. 34) of project-based learning including increased professionalism and collaboration on the part of teachers, as well as increased attendance and improved student attitudes.

### **Component 3: Asset-based Community Development**

Issues concerning communities are often addressed initially by a deficit-driven approach focused on the needs, problems, and deficiencies within communities. Community developers and researchers have outlined the inherent problems with this deficit-driven approach indicating that community members in under-resourced communities can begin to see themselves as deficient (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Asset-based community development (ABCD) (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993) offers an alternative capacity-

oriented approach that focuses on identifying and mobilizing the assets that exist within communities. Asset-based community development begins with identifying the gifts of local citizens, then bringing citizens together via local associations, then finally bringing associations together (Habermas, 2001) for community change. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) emphasize the importance of community engagement in community development, stating, “All the historic evidence indicates that significant community development takes place only when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort” (p. 5). Scholars and community partners have applied the ABCD model in underserved rural as well as in urban communities to address varied community issues in multiple contexts (Atkinson, Desmond, Saperstein, Billing, Gold, & Tournas-Hardt, 2010; Boyd, Hayes, Wilson, & Bearsley-Smith, 2008; Nam, 2014; Shabazz & Cooks, 2014).

### **Component 4: Democratic Orientation**

The ABCD approach is inherently democratic. A democratic orientation in education serves to ensure a democratic society exists by providing students with opportunities to practice democratic skills and to develop democratic values and attitudes (Apple & Beane, 1995; Counts, 1939; Dewey, 1916; Kelly, 1995; Ligon, 2005; Mursell, 1955; Parker, 2003; Sehr, 1997). Dewey (1938) describes six characteristics of democratic education: (1) the celebration of expression and cultivation of individuality, (2) inspired free activity, (3) learning through experience, (4) the acquisition of skills and techniques by means that make direct vital appeal, (5) the utilization of the opportunities of present life for educational exploration, and (6) becoming acquainted with a changing world.

Apple and Beane (1995) identified seven elements that are foundational to democratic education:

1. The open flow of ideas, regardless of the popularity, that enables people to be as fully informed as possible.
2. Faith in the individual and collective capacity of people to create possibilities of resolving problems.
3. The use of critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems, and policies.
4. Concern for the welfare of others and the common good.

5. Concern for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities.
6. An understanding that democracy is not so much an ideal to be pursued as an idealized set of values that we live and that must guide our life as a people.
7. The organization of social institutions to promote and extend the democratic way of life.

Hence, at a minimum in democratically oriented education students participate in setting the direction of learning and have learning opportunities that include hands-on projects, community connections, meaningful student governance, opportunities to develop personal relationships, and conflict resolution skills. In summary, a democratically oriented classroom is one where teachers facilitate student participation, and student ideas and experiences are central to the educational process.

Facilitating democratic education requires a democratic orientation on the part of the teacher. A democratic orientation to education requires a high level of trust in people (students) and a core belief that people have the capacity to understand and resolve the issues and challenges facing them (Mursell, 1955). This plays out in the culture of the classroom. Furthermore, democracy as a “cultural way of being” (West, 2004, p. 68) demands a faith in the social nature of democracy that moves it beyond the procedural and into the people (Boydston, 1987). A faith in people to be active, participatory, and responsible is at the core of our understanding of democracy and democratic education.

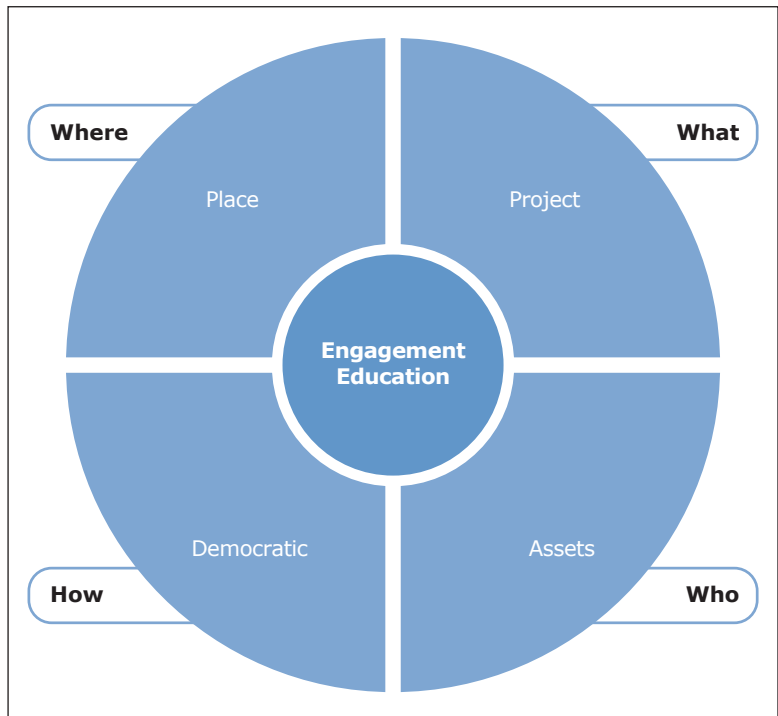
**The Intersection:  
Engagement Education**

These four approaches (place-based education, project-based learning, assets-based community development, and democratic education) have guided our work as educators in secondary and post-secondary classrooms and are central to our vision of the teaching and

learning process. During our work with community members and high school students in 2012, we recognized a new model emerging—one that exists at the intersection of the four approaches. This framework, which we refer to as engagement education, engages students and community members as partners in the teaching and learning process, the goal of which is understanding and solving local social, civic and ethical problems. We define engagement education as: place-focused, project-based, asset-driven and democratically orientated.

Each element of the engagement education model represents a different component of teaching and learning: who (community members as assets), what (community project-based), where (local community), and how (democratic orientation) of the teaching and learning cycle (see Figure 1). The who describes the individuals involved in the teaching and learning and helps refocus us as faculty to turn the focus away from external expertise and toward community members as integral to the teaching and learning process. The what refers to the content which, in this model, arises from a problem or project that is grounded in the local community. The where grounds the learning in what is local. Finally, the how frames the culture of the classroom and describes how we interact and engage with each other. In the next section, we will describe the four components of the engagement education model, (a) place-focused, (b) project-based,

**Figure 1.** Engagement Education Model



(c) asset-driven and (d) democratically oriented, situated within the context of the project from which it emerged.

### Overview of the Clock Project

We began work on the clock project in the fall of 2012. This project was a collaboration among our university, a local community organization, the county historical society and the local high school to research, restore and rededicate a 107-year-old clock which stood in the center of the town square at the train depot.

#### *Place-focused*

Engagement education is place-focused and the local community is the context for learning. This clock project took place in a small rural community in southeast Appalachian Ohio. The township has a population of approximately 4,480 and a rich history in coal mining. Similar to other rural areas this community struggles with the structural challenges facing many rural communities: high poverty, high unemployment, under-resourced schools, aging population, youth outmigration, lack of access to health care, and inadequate housing (Duncan, 1999). In 2009 the median household income in the township was \$24,152. The local school district consists of one elementary and one middle/high school. In 2014, the average daily enrollment for the entire district was 860 with 69.35 percent of students on free or reduced lunch (Ohio Department of Education, 2014b) and a 97 percent four-year graduation rate (Ohio Department of Education, 2014a).

There are numerous local non-profit organizations that serve youth in this community. Two local nonprofits had been working with the county historical society and museum to secure funding from a local grantor to restore the historic clock. While the planning for the clock restoration was underway, conversations were simultaneously happening in the township about how to engage local youth in leadership development activities<sup>1</sup>. We saw an opportunity to connect community needs and local youth using a place-based approach. We met with community leaders and leaders from the two local nonprofits to discuss ways that local youth could be involved in the work of restoring the clock.

The leader from the one of the nonprofits recruited four individuals from the community including an individual from the county historical society who agreed to attend the class meetings. This group of five became the core group of community mentors, volunteering weekly throughout the semester.

We needed to identify a teacher who would work with the mentors. The local school superintendent suggested we talk with a sophomore language arts teacher who might be interested in integrating this project into his curriculum. We met with the teacher and he agreed to give up one class period per week for the spring semester. We would meet with the class of students once before the end of the fall semester to introduce the project and the mentors, intending to get the work underway in spring semester.

To situate learning in the community the mentors worked with students to plan local field trips based on the needs of the workgroups. One workgroup visited the clock repairman. A second workgroup visited the historical society museum to find answers to questions about the clock. Another group visited local sites in the town to learn about local history of their town and the clock. We were surprised to find out that even though most of the students had lived in the town their whole lives, many had never been inside many of the buildings in their town nor spoken with the community members about the town's history.

Another principle of place-based education is that students serve as scholars and citizens, doing sustained, standards-based academic work. As this was a sophomore language arts class it was important to the teacher, students and the community members to be attentive to the English Language Arts standards. We found that many of the standards were easily addressed within this project. Students were purposeful in their use of technology, researching history of the community and developing presentations for various community groups about the clock project. The students maintained individual writing journals and made weekly entries. The class read "Where I am From" (Lyon, n.d.)—a poem (and poem form) that engages place in a very personal way—and eventually created their own "I Am From" poems describing their connection to their home and community. We selected several readings from *Kettle Bottom* (Gilliam Fisher, 2004) by Diane Gilliam, an Appalachian poet who came to the town to facilitate a poetry workshop with the students and mentors. The students' (and mentors') poems from the poetry workshop were subsequently published in a book that was presented to the community.

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<sup>1</sup>Community Leadership workgroup meetings were being held in the township as a result of a Promise Neighborhood planning grant. The first author was present at the community leadership workgroup meetings along with several of the local leaders who eventually became mentors in this project.

One student essay is included below:

A town so filled with life, people going away and coming to town. These people just come by to see my face, but as time goes on, those people are becoming less. As time goes by, I feel sicker and weaker as if I am falling apart. We come to this current time; I am no longer helping people the way I used to. I feel as if I am dying. As I am fading, a man appears. He says that I am broken and that he wants to help me. The man picks me up and takes me to a place of healing; he knows my state of health. To help me heal to make me feel as if I am whole again and to get me back in shape. He gets me all the new parts and takes out the old. I feel as if I am reborn. The man pulls me into his arms and tells me we are going home. As I head back to this little town, all the memories, sad to know that many of the people won't be here. I brace myself. I have arrived, home at last, and much to my surprise, I see people, a lot of people. As I come to the center of this town, I see all the old faces and some new faces. I am happy to be here, I am back at home, and if anything I feel whole once again. I am so honored and so privileged but I finally figured out who I am. I am the clock.

This student essay shows how place-based education can help students make connections between academic expectations and their communities. The clock project grew from a real community need. The group had real deadlines to meet. The primary outcome was the restoration of the clock, but the secondary outcomes were also very meaningful to the students and the community and included a book of student and mentor writing and artwork, landscaping around the train depot and a student web blog. The final culmination of the class project was the reveal of the restored clock at a community event which drew over 250 individuals. Students read their poems to the community members gathered for the clock unveiling. The students showed a clear sense of pride in their work, in the clock and in their community that day. Conversely, the community mentors and other community members expressed their pride in the young people involved in guiding the clock restoration.

### *Project-based*

Engagement education is project-based and a driving question pushes the work forward. At the first meeting with the class, the community mentors engaged the students in a conversation about the clock. We structured the discussion in the following way, leading to the driving questions:

- *What We Know:* The mentors presented a brief history of the clock with historical facts and images.
- *What We Remember:* A community member and mentor shared a series of personal stories of the community about his memories of the town and the clock. He then facilitated a conversation with students about their memories of the clock. Many students had personal stories and memories associated with the clock and the depot where it once stood.
- *What We Don't Know:* The first author facilitated a discussion which allowed the students and community mentors to explore what was not known about the clock.
- *What We Want to Learn and Do:* The second author led a discussion that allowed students to brainstorm ideas related to what they had an interest in knowing and doing related to the clock. These ideas became the driving questions around which the curriculum and project work were structured.

The phrase “respect the clock” came up during the discussion with the students and surprised the mentors. This phrase suggested an emerging sense of ownership and pride in the clock. The students reviewed the list of ideas and questions and grouped them into categories which became their work groups: (1) celebration group, (2) social landscaping group, (3) navigation group and (4) history and future of the clock. This student-generated list drove the rest of the project development.

After the first week, we met with the class weekly for approximately one hour for eight weeks. After a brief meeting with the whole class, we generally broke into smaller workgroups, each group facilitated by a community mentor. With the larger group goals in mind, each group determined its focus. A timeline emerged from the groups' planning: a celebration would be planned for the end of the semester that would coincide with a community reunion over a holiday weekend. The unveiling of the clock would occur at this event. This deadline made the project very real.

### *Asset-driven*

The engagement education model is asset-driven, operating on the principle that every community's greatest asset is its people. When people with similar interests join together their strengths are multiplied in the associations they form. The strength and capacity of the people and local community organizations in the township was easy to recognize. Community members were front and center throughout the project as project leaders, classroom mentors and as experts called on to teach during local field trips. Prior to our involvement, a local nonprofit had secured funding from a local foundation to restore the clock. Other than some technology (i.e. laptops, digital voice recorders and digital cameras) we brought very little from the outside other than our time and attention. This sent a message that we were committed to the project, but believed in the capacity of the community.

Students often do not have the opportunity to study the assets that exist in their communities. We were reminded of this reality in our first meeting with the students when we asked the students "What is beautiful about your community?" Their collective response was: "Nothing is beautiful about our community." The students were painfully aware of the deficits within their community, but had not had the opportunity to explore the complexity and beauty of the place of their everyday lives. We saw and heard this sentiment change over the course of the project as evidenced by this student quotation: "I love history and I especially love learning about the town. I've lived here my whole life and never would have imagined how much history there really is here."

### *Democratically Oriented*

Engagement education is democratically oriented. From the first classroom session, we aimed to foster a democratic orientation in the classroom through the open flow of ideas via group discussion and critical reflection where all ideas were valued (Apple & Beane, 1995). At first students were reluctant to speak up, but the mentors reinforced that all ideas are worthwhile and this project encouraged input from each of them. The class made decisions regarding various aspects of the clock restoration with student input, discussion and voting.

Prior to the first meeting with students and throughout the semester, we met with the mentors to discuss the project and the strategies for engaging students. Since the larger purpose of this initiative was youth leadership development and civic

engagement, we were all interested in ways to facilitate those processes. One of the community members was familiar with the intergenerational model of youth leadership development and shared that approach with the group (Southern Echo, n.d.). We shared readings and discussed various pedagogical models (i.e., place-based education, project-based learning, democratic pedagogy and asset-based community development) to get "on the same page" about how we would interact with the students, value and validate their voices and move the project forward.

### **Measuring Student Impact**

There is a growing body of literature aimed at measuring the impact of experiential education on youth (Duffin et al., 2005; Melaville et al., 2006; Qualters, 2010; Scott & Graham, 2015; Yates & Youniss, 1996). In this kind of work there are clear and often very tangible outcomes (e.g., a restored clock, book of student writing, new relationships) but there are also personal and interpersonal outcomes that are more difficult to measure. Yates and Youniss (1996) found that three developmental concepts were associated with participation in service: agency, social relatedness and moral-political awareness. Multiple studies investigating the effects of participating in service have indicated that students who participate in service activities report an increased sense of self-awareness and self-confidence and personal responsibility (Newmann & Rutter, 1983). Service can increase a sense of connectedness and belonging and moral-political awareness—"heightened moral feelings and reasoning—leading to civic activism" (Yates & Youniss, 1996, p. 86).

We saw students fully engaged in their work while we were in the classroom. Community mentors talked about being stopped by friends and neighbors in the bank or the grocery store to discuss the project, wanting to know more. The mentors shared that parents told them their children were excited about going to school. The teacher working with us on the project described seeing the students in his class grow in ways he never expected. Most importantly, we heard the students themselves tell us how meaningful this project had been to them. One of the students sent this email to the second author in the first few weeks of the project:

Hey, this is [student name] from [school name] High School. These are the pictures

you asked me to send you! Sorry it took so long. As I mentioned earlier today something came up last time I had a chance to send them and I had to leave. I have to send them from my grandmother's computer, and I finally got back up here to get them to you. One of the photos is of a meat market that was located where Certified is now, right beside the depot. If you look closely in the background there is a train car. So cool! I really am enjoying this project. I love history and I especially love learning about the town. I've lived here my whole life and never would have imagined how much history there really is here. I have interviews booked up to my chin with elders who have lived here for many years. I'm also getting a book that is supposed to have a lot of good information in it. A lady my mom talked to knows someone with a bunch of old things from the town that I plan on photographing and bringing into class.

Just thought I would let you know where we are in getting resources within the social landscaping group!

I'm so glad I get to be a part of this, and I will see you next Wednesday!

Other students in the class echoed these sentiments. As a final assignment and to better understand the impact of the project, we asked the students to write about their experiences in the class by responding to the open-ended prompt: "What did you learn from participating in the clock project?" Twenty-one students completed the reflection. We conducted a content analysis on the student responses to the prompt. To do this, we initially open-coded the responses (Charmaz, 2014), line by line, to establish an initial set of codes. We then completed focused-coding, a process comparing codes then grouping significant and common codes into categories (Charmaz, 2014), which resulted in six broad themes. We will describe the results from the qualitative analysis of the student responses in the next section.

### **Results of Analysis of Student Reflection**

The six themes that emerged from the student responses are: Personal Growth, Relationships Across Generations can be Transformative; Setting

an Example; Development of Pride in Local Community and Relevance of Local Knowledge (Table 1). Students described a process of Personal Growth; they began to recognize capacities within themselves they had not previously recognized. Some of the students redefined themselves (i.e. I am...). Students also recognized the importance of Giving Back to their communities, and articulated the personal satisfaction that results from civic engagement (i.e. "It gives me a good feeling to help."). We saw that Relationships Across Generations can be Transformative. Intergenerational learning was a new experience for these students, but after the initial discomfort, relationships formed. Mentors spoke about how meaningful these relationships had become. Another theme that emerged was Setting an Example. As the exemplar quotation in Table 1 describes, students saw and heard examples of individuals who make a difference in their community. The last two themes—Development of Pride in Local Community and Relevance of Local Knowledge—are closely related. Students valued the opportunity to learn about their local community in class and the result is a broader sense of pride in their local place.

### **Educational Impact and Conclusions**

We have defined engagement education as place-focused, project-based, assets-driven and democratically oriented. We argue that this model allows for multiple ways to engage the learning and teaching process. Specifically, when students and teachers are involved in engagement education with community members they identify real-world problems and these problems serve as the basis for curricular driven exploration and solutions. This type of learning offers students real-world application and practice in the development of both discipline-specific content and the development of critical thinking skills needed to solve complex community driven problems and function as active, engaged citizens. Importantly, students are challenged to develop flexibility in their thinking and be resourceful in identifying possible solutions to important community issues. When all aspects of learning are integrated, the connections are clear and education makes sense to students.

Once the students involved in the clock project engaged the local, with committed community partners, inside a democratically oriented classroom they began to see the assets of their community. We found that when the "community provides the context for learning" and "when student work



**Table 1.** Themes in the Student Responses to Final Reflection on Clock Project

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Exemplar Student Quotations</b>
Personal Growth	I still see myself as the same kid, but people have told me how much I have changed and how I have really stepped up. It helped me be who I am today. I need to stop being a wuss and step out of my shell a bit. I can speak in front of people without missing a beat. I am very intelligent.
Importance of Giving Back	I have learned that being part of a community project does make a difference in your life. The Clock Project is a good way to connect with my community and my classmates. It gives me a good feeling to help. People are happy we are asking them things. People smile and laugh; sometimes they sing songs for us. Especially the old people, it brings joy to the old people to know that we care.
Relationships Across Generations Can Be Transformative	Miss D., — a wonderful woman and amazing friend. S., — I adore her! At first I wasn't comfortable about it but as time went on I realized that we were taught but we also taught them things. It was different, but cool to work with different age groups in class.
Setting an Example	You are recognized by the difference you have made in the community. Because of what you are doing someone is going to look up to you and be as helpful as you are.
Development of Pride in Local Community	I learned that the township still has pride in itself. We're good people, we're smart, and we're not afraid to take pride in our community. There's a lot of potential in this community for students and for everybody.
Relevance of Place — Local Knowledge	It's awesome that we can learn, celebrate and talk about [Town Name], my hometown, in class.  [The township takes] pride in our community.

focuses on community needs and interests, and community members serve as resources and partners in every aspect of teaching and learning” (*Rural Schools and Community Trust*, 2013), students develop pride in their communities and communities develop pride in their young people. One student comment is representative of the power of this model of education to help youth develop as engaged citizens. She said, “I have learned that being part of a community project does make a difference in your life.” Engagement education can be a model in which rural schools, community members and engaged scholars can capitalize on the talents and strengths of the other to strengthen local communities.

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