Consequential Learning

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Introduction

Consequential Learning (CL) is an approach to rural education and development that links schools to communities through curricular and extracurricular projects and courses, in which students, using the tools and concepts of academic, technical, artistic, and business disciplines, are challenged to produce consequential public outcomes. Students, school staff, and external resource persons form a team to determine and complete projects that make a difference in the well-being of communities. The projects define new roles and develop new skills for students and teachers; they involve, for clearly articulated tasks, "outsiders" who bring new expertise, opportunities, connections, and resources into schools. CL projects and approaches help delineate new purposes for schools (including community development and gathering local information) and clarify basic issues of education and community enhancement. They demonstrate the potential for school and community partnerships to improve educational quality and community life.

Consequential Learning is based on thirty years work with schools and communities in rural Alabama, primarily through the Program for Rural Services and Research (PRSR) at the University of Alabama, and the PACERS Cooperative, an association of about thirty small rural public schools working together to sustain and improve their community-based institutions. The work has been in a variety of ethnic, racial, and economic settings and has spanned elementary through secondary schools. It has covered all disciplines from business to the arts. Projects include building solar houses and greenhouses, student-published community newspapers, the establishment and operation of many profitable school-based businesses, preparation of oral and photographic histories, the construction and operation of aquaculture units and other living labs, and the creation of music and drama based on local life. It is fair to say that the projects and approaches presented under the aegis of Consequential Learning have been thoroughly field-tested. In the process several basic premises have held steady:

1. The well-being of rural schools and communities are interdependent. Collaboration between them has to be fostered and their strengths shared.
2. Rural schools and communities must form area/regional networks to support mutually beneficial action including the development of appropriate and needed instructional, information, and communications resources as well as living labs and other authentic learning spaces.
3. Young people can and will make a significant difference in their communities and aspire to do so. They will assume and fulfil important responsibilities.
4. The effective linkage of learning to place will powerfully transform student interest and teacher practice.
5. Rural people can create solutions to many of their own problems by identifying their strengths, acting entrepreneurially, and affirming their own competence.

An equilateral triangle is used as a graphic representation for Consequential Learning. Students, school professionals, and "outsiders" (resource persons, community members, and organizations) each represent a side—with each side being directly and equally linked to the other two. Their linkage is for the purpose of undertaking projects that are transparently consequential for all three parties and the community and/or constituencies served by school. As a result the triangle defines a space for collaborative action in which all participants have a stake—that is a project that has a public outcome beneficial to students, school, and community. In CL project may mean a short or long-term program or a course with a consequential result.

Two exemplary information technology projects will be described to illustrate Consequential Learning criteria and the approach's potential for students, schools, and rural communities and regions. The projects were chosen as examples because of interest in information and communications technology and in current trends in rural education. The two initiatives, Tiger Computers and NuGenerations Technology, were organised about a decade apart in the PACERS Cooperative and supported and coordinated by the Program for Rural Services and Research at the University of Alabama. As PACERS' projects, Tiger Computers and NuGenerations Technology have produced local and state-wide benefits and garnered national attention and support. Helping to close the digital divide that characterises their areas, the projects have demonstrated the power of rural schools and their students and allies to create new and appropriate contexts, models, and approaches for learning and local development.

From my own work and experiences, other strong and on-going projects that represent a variety of disciplines and that cross all grade levels could have been citied as appropriate illustrations. For example, I considered as Consequential Learning exemplary practices, PACERS' community health projects—including one through which students in about a dozen high schools designed, administered, and analyzed school and community health inventories. Of course many people have similar experiences or know of comparable work. However, the existence and even the spread of such work and approaches internationally does not mean that they are systemic or even pervasive. Therefore, before recounting the exemplary technology projects, it seems prudent to have a look at some of the obstacles that have tended to make Consequential Learning type programs and approaches peripheral.

Obstacles

It is not easy—given Western culture and prejudices—to make the case for local and rural. Of course when rural and local are used as the modifiers for any proposed educational enhancement—as in this case—the road to change, if it exists, will be rough and unmarked. To begin with, in Latin a rural person, i.e. a country dweller, is called *paganus*—well that translation is plain enough. The thesaurus on my word processing program offers only the following synonyms for local: restricted, limited, confined, and narrow. And Amy Gutman (1999) notes Aristotle's assertion that education is one of the two most complex inventions of humankind. So here I am, a country dweller with restricted, limited, confined, and narrow views trying to address one of the most complex matters in the world to a group of pagans.

Out of this litany of admitted self-pity, I begin with local. Dictionaries are kinder to "local" than my short-sighted word-processor. A common definition of local is "...of or relating to a particular place" (*American Heritage*, 4th Edition). To return to Latin, the root of local is *locus,* i.e. place. We still have not reached safe ground because as Edward Casey (Casey, 1998) states "...the very idea of place...is deeply dormant in modern Western thinking." If it is hibernating in the general thinking of Western society, it has been anaesthetised in the culture of Western schooling. This judgment is made with the knowledge that there are many efforts to develop locally-related and place-based learning approaches and programs in Australia, North America, and Europe. Many have gained attention and praise. There has even been significant private funding support for them and the creation of organisations to promote the cause. However, the efforts, as good and widespread as they are, have not altered educational policies in a comprehensive and systemic way.

Two comments help explain my position. First, there appears to be nothing significantly impeding the relentless determination of educational policy makers and politicians to promote an evermore centralised/standardised curriculum that can be measured by standardised tests—the reigning, all-powerful, and not-to-be-contested king of cure alls for public education in the US. George Bush's *No Child Left Behind* legislation is one of the most comprehensive power grabs by the US federal government in the nation's history and centralises public education—including its evaluation and by implication its content—to an unparalleled degree. I have heard observations by European and Canadian educators suggesting similar developments regarding the centralisation of content and evaluation. Of course this seems inevitably to mean a centralisation of power as well—further removing governance, evaluation, and influence from local communities.

Second, the dormancy of Western intellectual inquiry into the meaning of place obviates a full consideration of the importance of local in education. The whats, whys, and hows of teaching and learning are not matched with a comparable interest in where. It appears that the places in which students live, in which their values and lives are formed, and in which their interests are often most concentrated are effectively dismissed. As a result schools tend to become local in the same way that a McDonald's burger factory is local, and that "ain't local" at all. Diplomas are routinely handed out to students who have learned nothing in their schools of the trees, grasses, water sources, histories, geologic formations, economics, and government of the their own places. Local longitudes and latitudes remain a mystery suggesting that any place on earth is pretty much the same as any other if you can just get to the Internet, TV cable, or the mall. It suggests that there is little understanding that students are members of communities and that we all live in actual and unique places that shape our ways of learning and living.

If the attempts to connect learning and place still go against the grain, it is more the case for us pagans in rural schools and communities. After all, in common vernacular when "rural" is not sentimentalised, it is usually thought of as nowhere, no place, the boondocks, the backwaters and without political power or cultural warrant. Rural, according to common perception, needs to be brought up to speed, dosed with occasional charity, taught to live by industrial and urban models, and aided by professional mercenaries and missionaries. It exists across the great digital divide that signals its distance from the new information age economy. Rural is not empowered nor is it recognised as a source for education reform, leadership, or perhaps even for its own self-determination. Although it may not be the case in all places, the rural United States has for a century been marked by the closure first of thousands of local schools systems and then of course of thousands of schools. Governance and schools become more remote and less likely to respond to the values of

local and rural. The message is simple, if rural people intend to change things by making their schools relevant to the lives of their students and communities, they must work hard, smart, and collaboratively.

This call to action matches Consequential Learning's concentration upon moving the culture of education and of rural communities from passive to active and from consumptive to productive. As an aside that I cannot seem to avoid mentioning, in my state Home Economics teachers have become Consumer Science instructors. The change in job title and description reveals complex social changes. The point is simply that rural almost by definition has been a place where people were productive, made or grew what they needed, and fixed what was broken. In its Greek origins "economics" always seems related first to such matters as producing, caring for, and building. But rural education, as with all education, is mainly passive—a kind of consumer context in which production and building are not much in the mix. Increasingly it seems that the purpose for schools is the cultivation of memory in order for students to demonstrate on tests that they have mastered the required volume of often disaggregated bits of information. Critical thinking, assessment by students of the value of what is being taught, and demonstration of their mastery of concepts and tools are not very much in the mix. Rather the process seems submissive; kids are receptacles. Youngsters with "sticky brains" or a lot of random available memory are labelled the "good" students. Kids' progress is increasingly measured externally (but not by their communities), and the yardstick is usually only a test of the memory bits that youngsters often find disconnected from their worlds or their passions and interests. I am not indifferent to the benefits of memory, to gathering what is called domain knowledge, or to standardised tests. The point is they are not enough, and as the singular guide to learning and to the formation and operation of the processes of education, they are a disaster.

This review of a few of the obstacles may appear to be an exercise in complaining—even whining. However, its purpose is only to make clear that attempts to link learning and place or schools to communities face strong overt and implicit challenges that are deeply rooted in educational institutions, practice, and culture and the society in general. The review of obstacles is a preface to a call for informed action not a plea for others to make it right. A first impediment to what I call Consequential Learning is the fact that the power of place for improving learning and the power of schools for enhancing local life are not common coin in educational systems dominated by "recall and repeat" drills. They are not concepts that have significant power in determining what is to be learned by students, the nature of pre-service and in-service professional education, and how the money flows. Centralised and standardised education has little time for place, for school and community linkages, and for the imaginative consideration of new and old purposes for schools that flow from schools

interacting dynamically with the places where they exist. In general education policy and practice seem not to be aware of students' citizenship or membership and of the enormous potential that arises from calling upon these factors. In my opinion, therefore, it is foolish to enter into reform efforts—which is what CL type efforts are—without being aware of likely impediments. At the same time, there are successes and paradigms that justify the programs and approaches that I have gathered under the label of Consequential Learning. This article will tell the story of two such efforts, technology projects with strong local consequences. It will reflect on their implications for rural education and communities and suggest strategies and rationales for making the effort to link learning to place through projects that unite students, teachers, and "outsiders" to make a difference in local life through demanding and school-based public enterprises.

Building Our Own

The PACERS Cooperative is the context for these exemplary technology projects. The Coop was initiated in the late 1980's to save and improve small rural public schools in Alabama by demonstrating their viability through the creation and application of approaches and programs aimed at building upon their strengths and linking them to their communities. The association began with several interrelated priorities: provide students new and appropriate curricular opportunities, develop entrepreneurial programs and attitudes, and apply the resources of emerging digital technologies to meet information, communication, and instructional needs. In the early 1990's PACERS received funding from the Ford and Lyndhurst Foundations to develop programs and approaches to realise its goals. (I believe firmly that resources can be found when they are sought for well-formed ideas and by well-organised groups.) The planning process called for interested teachers in all thirty PACERS' schools to propose projects guided by the organisation's purposes—especially its commitment to linking education to place and to melding school and community strengths. Bemoaning the local problems was not encouraged; positive action, not pathology was the order of the day. Proposals were reviewed within each school and then in cluster meetings of four to six schools. The cluster meetings required time, travel, and risk, but they had a powerful impact. The high quality of some proposals tended to raise the bar for all teachers and to spark imagination, hopes, and confidence that were not always operative in a single school. The collaboration between schools and their faculties was indispensable for the formation of PACERS' work and approaches. It is an essential element in for the long-term enhancement of rural schools and communities which cannot afford to stand only in their own buckets of water.

Tiger Computers

The idea for Tiger Computers was born in one of the PACERS' cluster meetings when Rick Clifton, a computer-science teacher at Cedar Bluff High School, was moved—literally—to throw away the technology project plans he had brought. Throughout the planning process that preceded the meeting in question, Mr. Clifton had made constant appeal for grant money to be used to purchase computers—a hope that the supporting foundations would never share. When that reality dawned on Mr. Clifton, he settled upon a computer-based weather station as his project. Given the scope of his understanding of the significance of computers for his school and students, his plan frankly was not very significant. As the cluster meeting moved forward and very strong and ambitious plans were being laid out by other teachers, he began to groan—somewhat noticeably—under the burden of his very lightweight proposal. When a break came in the presentations—immediately preceding his time to be on the spot—he asked me: "Would they (i.e. the foundations) give us money to start a business to build our own computers?" The question was powerful arising as it did in the context of a small and non-affluent rural Appalachian town—marked as most with out-migration and loss.

As you will quickly guess, the idea had appeal for funders and almost everyone else involved with PACERS. It was bold and innovative; it worked. The ways that it worked, that is the outcomes, were very important for the PACERS Cooperative and the entire state. It embodied the triangle metaphor for Consequential Learning. Teachers, students, and outsiders were linked together to undertake an ambitious and thoroughly public task. Named for the high school's mascot, Tiger Computers was created as a school-based enterprise at Cedar Bluff High. Students prepared vitas and interviewed for positions before an advisory committee that included the town mayor, several men and women who ran local businesses, and other adults with interest in the project. Kids were dealing with adults from outside the school in new ways at the outset of the project. And this connection with "outsiders" continued as computer and telecommunications experts volunteered time to train and advise the Tiger staff. Mr. Clifton and other teachers had to learn new technical and business skills and make connections themselves beyond the school. They also had to learn how to support students in this new and demanding context.

Tiger was a school-based business that made money—a lot of money, grossing several hundred thousand dollars during a couple of years of its operations. Success led to the building of Tiger Computers own facility. It contained an assembly and repair space, and storage areas, offices, and an up-to-date computer training classroom (used by schools, businesses, and individuals). With a base of operations, a fairly workable initial business structure, strong student interest, and external

support—including funding and skilled resource persons— Tiger was off and running. There were powerful and not anticipated outcomes.

Tiger provided other PACERS' schools high quality and low cost computers setting the first stage for their ultimate connection to the internet, computer-based instruction, and information access. At the request of the Alabama Public Library Service, the Program for Rural Services and Research, and the PACERS Cooperative, Tiger devised the state's first information resource sharing network linking four rural schools and four rural public libraries. The system called Library Resource Sharing (LRS) used computers and networking programs built by Tiger staff and students to support access to commonly held information subscriptions that were otherwise unaffordable. The immediate result was that the school and public libraries had expanded their holdings by geometric proportions, creating new research and study opportunities for students, alums, and community members. In the long term LRS was a model for the Alabama Virtual Library—an on-line library resource now available for all schools and educators in the state.

TDS, a US national communications corporation, provided telephone service to Cedar Bluff and to the county in which it is located. Local and national representatives of the corporation took a great interest in Tiger and offered important technical assistance, services, and recognition. Seeing the potential of the work, TDS placed the first internet server in rural Alabama at Tiger, and established an arrangement through which all PACERS schools could access the Library Resource Sharing program and eventually the internet. As a result PACERS schools, although rural, remote, and often under funded, were among the first in the state to have access to the internet. Not only did schools benefit, the county began to receive inquiries from corporations about locating in the area—a new and motivating factor was access to the Internet. It is important to reiterate that significant, relevant, and challenging projects will often attract expertise, new insights, and resources needed by the schools. In US telephone book terms, those resources and people may not be in the yellow pages, but they can be found in the white pages.

Students prospered in the program. They learned significant digital and business skills and made post-secondary decisions that led to successful careers. Kids made a big difference in their community, in their county where they networked all the schools, and in the whole state. Media representatives were always at the door. Everybody was proud of Tiger, and everybody was sad when it closed its doors after a few years' of operation. One student told me that Tiger's closure hurt so badly that she never went by the building again. She explained that her mother had always made it clear that she was going

to college but never explained why. At Tiger the student learned why she was going to college and what she was to do with her life. It was, therefore, too sad to pass the place.

There are some obvious reasons that Tiger closed. It probably became too big, too fast. Perhaps, because the learning curve was too steep and the opportunities too close at hand and too compelling, and, therefore, not enough time was taken to keep students up to speed. They tended to become more like workers in a factory than the owners and creators of an innovative business. That side of the triangle became weak. The business plan was not adequate and adaptable, and as a result, its operational culture could not match the demands of the business. The educational system itself was not prepared to deal with Tiger. Questions of student schedules and academic credit were perplexing. The auditors entered shutdown mode when confronted with a school-based business that was handling so much money, ordering so many parts, and accepting contracts from rural Alabama to Washington state. Some asked why every school couldn't have one of those projects. And so on.

I do not go by the Tiger building anymore myself, but I see its outcomes everywhere. I recognise the power of the collaboration that made Tiger possible and that spread its benefits state-wide. The real issue is probably not its closure but that it ever existed. Of course I remain concerned that such a powerful and successful school and community enterprise did not have a longer life or that it was not transferred into the local economy by local entrepreneurs. However, the genuine and long-lasting results exceeded all that could have been hoped for. A weather station turned into a program that greatly assisted PACERS, the PRSR, and others to develop powerful computer-based information and instructional resources for rural Alabama schools. Those resources—including an on-line high school and a virtual library—add equity and quality to the schools and the state, and they arose mainly from the initiative of rural teachers, students, and communities with considerable impetus from Tiger. The resources underpin the notion that rural schools and communities can "build their own." Second, the notion that schools could establish student-run businesses to address specifically their digital needs took hold because the benefits from Tiger were to be found in many schools and the project's exploits were recounted in the media. Several schools related to the PACERS Cooperative have established their own computer repair, networking, building, and training enterprises. My second example, NuGenerations Technology is one of those businesses.

NuGenerations Technology

NuGenerations Technology is a new project of the public school system in Hale County, Alabama. The county is located in one of the poorest regions in the entire United States. The Hale County

School System has no money to spare, but its superintendent and several of its principals and teachers were determined to give their students an opportunity to cross the digital divide and bring their county with them. Noting that all computer repairs and training had to be purchased at high cost from out of county vendors, educators asked why not do it ourselves—or better yet why not our young people. The question embodied Mr. Clifton's original thought in regard to Tiger Computer—why not build our own. In partnership with PACERS and the Program for Rural Services and Research, planning for a student-run technology business was started. The success of Tiger was powerful motivation, and the closure of Tiger suggested that all the components of the triangle had to be much stronger. Educators, students, and resource people had to collaborate more effectively and be much better prepared for the short and long term.

The starting point or the first side of the triangle was the educators themselves. The committed involvement and leadership of the superintendent, central office staffers, and principals and teachers were acknowledged to be indispensable. Their roles had to be defined and adhered to. Given that the proposed program was new, complex, and involved students from five schools in the county, the superintendent would have to clear the way, make the schedule adjustments, and deal with a variety of unanticipated matters—that is to say he would have to be fully engaged in the project and willing to go out on the limb for it. School-house administrators also would face questions of scheduling; they would have to ensure that the participating students were meeting their class requirements and that parents and teachers understood this to be the case. They would need to assist in evaluation and the recruitment of support. They would have to welcome outside resource persons into the school. Space would have to be found and reassigned.

One factor that made it possible for all schools in the county to be involved is the Alabama On-line High School (www.aohs.state.al.us/). AOHS is a product of the PACERS Cooperative and the Program for Rural Services and part of its origins derive from Tiger Computers. The AOHS provides presently twenty-five high school courses on-line in an asynchronous fashion, therefore, every school and student in the state can have access to courses mandated for graduation. Cited by *Education Week*, as the US's only on-line school that provides the meat and potatoes courses (my language), the AOHS is a source of equity for rural kids, schools, and communities. Much of the confidence that such a project could be completed came from the successes of Tiger Computers to which I have already referred. I mention the AOHS to say that if rural students, communities, schools, and their supporters had not organised and acted together through PACERS, the on-line service would not exist; and if it did exist, it would be filled with advanced and specialised courses, and it would not be geared to serve local interests. We built our own, and we built it well. In the case of NuGenerations, students from

across Hale County can come to work at the business for part of the school day because they can take needed courses on site from the AOHS.

The teacher coordinating the NuGenerations project faced a series of challenges. In the first place her roles would be different. She would have to expect more from her students than she had ever done. More would be asked of them. To a great degree she would have to allow success or failure to rest upon their shoulders. She would have to present them and their work to the public in a variety of challenging settings. In the world of digital technology, she would not be the expert handing out the necessary information. Her range of technical knowledge would shortly be superseded by her students, and she—like her students—would have to depend upon outside experts. She would become a colleague with students and with resource persons, a project coordinator, a business consultant, and a learner herself. For example, although she had taught business-related courses, it was necessary for her to take a graduate level entrepreneurship course to assist her students to set-up and operate an effective and on-going school-based enterprise. The course she took was offered by REAL Enterprises, a US program that promotes entrepreneurship. AlabamaREAL (www.prsr.ua.edu/sbusiness.html), a member of REAL Enterprises and a program of PACERS and the PRSR, provided scholarship support for her training, operational consulting when the project started, and linkage to other teachers engaged in similar projects. Effective business operation was a priority. It had become increasingly clear in PACERS' many school-based businesses projects that students could undertake very serious enterprises that made considerable difference to them and to their communities. However, a strong business plan and operational culture were understood to be essential for success. With such support in place, students could, in Jonathan Sher's words, make jobs, not just take jobs, and their businesses could produce entrepreneurs and enterprises in a relatively passive economy.

It was also clear that ongoing external support was needed to prepare teachers and students to run businesses, like NuGeneration, and to help them fashion and update the plans indispensable for their continuing operation. NuGenerations was not to be play school; its success or failure was not going to be measured simply in terms of grades and test scores. A lot more was at stake.

And for students who would participate in NuGenerations, the stakes were raised immediately. They were equals in the equilateral triangle of Consequential Learning. The load on them was as heavy as that upon the teachers and resource persons. They would be supported, but in the end success or failure would depend upon them. They would have to gain and apply high-level skills, make critical judgments, interpret their effort to their supporters, work with each other and with adults, and produce

the goods. They were responsible agents accountable to each other, to their supporters, and in a very public way to their communities. In order to get the job done, they had to move from being novices to experts. For this language of "novice to expert", I am indebted to John Bruer, who suggests that learning is in fact "...the process by which novices become experts" (Bruer, 1993). In my own interpretation of what he meant, learning is not simply about bits and pieces of information, but about conceptual understanding that leads to mastery and application. For the kids at NuGenerations Technology—or those in hundreds of similar projects—it is absolutely necessary for them to become experts, i.e. not technology students but practitioners using disciplinary techniques and tools.

What motivates them to become experts? In terms of the projects recounted here and others I know, motivation lies in the challenge and opportunity to do good work that benefits communities, that brings public acknowledgement and affirmation, and that has results whose consequences are apparent to and relevant for young people. In the company of adults who believe in them, share responsibility with them, and give them technical support and model for them critical thinking, young people will aspire to learn in new ways and to make a difference in the places where they live. In fact the interaction of students with adults is crucial. The American educator, Deborah Meier (Meier, 2002) says that the main problem in American education is the lack of contact between students and adults who are making their living and lives in the world that students are moving rapidly toward.

Of course this brings the focus to the third side of the triangle—to the "outsiders" or experts who bring to the school information, skills, experience, connections, and other resources needed for the project and needed to enhance the school itself. Schools must be open and hospitable to constituencies and individuals ready to help when the job is laid out for them and the invitation issued.

In Hale County, educators asked for help from the local banker, a few business people, and other individuals interested in the schools. The volunteers formed themselves into an advisory committee to whom students would ultimately have to present their business plan. The committee held out the prospect of funding and materials and they would help interpret the project throughout the county. In response to a proposal prepared by Hale County educators, local volunteers, and PRSR staff, start-up funds were provided by the Appalachian Regional Commission through its initiative to develop entrepreneurship.

NuGenerations Technology was on its way. Student applications were received and youngsters were interviewed, selected, and received their marching orders. It turned out that the first march—that is the first project was extraordinarily demanding for any group let alone a collection of technology

rookies. Their task was to network the county courthouse—the governmental centre of the county. The century old building was not designed to be amenable to telephones much less to computer networking. Its occupants had little ability to imagine, much less help move such a process along. As already noted the county itself languished on the far side of the digital divide with little local expertise. There was obviously a great deal of learning, training, hard work, and practice to be done before the student novices could wire the building and set in motion a functioning network—that is before the Internet could be reached or the office down the hall for that matter. To fill the void, the Program for Rural Services and Research assigned a staff member with a degree in computer technology and a lot of hands on experience to be the students' trainer and guide—she was to be the person to make the youngsters experts and to see them through a very tough task. The PRSR staffer did her work very well, and in fact she is a person I have already mentioned in this presentation. Blair Davis never would go back to look at her Tiger Computer building, but she would a decade later help students in some of the most needy rural schools in America complete an almost unimaginable task. I think of it as another case of rural folk building our own experts.

I of course do not know the future for NuGenerations. It has had a significant start. Educators, students, and resource persons worked effectively to make the business a reality and to see it successfully through a major project. Word has spread about it through national publications, and other schools systems in similarly desperate circumstances have made inquiry about assistance in replicating the approaches. Hale County's governmental system has been strengthened and its schools and young people are seen in a new and better light. NuGenerations Technology has developed novices into experts; kids have skills and products to put in their portfolios and have made connections with post-secondary institutions and careers. An authentic learning space has been created where educators, young people, and "outsiders" can work together and learn from each other as they make a difference in their schools and communities.

Summary

Lists are boring and suggest the kind of memorisation and non-critical thinking that I have set out against here. Nonetheless, I am going to conclude with three lists. The lists include roles and functions that should characterise the groups on the three sides of the Consequential Learning triangle: educators, students, and outsiders who have been linked together to complete an appropriate public task. The meaning of the roles is rather self-evident and, therefore, receives little comment. However, it is my experience that the roles and functions are not traditional ones nor do all have high priority. When noted and, thereby, emphasised, they serve to broaden the definition of those educators,

students, and "outsiders" committed to linking learning and place and to forging collaborations between schools and their communities and constituencies with the purpose of making both better.

Educators are coordinators and organisers, interpreters, documenters, evaluators, teachers, learners developing new skills and better professional practice, designers of curriculum, recruiters, entrepreneurs, colleagues with students and "outsiders," and owners. They explain the connection of student work to external academic mandates and to community hopes. All these words of definition were given to me by teachers describing what they did in the kind of work I have noted under the rubric of Consequential Learning. Above all these roles are seen as creative and reflective of the appropriate status and practice of an educator.

Students are recognised as community members and contributors; they are producers, critical thinkers, self-aware difference-makers, decision makers, teachers and learners, owners, accountable, responsible, managers, evaluators, colleagues and collaborators with each other and adults, de facto historians or scientists or publishers, and they are happy. They are people creating a portfolio of accomplishments and of skills that they understand to apply to their places and their futures. They are novices becoming experts—not in "examsmanship" but in community life, in making a difference, and in preparing for successful living. "Outsiders" are bringers of skills, energy, interest, and resources, setters of real world and professional standards, evaluators, teachers, advocates, connections to the future and the community. They manifest public interest in schools and young people, and they are indispensable to any effort to make schools richer and stronger. They may be people with skills, money, time, interest, connections, and concern—whatever their capacities, places must be made for them in the educating of young people. They are an equal side of the triangle.

It has been my good fortune for thirty years to be able to watch rural educators, big and little rural kids, and all kinds of resource persons and organisations form partnerships to make their schools and communities better by linking them together and by understanding the importance of place in education. I have seen results that the culture of education and the condition of rural could never have predicted. The results promote the notions of rural competence and call for initiative and collaboration and for building our own. They do not overlook the power of the pathologies, but they suggest that rural educators, young people, and communities are up to challenge of making their schools and places better.

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RESOURCES

Information on PACERS projects, AlabamaREAL, and other education and community development initiatives can be found at www.prsr.ua.edu or www.pacers.org, the web-sites for the Program for Rural Services and Research and the PACERS Cooperative.

PACERS Community Newspaper Project
Sample newspapers, a guidebook for student publishers, and documentation on the project are available from the PRSR.

Community History

Sunup til Sundown (A student-written oral history of agriculture on Lookout Mountain, Alabama.)
Catching Memories in a Box (A collection of photographs and notes by elementary students that documents the lives of their families and friends in Coffeeville, Alabama.)
Here I Stand (A CD containing songs and recitations based on the life stories of rural Alabama elders; jointly produced by PACERS/PRSR, Larry Long/Community Celebration of Place, and the Smithsonian Folkways).

Community Celebration of Place (www.communitycelebration.org).

Curriculum Guidebook for Elders Wisdom Children's Song and CDs and Audiotapes

Related Web-sites

The following web-sites have information on programs that build on students' community connections and that emphasise their capacity to learn while making a difference. They provide connections to other organisations, examine related issues, and offer perspectives on assessment of community-based learning.

Education Foundation (www.educationfoundation.org.au);

Rural School and Community Trust (www.ruraledu.org);

What Kids Can Do (www.whatkidscando.org)