Gratitude, Reciprocity and Joyful Connection: Cultivating Planetary Well-being in Education

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GRATITUDE, RECIPROCITY AND JOYFUL CONNECTION: CULTIVATING PLANETARY WELL-BEING IN EDUCATION

A Master's Project Presented

by

Kristen M. Andrews

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Science
Specializing in Natural Resources with a Concentration in Leadership for Sustainability

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Project Committee:

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Abstract

As an educator in the Anthropocene, I am called to create the conditions for students and teachers to care for themselves, others, and the earth in support of the greater whole. Care is born of connection, and when people engage in activities that foster relationships among all beings, human and non-human, they are poised to experience joy. From a place of joyful connection, our unique gifts are more likely to manifest in the interest of planetary wellbeing. The focus of this project was to cultivate this type wellbeing in educational venues by employing the interactive tools of gratitude and reciprocal service. Integrated into these activities were opportunities for human expression of diversity, interdependence and self-organization in order to confront dynamics of power and privilege. Project work included developing and mentoring service learning projects and participating in discussion groups with undergraduates in the University of Vermont Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources and with high school students in the Middlebury Congregational Church Senior High Youth Service Group. Assessment involved active listening, reflective journaling, peer coaching and written and oral student feedback. My findings are recorded in a series of vignettes illustrating educational best practices focused on gratitude, reciprocity, compassion and other pedagogical conditions I experienced as facilitating joyful connection and cultivating wellbeing in teaching and learning settings.
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Team Thank You builds a bridge for The Watershed Center in Bristol, VT
Introduction:

“The dangers coming down on us now are so humongous that it is really beyond an individual mind all by her/him/itself to take it in.”—Joanna Macy (Jamail, 2017)

This sentiment, articulated by eco philosopher Joanna Macy, is familiar to most humans living on Planet Earth. Yet young people, who are expected to address these dangers in order to secure a future for their generation and beyond, bear this burden especially intensely. College students who have chosen to apply themselves to the academic fields of Natural Resource Management and Environmental Studies discover the present realities of social, ecological and economic degradation in course after course. Macy names these overwhelming feelings as “the pain of the world itself, experienced in each of us” (Macy and Brown, 2014, p. 31). She warns that our culture’s belief that pain is dysfunctional leads to “subliminal censorship (which) impedes access to the vast realm of the unconscious, that wellspring of intuition, creativity, and foodstuff for genius, the part of us that knows we’re embedded in life” (p. 31). She goes on to suggest an appropriate response: “We need to sit together, grab each other and be together as we even take in what is happening, let alone how we respond” (Jamail, 2017).

The focus of this project was to create the conditions for young people to be together with themselves, each other, and with what Margaret Wheatley describes as “forgotten companions and animate Earth” (Wheatley, 2014). Through these connections, I sought to further explore the role that the experience of joy can play in the expression of the unique gifts of all beings, in support of planetary wellbeing. For the purposes of this project, I have settled on the Taoist definition of joy as “the natural feeling inherent in the fact of living...the feeling of being in the current of life” (Larre & de la Vallée, 1996, p. 18).

I have been working in the field of education for 34 years now and parenting for 17. Throughout this time, I have consistently questioned and explored the nature and purpose of learning. I am inspired by Gandhi, who defined education as “an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man–body, mind, and spirit” (Kumar, “Education and Peace: A Gandhian Perspective”). I resonate with Robin Kimmerer’s view that the purpose of education is, “to learn the nature of your own gifts and how to use them for the world” (Kimmerer, 2014, p. 239). These words have helped me to identify and define where my calling as an educator lies. In my own educational practice, I have seen the power of the integration of mind, heart and spirit. I have noticed the ways that practices of gratitude and reciprocity have nurtured connection among human and/or non-human beings in ways that seem to draw out the unique gifts in each learner.

Gratitude researcher Kerry Howells asserts that “to take the kind of brave and urgent action our earth and humanity require, we need to be deeply moved by a force that connects us with each other, our environment, and perhaps to something greater than ourselves” (Howells, 2012, p. 5). In her work with students and teachers, she has observed that when gratitude "live(s) in our hearts in an authentic and contemporary way, it can offer that bridge to community connection and action” (p. 5). David Orr, in his essay Gratitude illustrates how gratitude inspires reciprocity: “Saying thank you is to say that we belong together—the giver and the thanks giver—and that it is this bond that frees us from alienation. And the gift must move. What is given must be passed on. In the end nothing can be held or possessed—a truth grasped by every culture that approaches what we’ve come to call sustainability” (Orr, 2011, p. 44). I saw potential for manifestation of joy in these practices, and was compelled to examine them more deeply.

In my role as a teacher and learner I am continually asking two central questions:

1. What are the conditions we need to create in order for students and teachers to care for themselves, others, and the earth in support of the greater whole?
2. How can I, as a teacher, nurture the development of the individual spirits of those I work with and at the same time nourish and grow my own spirit?

The goal of this project was to address these questions by experimenting with and learning from educational practices with the potential to cultivate joyful connection among human and non-human beings:

1. Creating the conditions for human expression of diversity, interdependence and self-organization
2. Employing the tools of gratitude and reciprocal service
Strategies and Methods:

In order to explore these questions and address these goals, I designed, implemented and supported educational activities in teaching and learning venues having the following characteristics in common:

1. Significant interactions with undergraduate and high school aged students;
2. Service learning as a focus of the program;
3. Embedded opportunities for the cultivation and support of diversity, interdependence and self-organization.

In the development of project activities, I utilized the following principles to guide my exploratory process:

1. Engaging mind, body, and spirit;
2. Fostering connection with the earth, self, and others;
3. Practicing gratitude and reciprocity.

Based on the above criteria, I engaged in the following activities:

1. Teaching Assistant for the UVM Capstone Service Learning Course NR206, Environmental Problem Solving and Impact Assessment (Fall 2016 and Spring 2017)
   In this role, I served as a project mentor for 14 groups of 2-6 students as they carried out a variety of environmental problem solving projects with community partners.

2. Community Partner for two NR206 projects (Fall 2016 and Spring 2017)
   In this role, I acted as a community partner working with groups of 3-5 students as we designed and piloted collaborative experimental projects with youth and adult leaders in my community.

3. Teaching Assistant for NR207 Power and Privilege and the Environment (Spring 2017)
   In this role, I attended large group discussions (100 students) and led some small group discussions (10-12 students) on white privilege.

4. Co-leader of the Middlebury Senior High School Youth Service Group (Fall 2016 and Spring 2017)
   In this role, I led small group (8-10 students) and large group (30-40 students) discussions on topics related to service and power and privilege.

Methods of Evaluation

Throughout this experimental and exploratory process, I engaged in ongoing critical reflection individually and with students, peers and advisors. I regularly evaluated my work in the realms of relationships, process and results by reflecting upon these questions:

Relationships:
   Am I developing authentic connections with college and high school aged youth?

Process:
   Am I continuing to ask deeper questions about what clears pathways for joy?

Results:
Am I developing tools to create the conditions for joy to emerge in the lives of youth and in my own life?

Examples of my assessment activities included:

- Reviewing, evaluating and providing written feedback on the critical reflections, midterms and final reflections of 28 NR206 students 4-6 times per semester
- Attending NR206 class weekly for 2 semesters where I listened, observed, participated in conversation and led discussion sections
- Asking students questions related to gratitude and reciprocity and listening to their responses during group mentoring meetings for eight groups of 2-5 students 5 times per semester
- Asking students how they felt about being asked questions about gratitude and reciprocity in an academic setting and listening to their responses at the end of each semester
- Engaging individually with 28 students during 15 minute check-in meetings once per semester
- Participating in a peer learning community at weekly processing meetings with other NR206 TA’s and Course Instructor Zac Ispa-Landa
- Attending and participating in NR207 class as well as planning and evaluation meetings with NR207 instructors weekly for 1 semester.
- Maintaining a Personal Process Journal where I
  - Focused on my intuitive responses to students’ verbal, written and creative expressions
  - Challenged myself to ask new questions as I gained new insights
  - Documented my progress in developing my chosen Core Leadership Practices and Measurements of Success
Results:

Throughout the two semesters of this project I had multiple opportunities to employ the tools of gratitude and reciprocal service and to support human expression of diversity, interdependence and self-organization. Documentation of my work with students (below) includes specific activity plans, direct quotes from students and examples of student work generated in response to my prompts and presentations.

NR206: Environmental Problem Solving and Impact Assessment

1. Fall Semester lesson on gratitude developed and presented with Zac Ispa-Landa (Appendix 1)

2. As part of our Spring semester lesson on gratitude, Zac and I spent time consulting with 5 students who were engaged in an NR206 community project focused on gratitude. A summary of the students’ experiences with gratitude practices appears in the Personal Testimonies and Example Mindfulness Practices sections of their NR206 project website.

3. Student exemplars of critical reflections on gratitude – Fall Semester (Appendix 2)

4. Fall semester 3rd project progress meeting; student responses to questions on gratitude and reciprocity (Appendix 3)

5. Final project progress meeting; student responses to questions on reciprocity and gratitude
   a. Fall Semester (Appendix 4)
   b. Spring Semester (Appendix 5)

6. Final Expression of Growth and Learning developed with Zac Ispa-Landa (Appendix 6)
   a. Fall Semester student exemplars of Final Expression (Appendix 7)
   b. Spring Semester student exemplars of Final Expression (Appendix 8)

7. Fall Semester community project proposal (Appendix 9)
   a. Student final report (Appendix 10)

8. Spring Semester community project proposal and pitch (Appendix 11)
   a. Student project proposal (Appendix 12)
   b. Students’ final report (Appendix 13)
   c. Student project website: https://sites.google.com/view/compassionateconservation/home?authuser=0
   d. Student reflections on the project (Appendix 14)
   e. Excerpts from Student Final Expressions (Appendix 15)
   f. Article in Addison Independent on the project (Appendix 16)

NR207: Power and Privilege and the Environment

1. Discussion section reflection (Appendix 17)
Middlebury Senior High Youth Service Group

1. Presentation and discussion on homelessness in Addison County (Appendix 18)

2. Serving Angels/Power and Privilege discussion activity (Appendix 19)


Other related and influential activities:

I attended a presentation for the youth group offered by Simply Smiles, the organization coordinating the service trip to the reservation in South Dakota.


I participated in 2 workshops based Joanna Macy’s *The Work That Reconnects*.

Evaluation/Assessment:

I began this study with the belief that we humans need to do a better job loving all beings in order to continue to live on this planet. I assumed that the more connected we felt, the more joy we would feel and the more deeply we could love one another. It seemed to me that recognizing the good in one another and engaging in exchange of that good was a route to developing the kinds of joyful connections that cultivate love and wellbeing.

As the project progressed, I began to discover another result of connection, one that can spring from the opportunity to acknowledge planetary pain in community. Joanna Macy explains this pain as based “less in concern for the personal self than in apprehensions of collective suffering—of what is happening to our own and other species, to the legacy of our ancestors, to coming generations and to the living body of Earth” (Macy and Brown, 2014, p. 21). I witnessed this raising of consciousness as fertile ground for increased appreciation of diversity and interdependence and an impetus for self-organization. In order to love one another better on this planet, I recognize that in addition to seeking joy, we may need to expand our awareness of the distress of our world. In this state, we might be better equipped to respond appropriately to the feedback we are receiving as a species and perhaps find new avenues to reach out beyond ourselves to attend to the needs of the greater whole.

Based on the experiences of this project, I developed a list of practices I believe can help create the conditions for human expression of diversity, interdependence and self-organization and, in turn, cultivate planetary wellbeing.

1. Gratitude
   a. Individually designed daily gratitude practices
   b. Recognition of cultural differences in the experience of gratitude
   c. Structured, prompted space for gratitude for toward human or non-human beings built into academic settings.

2. Reciprocity
   a. Balanced power dynamics in teaching and learning
   b. Opportunities to recognize and express gifts given and received in academic settings

3. Compassion
   a. Acknowledgement of the fears of white people as they confront their own privilege
   b. Opportunities to acknowledge the pain of the world in community

4. Other pedagogical conditions which promote joyful connection
   a. Multi-modal activity
   b. Cooperative physical activity
   c. Good food prepared in community outside
   d. Invisible leadership style (Appendix 21)

As I prepared for my presentation of this project, I designed a schematic diagram that illustrates the scope of the project and how each of the component parts ultimately support planetary wellbeing. (Appendix 22)
How this project will impact my future educational practice:
This project has opened up possibilities for a variety of new avenues for learning and exploration for me. I may decide to further study Joanna Macy’s The Work That Reconnects and become skilled at facilitating workshops focused on creation of life sustaining human culture. I am beginning to explore the use of contemplative practices as pedagogical tools and may seek to develop more advanced tools in this area. I am also looking at ways to integrate my work with students with my work with plants. I will be engaging in a study of Agroecology in the context of social justice later this summer and plan to continue my study of Medicinal Herbalism.

I walk away from this project with heightened consciousness of the struggles of others and gratitude for newly sharpened perceptual skills that will enable me to continue to deepen my capacity for compassion. I will use these tools to continue to discover new avenues for stepping in and beginning to interrupt cycles of oppression in the context of my own community in support of joy and planetary wellbeing.

My year of listening to students express gratitude in the context of reciprocal service has brought me great joy. I am filled with a profound respect for and awe of the contents of the hearts of young people on this planet today. Yet what I have experienced is only a cursory beginning, a tiny glimpse of the shining capacity of human spirits, including my own. I am compelled to continue to strive to create the conditions for young spirits to find their joyful place in the current of life. I am convinced that support for students at this level is critical to the wellbeing of our planet and that this work is my personal pathway to joy.
Recommendations/Next Steps:

I found the students I worked with to be very receptive to the incorporation of practices of gratitude and reciprocity into their academic and service work. I also perceived them to be distressed by the state of their world, compelled to work for its betterment and overwhelmed by the magnitude of the work ahead.

This project revealed the opportunity for future work that further explores techniques and venues for supporting the spiritual and emotional health of students in academic programs such as undergraduate Natural Resources and Environmental Studies. Joanna Macy’s process known as The Work That Reconnects includes exercises in Coming from Gratitude, Honoring Our Pain For the World, Seeing with New Eyes and Going Forth, (Macy and Brown, 2014) all of which I believe could be beneficial for students during these times. Power and Privilege work could certainly be integrated into Macy’s exercises as well. The model I developed for the Compassionate Conservation project has potential for replication. I see possibilities for working with local high school students in a similar manner at The Watershed. I can also imagine partnering with other local organizations to develop service opportunities for local high school and college students with a focus on gratitude and compassion.

Acknowledgements:

I wish to thank the many students who cheerfully took the time to thoughtfully answer my questions on gratitude and reciprocity. With generous spirits, they considered my curiosity and willingly dipped into their own wells of emotion, revealing that which inspires their lives. Thanks also to Zac Ispa-Landa, NR206 and 207 Instructor and Andy Nagy-Benson, Middlebury Youth Group Director for offering me laboratory space in their educational venues, with trust and freedom. I offer great gratitude to my committee, Matt Kolan, Kaylynn TwoTrees, and Simon Jorgenson for patiently creating a space where I could safely wrestle with joy, pain and complexity and find my own pathway forward. Finally, I send my heartfelt thanks to Izzy, Milo, Miguel, Kim and Juli of Team Thank You who built the bridge that carried me to a new understanding of my work in this world.
References:


Appendix 1: Lesson On Gratitude

NR206 Gratitude Activity- Zac Ispa-Landa
November 29, 2016

Intro, orientation, context

Arrange room into circles of 10 chairs
(thanks to Kristen Andrews for helping inspire and design this experience)

I want to offer gratitude as a practice and tool for working in the midst of challenging environments

starting from a place of stillness before jumping to our feet

gratitude as a way to cultivate stillness

As you’re thinking about going out into the world, getting jobs, being of service to the things you believe in, solving problems, practicing leadership, standing up for the environment, saving the environment (or trying to figure out what that even means) or just trying to get by… we need tools and practices to stay connected to wisdom, to our best selves, to our core values, to wellbeing…

think about cultivating gratitude as a place to come from – this might be very useful for you – it can impact your lives in real ways

“Empirical research in the area of positive psychology shows that those who are in a more grateful state are more optimistic, have greater resilience, tend to get less depressed, and have enhanced wellbeing.” (Howells, 2014, p. 59)

Practices like these can help us be grounded and present, and expansive and creative.

This is not about naïve optimism – this is about recognizing our interconnectedness. About recognizing that I can’t live for three minutes without taking a breath of oxygen that the trees have produced… that I couldn’t live for three days without freshwater that the rain brings, that the very elements that make up my body come from the plants and animals who have been feeding me for 35 years… it helps remind us of our connection to something larger

“To take the kind of brave and urgent action our earth and humanity require, we need to be deeply moved by a force (gratitude) that connects us with each other, our environment, and perhaps to something greater than ourselves.” (Howell, 2012, p. 5)

Where do you draw strength from? Where do you draw wellbeing from? How do you come back to your center, where you can act from wisdom?

This is a tool you can use in your lives. IT EASES SUFFERING, IT CONNECTS YOU TO SOMETHING LARGER. IT HELPS CONNECT YOU TO YOUR OWN SOURCE OF WISDOM AND STRENGTH.

If we think about the evolution of cultures – those that have been around for a long time often have a lot to teach about what works, from a cultural perspective, to create conditions for resilience, sustainability (ecological, social, personal), and wellbeing. Evolutionary fitness means being well adapted to your environment… There are things that work…
Dr. Kimmerer is a mother, plant ecologist, writer and professor at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, New York. She is a member of the Potawatomi Nation, a tribe located in Oklahoma - traditionally an Algonquian-speaking tribe occupying the Great Lakes region of the United States.

In the following passage, she’s referring to the Onondaga Nation – “a member of the Haudenosaunee (“People of the Long House”), an alliance of native nations united for hundreds of years by traditions, beliefs and cultural values. Also referred to as the Iroquois Confederacy or Six Nations, the Haudenosaunee consist of the Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Seneca, Onondaga Nation’s and Tuscarora nations…”


The sunrise ceremony is our Potawatomi way of sending gratitude into the world, to recognize all that we are given and to offer our choicest thanks in return. Many Native peoples across the world, despite myriad cultural differences, have this in common—we are rooted in cultures of gratitude.

Our old farm is within the ancestral homelands of the Onondaga Nation and their reserve lie sa few ridges to the west of my hilltop. There, just like on my side of the ridge, school buses discharge a herd of kids who run even after the bus monitors bark “Walk!” But at Onondaga, the flag flying outside the entrance is purple and white, depicting the Hiawatha wampum belt, the symbol of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. With bright backpacks too big for their little shoulders, the kids stream in through doors painted the traditional Haudenosaunee purple, under the words Nya wenhah Ska: nonh, a greeting of health and peace. Black-haired children run circles around the atrium, through sun shafts, over clan symbols etched on the slate floor.

Here the school week begins and ends not with the Pledge of Allegiance, but with the Thanksgiving Address, a river of words as old as the people themselves, known more accurately in the Onondaga language as the Words That Come Before All Else. This ancient order of protocol sets gratitude as the highest priority. The gratitude is directed straight to the ones who share their gifts with the world.

All the classes stand together in the atrium, and one grade each week has responsibility for the oratory. Together, in a language older than English, they begin the recitation. It is said that the people were instructed to stand and offer these words whenever they gathered, no matter how many or how few, before anything else was done. In this ritual, their teachers remind them that every day, “beginning with where our feet first touch the earth, we send greetings and thanks to all members of the natural world.” “the relationship of gratitude and reciprocity that has been developed increases the evolutionary fitness of both plant and animal” (p. 30)

This time of year is the time for gathering and going into the long dark time before spring comes and you burst forth

**Instructions**

1. This is more than just “thank you” – you can take this as deep as you want.
2. Voice something you’re grateful for… make a gratitude statement
a. be really, really specific (e.g. ice crystals freezing on the tips of white pines and the way the sun hits them…)
b. And a “because.” (helps them think about how gratitude is affecting them)
c. Go popcorn style (pop when you’re hot), don’t need to go in order, be inspired by one another, take notes… go multiple times

3. When bell rings (about 15 min), create an artifact, a poem, a sketch, a mini-essay, related to this experience, related to gratitude – this can be a touchstone for you as you move forward

4. This can inform your final expression assignment, many ways to weave it in, incorporate some twinkle of gratitude into final paper, weave it in somehow…

How to bring this practice into your life

daily gratitude journal
Gratitude before meals
Work it into other daily practice (running, yoga, etc.)
Gratitude research


Some follow up resources from class today:

• The text I read came from Chapter 7: Allegiance to Gratitude in Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Kimmerer

• Citations for the research I referred to can be found at: http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter_article/in-praise-of-gratitude

• A fantastic book on gratitude: https://www.amazon.com/Giving-Thanks-American-Morning-Message/dp/1880000547/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1480442358&sr=1-1

• A translation of the Mohawk version of the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address: http://nmai.si.edu/environment/pdf/01_02_Thanksgiving_Address.pdf
Appendix 2: NR206F Student Exemplars of Critical Reflections on Gratitude

Final Critical Reflection
12/04/16

After looking back at my previous reflections, I noticed a couple of trends that appeared throughout the reflections. The first was progress. It took me through the second reflection to find the skill to critically reflect on material and apply that to lecture. Even though I got better, I still have a hard time truly getting in depth with my reflections as these are not my strong suit. Towards the last couple of reflections, I noticed a more wholesome connection between class content and project experiences. This organic connection seems to begin when we started to get deep into the project and began to face significant problems. When these problems arose, class concepts seemed to manifest themselves from these. For example, we were at a standoff with the project and I, at the time, was the leader of the group, organizing and communicating with Angella. I was becoming complacent with my duties and became lazy when it came to talking with Angella. Then Evan stepped up big and took the lead organizing tasks with Angella and Barry, essentially spearheading the group. Evan led by example and motivated me to get back on the horse and to work hard. I am grateful for Evan stepping up and picking up my slack and getting our project back on track.

The reason I used the word grateful is this is the idea I want to pursue for my final project/ paper. I am grateful for a lot of things, but in the last month or so I haven’t felt all that grateful. It wasn’t until we had the gratitude session that I fully realized the negativity I’ve had regarding the election and the potential issues that are going to arise from it. I have consciously been trying to look around every day and reconnect myself with all the positive that is around me every day. I’m thankful for a healthy and happy family. I’m grateful I have plenty of food to eat. I’m thankful that I can be stoked that it snowed today, because I have a warm house and a comfy bed waiting for me. I’m grateful I have a wonderful girlfriend that brings endless joy to me. I’m grateful I have shoes on my feet and clothes on my back. These ideas seem to become cliché and during our exercise I noticed most people trying to come up with thoughtful answers, but it wasn’t until I heard Rose, sitting behind me, say she was thankful for the “day old muffin” she was eating. I think it is a blessing that many of us can allow these things to become cliché as we take them for granted. Once any of these become relevant, mostly on a negative level, the simple things, the thing we take for granted, are the things that matter most to us. I’m grateful that you and Zac reintroduced this idea back to me because I truly needed it! 😊💪🏼

I think overall this semester, looking back at old reflections, entry tickets and re reading a few articles I realize that I have learned more than I thought in this class. Each module was a stepping stone and combined with the project many of the concepts we discussed have come through in the project. I feel like I have some life strategies that are going to help me in my future. I have begun to think slightly different when it comes to group dynamics and leadership strategies, but most of all to be grateful every day.
Stopping to think about the endless possibilities of what I could do after graduating, has become increasingly daunting as I approach my final semester of college. The course work I am rigorously pushing to finish has been making it hard for me to visualize what my future might look like after college. This is clearly an extremely exciting time where so many amazing opportunities are being presented to me but I have been struggling to find joy in everyday life. After the recent election, spirits and morale have been low among everyone around me. During a time like this, it easy to be down and difficult to break out of that. I have been exploring ways to find light in the darkness that is constantly trying to overshadow us. I have come to realize that it is much easier to point out negatives that exist in the world around us, but it is much more difficult and courageous to find positives in the day to day life we live. Rather than leaning into the negatives, I have been trying to wake everyday with a positive outlook on the day, no matter how grim you are expecting it to be. Participating in the gratitude exercise in class last week helped inspire me start looking at my days in this light. It was great to consciously think about all the things I have to be grateful for in my life and hear what other students in the class chose to voice gratitude towards. Much of what I heard my classmates say, I am also grateful for but hadn’t put much thought to in the past few months. I have been striving to stop dwelling on what makes me angry and instead finding more time to recognize all that I have to be thankful for. Having so many opportunities to pursue after college and having parents that encourage personal exploration is something I need to be more thankful for. I need to realize that the stress I am feeling is only a means for getting me to the place I know I want to be. When I think of my education as something that millions of people aren’t fortunate enough to receive, the drive that I have begun to lose since freshman year, begins to be restored. I have been viewing my education this year as an end goal that I know I need to reach rather than an experience of learning. When I devalue the process of education, I am compromising the effectiveness of the education I am receiving. When I look back on certain assignments this semester, I often think only about finishing them or submitting them, instead of the content that I created. Re-reading some of my old critical reflections and my midterm paper, I now realize that I need to be more questioning of what I am learning and the ideas that I receive from around me and to find more satisfaction in not knowing. I thought I understood the readings we did this semester, but going back to read them more closely, I found myself gaining entirely new insights. Even though it is senior year, I still can’t view my education as a destination but instead I need to see it as a journey that I am so lucky to be on.
Appendix 3: NR206F 3rd Progress Meeting Responses

NR206 Progress Meeting #3  November 17, 2016
At the end of each of 6 meetings with student project groups, I asked students to respond to 3 questions. Responses were informal and verbal. I’ve transcribed them to the best of my recollection here:

Question #1: Where have you experienced **gratitude** related to your project? (Receiving or offering)

**Group 1**
people walking by the Railyard- you guys are making a difference!
A client stopped to talk to us and appreciated our work
When we got the ramp design approved Kate seemed appreciative of the amount of work we had to do. She realized it wasn’t so easy!
Shannon painted a pumpkin and brought it down- people loved it!

**Group 2**
“We felt a lack of appreciation from the Community Partner- it demoralized us a bit, there was little human connection – everyone was so busy and gratitude felt shallow
When we met Barry, he helped us connect to the land and we felt more appreciated. He seemed excited about what we could offer- then we felt excited again. We helped each other and felt gratitude among ourselves.”

**Group 3**
“ People on porches where we measured garbage seemed to appreciate that their street was chosen by us for the study.”
“We’ve felt gratitude among the members of our group- each doing their part and empathy for each other when we struggle.”

**Group 4**
“(CP) really appreciates us when we go down to the Intervale to help him. Within our group we help each other and are grateful for what we each contribute.”

**Group 5**
“The Conservation Commission was so grateful it was a bit overwhelming! They wanted to give us so many resources! We are grateful for all the email responses and returned calls.”

Question #2 Have you experienced **reciprocity** in your project venue? Does it feel balanced?

**Group 1**
“We connect with the other workers with our hands in the soil and we have a great time (playing “shovels”!) We were part of something! With (CP) it doesn’t feel hierarchical.”

**Group 2**
“I felt an uphill power dynamic. Our partner didn’t provide us with the resources we needed. We had to look elsewhere for help. She forced us to figure it out ourselves but it didn’t feel balanced.”

**Group 3**
“We are getting more than we are giving because we are getting experience even though we won’t finish the bridge.”
**Group 4**
“We are learning, problem solving and practicing human interaction as part of environmental problem solving.”

**Group 5**
“Sharing resources with the Conservation Commission, we got experience working with people, exploring different leverage points. It has been a circular exchange with the schools and other community members. (not just back and forth binary exchange.)”

Question #3 (only one group had time to answer this one)
What types of connection to people and the earth have you experienced during your project?

**Group 1** “Moving huge boulders with the 3 of us and the TreeTops guy and a come-along was joyful. Connection to rock and each other. Moving mountains!”
NR206 Final Meeting with Community Partners:

The students prepared agendas summarizing their semester's work for the community partner and asked for critical feedback. At the end, I posed 2 questions to students and community partners:

1. **Reciprocity:**
   As a service learning course, NR206 is designed to create opportunities for reciprocal service. Could you reflect on the degree of balanced reciprocity that you experienced during this project? Did what you offered balance what you gained from this project?

   Students responded by offering unique descriptions of what they found most valuable about the project—the most meaningful and satisfying experiences they had. Without exception these offerings were deeper and more authentic than what had been expressed in the meeting up to this point. Community partners heard new information here and saw the broader value of their project.

   Community partners offered the benefits they had enjoyed beyond the deliverables outlined in the proposal, often revealing aspects of the students' work that was meaningful and valuable to them for the first time.

2. **Gratitude:**
   In NR206 this semester we have been experimenting with bringing the concept of gratitude into the academic realm. I'd like to take this opportunity to invite you all to express any feelings of gratitude that you have experienced toward humans or non-humans through any aspect of this project.

   Students were quick to respond to this prompt, often citing the gratitude they felt for one another and the relationships they had developed. Their responses went far beyond thanking their community partner for the chance to work with them and encompassed a wide range of entities.

   Community Partners responded to this question enthusiastically as well. They spoke of their personal values and how aspects of this project had helped them to realize what they were unable to do alone.

   Again, these responses were deeper and more personal and diverse than what had been communicated during the formal part of the meeting.

3. **Feedback:**
   Next, we excused the community partner and I met with the students alone for a few minutes. I asked them:
   a. How did that meeting feel to you?
   Students universally expressed amazement at how pleased the partner had been with their work and admitted to being worried that they had somehow disappointed them. They seemed both calm and elated. Their anxiety had melted away and they realized that success could look entirely different than the original plan. They recognized that the relationships they had built with each other were a critical component of their success.
b. How did you feel about me asking you all to discuss reciprocity and gratitude in this formal academic context?

Students were grateful for the informal opportunity to express (as opposed to suppress) their feelings in the context of the project. They acknowledged that they feel a need for this type of processing and that they are rarely given opportunities for “human” expression in an academic, scientific context.

**Group 1:**
**Reciprocity:**
Community Partner (CP) “It takes time to move from transactional to transformational. I don’t know yet. You are all welcome to come down to the Railyard anytime in the future to just hang out!”

Students:
“I could have given more.”
“I would have liked a more consistent exchange of specific feedback in order to know if our work is making a difference.”
“I often wondered if people were appreciating our work. When a person at the Railyard told us he liked our work, I felt like I was getting something back in exchange for my work.”
“What I wanted most was to become part of the herbalism community at the Railyard. I was looking for connection in exchange for my work.”

**Gratitude:**
(CP): “I appreciate that you brought yourselves fully to this project. You made honest effort to overcome your fears and figure out the problems you encountered. I’m grateful for the integrity of this group.”

Students:
“I am grateful for spending time with this group.”
“We have become very cohesive and through our communication have really enjoyed our time together.”
“I appreciate the opportunity to build something tangible, long lasting and that you trusted us to design it.”

**Group 2:**
**Reciprocity:**
(CP): “You have given us a huge gift and we got the better end of the deal. We got 3 really nice bridges and lots of physical work. The video puts us on the map!
In return: We are nice people! We offer you access to the warm and welcoming community we have established and a chance to be on the land.”

Students:
“We got intangible lessons, all of you were super nice. We got a great 206 project and opportunities to overcome difficulties.”

“We gave work on the bridges, but we worried we would disappoint you by not finishing them all.”

“What we got; we were able to problem solve without stress- we knew whatever we accomplished would be appreciated. You let us know that you were flexible as we figured out how to solve the problems.”

“You trusted us to figure it out.”

**Gratitude:**
(CP): UVM students are always kind and caring- willing, easy, relaxed and fun to hang out with
I’m grateful that I could trust your steady pace and know you were driving the train
For the partnership with 206 and UVM and the good communication
For the magic of the woods and its healing."

Students:
“For the group project. We became much better friends.”
“Being able to be on the land-for the peacefulness of the land- it’s an awesome place.”

“I live near Earthwalk and didn’t know about it. I’m grateful for the chance to work close to home in my
local community, for my new connection to Earthwalk, for the chance to choose this project. I appreciate
the kind and welcoming way you let us learn tangibly.”

**Group 3**

**Reciprocity:**
(CP):
“I got staff time to go out on the street, guinea pig, test, pilot projects I can’t funding to explore. Now I
have info to show my supervisors to show viability of my ideas and fresh ideas”
“I gave some suggestions and was happy to make the trip from Montpelier 2 times.”

Students:
We got quick responses to emails, and a learning experience with a real world feel. Debriefing really helps
us to understand what success really means.”

“I got a trial-by-fire, not-so-neat REAL research project working with humans (as opposed to numbers in
the lab.) I gained new awareness of my own household’s trash practices.”

“I learned to overcome obstacles and reach out to people outside of the school.”

**Gratitude:**
(CP):
“That 3 outstanding students chose this project, the UVM-ANR relationship…As a public servant, I have
many big unanswered questions I don’t have time to try to answer. This project helped answer some of
those question. The fact that you actually talked with people, going door to door is HUGE. You put a good
face on recycling and were great spokespeople”

Students:
“The opportunity to come to UVM to get this education and be in this situation and how much people
wanted to help us (stats prof, Casella, etc.) There were no bad apples in our group- all were enthusiastic
about the project and did their share willingly.”

“Meeting people who think about waste mgmt.. I was welcomed into a lot of homes to conduct my survey.
People had moments of realization as I talked to them.”

“People opened doors for me to learn and carry out this project. To work with my group members-
hands on-we were all into the project. We didn’t know each other before this class!”

Post meeting, just students in the room
“I found the informal nature of this meeting refreshing and reassuring, like a dialogue. I felt as if I had a chance to express my true thoughts and really be heard.” Reminds me of why I am proud to be a RESNR grad.”

**Group 4:**  
**Reciprocity**  
(CP)  
“I got a platform and momentum to move forward. I’m glad to hear you articulate what you learned from the process. I got the “who cares?” piece that I can now present to others to move the project forward. I got the experience of being a community partner and how to improve.”

Students:  
“I got problem solving with less structure, learned to find success through other means than the original plan and had the opportunity to recognize leverage points.  
“I got knowledge that there are ordinary citizens out there that care about pollinators and are knowledgeable (public engagement.)”

“Being flexible working with a large project group, communicating within a more challenging dynamic.”

“I learned about flexibility- the real challenges of it. Dealing with the concern of not doing enough and ending up with a new, exciting and beautiful product.”

“I got a new definition of success- a small but awesome public event.”

“I got a chance to consider the importance of leverage points and scale- I can apply it to other things. We were able to provide new info to our CP and groups to come.”

**Gratitude:**  
(CP) “The effort and spirit you brought, given the challenges. Your hopeful outlook and approach.”

Students:  
“The highway dept. and teacher Judy Elson were willing to talk to us.”  
“For pollinators and what they do.”  
“Practice for my thesis.”

“Something to support all my pollinator research. A chance to do something that helps the cause other than counting bees and blueberry seeds.”

“This project group was so positive, active, engaged, kind, receptive and open communicators Everyone participated in a meaningful way.”

“UVM allows us to culminate with a hands on project. A chance to practice making change from the bottom up.”

“A chance to do a project in an area foreign to me. I’ve recently had conversations at the farmer’s market and with my chiropractor about bees. I have a new way to share and communicate with people.”
“The people we worked with offered no resistance—They wanted to work with us. The library staff gave us positive feedback and was so willing to help us.”

Post meeting, just students in the room
“The more human aspects are often left out of academia. We are asked to suppress emotions and focus on short term goals and money. I put a ton of work into the outing club, but no one appreciated it so I got bitter…”

“We need to feel appreciated. It means a lot when people take time to say thank you. “

Group 5:
Reciprocity
(CP): “This was the most ambitious project at group has taken on yet! Much more was accomplished than I had hoped for. The group was able to think strategically about problems I don’t have time to solve.”
Students:
“I got interaction with the other workers at the nursery as equals, learning new skills.”
“I got the opportunity to talk about life with people at nursery- personal connection and mutual understanding when I had to go to my grandmother’s funeral.”
“Each week I looked forward to working and relaxing doing field work.”
“The nursery work was an escape from stress each week- “I’m a soil nerd”

Gratitude:
(CP)
“For the good cheer and talkativeness of the Burlington DPW drivers who deliver the leaves. Students integrating themselves into the ever changing dynamics of my staff- adaptable, resilient and calm!”
Students:
“When the hauler came through and delivered the leaves at the last minute. Experiencing the different perspectives of the various people we met at the nursery helped calm my pre-graduation anxieties.”

“This group was all on the same page, each pulling their weight and without any ‘tiffs’.”

“This was my best project group yet-great dynamics, effective communication, humility, responsibility.”

“Moments to put my hands in the soil and feel at home and be myself each week.”
https://sites.google.com/view/pruningroots/gratitude?authuser=0

Post meeting, just students in the room
“I was inspired by the gratitude activity we did in class to bring it to my TA position with freshmen. I was amazed at how receptive they were!”
https://jonathanconstabel.wordpress.com

“We cultivated a culture of gratitude amongst our group members and had the best group ever. In 206 there is a lot to be grateful for. Students’ feelings are often overlooked. We don’t get asked how we feel…”
**Group 6**  
**Reciprocity**

(Provisional Partner)  
"The deliverables are fantastic, but I’ll have to see what I get from them as I use them as time goes on."

Students:  
"The research I did allowed me to be able to use my new knowledge of Corporate Social Responsibility—that I’m extremely interested in. AND I felt as if I was helping NES."

"I had a chance to step outside of my field of study to do what interests me- looking at human ecosystems, biodiversity and the spiritual/social side of things."

**Gratitude:**  
(Provisional Partner)  
="For the 2 of you for stepping up to join me in this process, for taking the risk to try something unusual."

Students:  
"The opportunity to meet the founders of NES, Ben and April, who are in their 70’s. They are so full of life. I didn’t know people like that existed. They are examples of the way I’d like to live my life."

"Exposure to the International Festival and the chance to organize a fashion show. I’m grateful for the human connections I made in the process."

**Post meeting, just students in the room**  
"It felt comfortable and appropriate in this context. It was more awkward for me in class, but here I felt comfortable."

"I appreciated the opportunity to express gratitude for what was most meaningful to me."

I am just bursting with joy after these last few days of final project meetings. I have found a piece of my calling. These meetings could have been difficult, awkward and tense. The students were all worried that they had in some way disappointed their community partner. I feel deep gratitude for the opportunity to facilitate these expressions and listen to them as they emerged. In every case, the 2 questions took the meeting with the community partner to a new level, where students and partners alike were sharing heartfelt realizations with each other. The level of authenticity deepened, the gap between the students and partners narrowed and the students were quick to bring up the bonds they had developed with one another. One group acknowledged that the emphasis on gratitude in class had inspired them to regularly express gratitude to each other. As a result, they all felt this group had been the best group experience of their RESNR career!

I suggested to them that seeking and recognizing balanced reciprocal interaction and gratitude are tools over which we have control. They are our unlimited resources, especially in these times when so much seems out of our control.
Appendix 5: NR206S Final Project Meeting Responses

Student Responses to questions asked at NR206 Final Progress Meeting with Community Partners
May, 2017

**Question 1:**
**Reciprocity**
“One of the important goals of service learning is to create the conditions for reciprocal exchange. I’d like to ask each of you to comment on the balance you experienced between what you gave to this project and what you received as a result of participating in this project”

Student Responses:
“This project gave me a social perspective on holistic planning and campus politics – after so much data driven science work. Finally a good group project!”

“I got the opportunity to figure things out on my own, outside the classroom.”

“They trusted that we were well intentioned people and saw value in the work that we did”

“I got the chance to choose and carry out an outdoor, hands on project that I really wanted to do!”

“The teacher allowed us to take classroom time to try out our lesson plans and gave us feedback.”

“I received patience from the teacher and joy in interacting with the students.”

“I got real life experience; doing it and being there.”

(Community Partner (CP)): “The project enriched my community’s school, where my kids go.”

“I realized I am creative and organized and good at editing film!”

“I saw that the adults at Crow’s Path mostly ask questions... and get new answers all the time”

The project altered my views on education and what it means in the context of UVM. It gave me a framework for thinking about life flexibly. Teague created the conditions for relationship to develop

(CP) “The students were an embodiment of the spirit of Crow's Path.”

“Being outside every Weds awakened my personal connection to the land where I could use my senses, participate and see the experience through the kids’ eyes.”

“The gratitude circle helped me to see gratitude as natural, normal, authentic, simple and voluntary. Even just making a noise is OK.”

“I was inspired by Chuck, our community partner, as a human being. He is so dedicated to the landscape and his work with students and so passionate about his goals. He really gets things done and embodies the principles of permaculture.”

“Chuck (CP) is so productive, values others and find joy as he maintains his own happiness.”

(CP, Waldorf School): It felt as if we were working together to support the Waldorf school”
“We were given the freedom to design the shed on our own.”

(CP) "getting your excited text messages about tracks you had found made me feel like you guys were in this project with me!"

“I got the freedom to go out tracking whenever I wanted to, and so much tracking experience!”

**Question #2**

**Gratitude**

“We have been talking about gratitude in class this semester as a tool which can be very useful in the process of environmental problem solving and in maintaining an upright stance in group work. Considering the entire project process over the course of the semester and the interactions you had with both human and non-human beings, I’d like to ask each of you to share an example of a time when you experienced a warm orb of gratitude toward or from a human or non-human being that has remained lodged in your heart.”

Student Responses:

“The opportunity to come full circle and reflect on how far I’ve come in my education.”

“Our group was so understanding, low stress and supportive of one another.”

“The opportunity to see what I could change and how we have all grown and changed.”

“Corey and Gerald (CP’s) were hopeful and willing to dream”

“No one called the cops when we showed up with a chainsaw”

“Seeing the kids running along the benches we built, like they were balance beams.”

(CP): “A peaceful moment sitting on the new benches facing the wetlands, watching the sunlight and hearing the birds.”

“The students’ curiosity about small things, their willingness to ask questions and learn.” (hard to be positive when it is all so fresh)

“The support of my group members who helped me put aside my ego and kept showing up.”

“The students remembered our names when we came back!”

“The students welcoming and accepting us a strangers.”

“The opportunity to practice being understanding of other peoples’ challenges and look at the big picture.”

“The conversations we had as we traveled back and forth to Montpelier.”

“Getting to know group members and being loving to one another.”

“ After we finished playing a game of Dungeons and Dragons with the kids in the snow and the sunshine, when we left, one kid, Kae, waved goodbye..."
“I got lost on the land one day, so I put my camera away and followed the sound of the children, who were excited about finding a giant tree fungus.”

(CP) “The videos you made gave me a new window into the evolution of the kids at Crow’s Path.”

(CP) “I really love pitch day, where so many community connections happen.”

“I’m so grateful to see Rock Point and what goes on there and to get 4 credits doing this!”

“Taking my friends to see the sunset at Rock Point and introducing them to the plants and the trees and sharing this experience with my family.”

“Chuck (CP) sharing his story with us so that we can share the story with others.”

“My passion for horticulture and the joy of working with plants”

(CP Waldorf School); “In our first year as a school, we have been struggling with our lack of infrastructure. Having 3 capable, inspired, professional students come and work with us was a bright and shining light that has heartened us and propelled us forward!”

“This project made me grateful for Vermont where we can source local, recycled resources and be part of a community.”

“The opportunity to learn a bit about building and contribute to a tangible, beautiful project working with these guys.”

“This project gave me a real outlet for my pent up energy, a healthy distraction from thinking about my buddy who recently suffered a traumatic brain injury.”

“For all the unexpected close range wildlife encounters, which brought me back to my deep connection to nature.

“Chasing after that mink, following its tracks in the snow, all together at the tracking club meeting.”

“Opening up a new part of my brain for mammal tracking, a new awareness. I am lighter on my feet in the field now.”

“When you all showed up at the Burlington Geographic meeting so excited and dedicated, I thought, ‘This is my TEAM!’”

Question 3

Debrief:
“What was it like for you to express these types of feelings in the context of an academic meeting in the Rubenstein school? Did it feel appropriate to the situation? What was your comfort level with this process?

Student responses:
“We get less of this in NR (ENVS does it more)”
“It’s casual and made us feel like Corey(CP) respected us a human beings.”

“It gave us closure.”

“Acknowledging each other at the end makes the experience more memorable.”

“It helps us internalize our learning and how it shapes us a people.”

“A reflective process of being grateful shapes you as a person and makes you have a happier life.”

“Makes me realize that most of my life I have been taking. It makes me appreciate the now and how I am growing internally and externally. It makes the world a more grateful place.”

“It helps me reflect with a broader holistic view, getting me out of the box of ‘now.’”
Appendix 6: NR206 Final Expression of Growth and Learning

Final Expression of Growth and Learning | NR206: Environmental Problem Solving
(Written by Zac Ispa-Landa with input from Kristen Andrews)

Assignment Description
This assignment is an opportunity to explore and share insights and learning that you have gained this semester. It is an opportunity for deep, rigorous, authentic, and integrated reflection and expression. It is an opportunity to polish and refine some of your thinking and reflection and to express it in a meaningful way that can be shared with others.

You are welcome to use a wide variety of media. This assignment can come in the form of a final reflection paper, a video, a creative writing piece, a collection of vignettes, a presentation, or visual art, for example. This final artifact of NR206 needs to be presented in a way that can be well understood by the reader or audience member. Pieces that do not contain written or verbal language or whose meaning is not overtly clear should be accompanied by an artist’s statement. (For information on artist’s statements see http://www.gyst-ink.com/artist-statement-guidelines/ and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artist's_statement). All work needs to be uploaded to Blackboard in a shareable digital format.

This assignment is an opportunity to try new things and to take risks. The primary goal is to further your own learning. Approach this as creatively as you can.

Direction you may want to take:

Analysis of your project experience
• Where was there tension in your project (name and describe it), and what was the learning for you in this?
• What were you trying to accomplish? What problem-solving tools and frameworks did you use? What theory of change did you base your work on? Did you solve the problem? What were the impacts of your work (intended and unintended)?
• What roadblocks or unexpected successes did you encounter that might serve you in your future work? What red flags might you recognize now after your project experiences?
• What happened during your project experience that you did not expect? How did you and your group handle these surprises?
• In what ways were you called upon to re-define your definition of success?

Integration of ideas, frameworks, and content from lectures, readings, guest speakers, and dialogue
• How do ideas, concepts, or frameworks from this class connect to each other and/or other parts of your life or education? What specific elements of the course related to your project? What perspectives of yours have been challenged?

Articulation of your leadership philosophy
“Leadership is our ability to pay attention and respond to what is actually happening.” - Mistinguette Smith
“Leadership is about responding with integrity to what we value most, and in alignment with our highest aspiration.” - Kaylynn TwoTrees
• How do you feel called to respond to what is happening in our country and on our planet in a way that is in integrity with what you value most and in alignment with your highest
aspirations?

Exploration of your theory of change
• How do YOU want to engage in change? What does a desirable future look like to you and how do you want to participate in creating it? How do you think change happens and what role do you see yourself playing?

Exploration of personal learning edges and new goals:
• What did I learn? What was unexpectedly revealed? What assumptions, expectations, or biases did I bring to the situation? What personal skills might have enhanced my experience/success with the course/project, and how might I develop them?

Expression of gratitude
• Did you feel appreciated by anyone during your project experience? How did this impact your work and level of motivation?
• Were you able to express gratitude to anyone during the project experience? How did this impact you and your group?
• What gratitude would you still like to express to other humans or non-humans?
• What creative mode(s) of expression might you utilize to express gratitude in relation to your project experience?

There are no "right" or "wrong" ideas. We will not assess your ideas but will evaluate the rigor and depth to which your work explores and express them; we are looking for thinking and expression that goes deeper than recall of information or exposition of opinions. All written work should adhere to professional level standards.
The design above depicts gratitude. Often when we think of gratitude we think of being grateful of others and remind ourselves to always be thankful. However, this class taught me that being grateful is about so much more than saying thank you. Showing or expressing gratitude is more of a personal action than a comment or remark. It is being respectful of the environment around you, as the trees provide you with oxygen, the soil provides you with food, and the water provides you with life. It is about recognizing when your actions are harmful to systems greater than yourself, and how to change your patterns so that you can be beneficial rather than hurtful to others linked to your decisions. Without being grateful, we lose site of important aspects of our environments, communities and our world, which give us life. In order to move forward in life, we must always remember to act with consciousness and gratitude in order to create happiness, sustainability and peace in our communities and with our planet. -
Artist Statement

Gratitude Journal

The conversation in class about gratitude and taking time for reflection reminded me of what I am thankful for. For this assignment, I decided I wanted to focus on my experience here at the University of Vermont as a whole, not just NR 206. I also wanted to explore reasons why I love to live in Burlington. I decided to take my own direction. Creating this gratitude photo journal has given me the power to reflect and expand my thinking.

Above everything, this class has taught me how to critically reflect and refine my knowledge. All of the readings were applicable and relevant to something in my life, or contained information on something that would better my understanding. My vision for this project is to showcase what made my four years here so special, and how it has shaped my newfound confidence, fierceness, and intellect.

Looking back, my experiences in Vermont have helped me gain independence and passions. As I move on, I thought about all of the trials and tribulations that occurred on my journey for my degree, and I am here to say I DID IT.

This work serves as the start of cataloging my gratitude. It contains gratitude for my opportunities, my backyard playground, and my accomplishments. I will now begin writing more every day in an attempt to practice mindfulness. Gratitude aids in stress relief, higher sense of self worth, block negative emotions, and brings out positive emotions.

Please enjoy this photo presentation as you take a glimpse into my life while in Burlington.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9NPYihvJIPuMjBIS01scFBzVWs/view?usp=sharing

Here are 2 websites made by students as final expressions:

https://jonathanconstabel.wordpress.com
https://sites.google.com/view/pruningroots/gratitude?authuser=0

December 13, 2016
NR 206  Final Paper

Gratitude is a virtue that we as humans don’t express enough to one another or to the world around us. It is only on certain occasions that I take the time to show the people around me what I am grateful for. Rather than waiting for the holidays to come around, I should take it upon myself to treat every day like a holiday. Waking up in the morning with a happy life and good health, is truly a gift. The finite planet we call home, is a gift. My freedom to say whatever I please, is a gift. It has become too easy for society to focus on negatives around us but the light of positivity can shine through even the worst darkness.
The media that I am surrounded with daily usually portrays images and ideas that I strongly disagree with on a personal level. Sometimes these images leave me feeling hopeless. Watching the future of my generation be dictated in such a careless way by people who won’t be around to see the damages they have created, makes everything that I am working hard to accomplish often seem meaningless and useless. I have always been the type of person that tries to find a positive note no matter how negative the situation but this is becoming increasingly difficult for me. I try to find gratitude in whatever realities are present. I need to do this to feel better about things that are out of my control. I also think that while it is important to express gratitude, I should also not feel there is anything wrong with anger and sadness that I may be feeling at the same time.

To better explain what I mean, I will quote Jim Valvano here. He said, “To me there are three things everyone should do every day. Number one is laugh. Number two is think -- spend some time in thought. Number three, you should have your emotions move you to tears. If you laugh, think and cry, that's a heck of a day.” The first time I heard this quote years ago, it really stuck with me and I tend to think about it whenever I am feeling a world-win of emotions. I like this quote because it says to me that the important thing is that I am feeling something. We are capable of being grateful while at the same time feeling sadness. Through our openness to be emotional, we can bring compassion into everything we do and experience. There are hundreds of different ways that I can approach any given day or situation that is presented to me. What’s important is the level of care we operate with. They say that the greatest thing that you can give someone is something that you made with your hands and this is how I understand gratitude. A gift that someone buys for you may be nicer than a gift that they personally create, but it is the thought that they put into that gift that makes it special. In a world where everyone wants the newest and nicest thing, it is heartwarming when you see people still having care for the process itself.

Although there are many things that extend out of my direct control, I still can control what I do personally. Many people get held up on things that are out of their control and focus very little attention on the impacts that they have on other people. All we can do as humans is be the best versions of ourselves and treat
other people the way that we want to be treated but no one is perfect and the best version of ourselves is not a destination we can ever reach. Actively working to better yourself and be a good person is a journey and a balance. The challenge that arises with this journey is the decisions you must make about what is best for yourself. It is much easier to see what you need as a person when you are making decisions alone but these decisions become increasingly difficult when you are strongly being influenced by other people. In the same way that I don’t want to dwell on things outside of my control, when it comes to my future, I don’t want to focus on what other people think. Following my heart and mind will bring me to the place I truly want to be and will surround me with all the right people to make this happen. It is not important to be with someone that makes you happy, but rather, be someone that makes you happy. I will always find comfort in being alone, where my mind is most clear.

In the past few months, I have been hearing the people around me settling on aspirations they have for life, specifically as we approach graduation and start looking for jobs after college. The dreams that I heard them talk about pursuing are dwindling by the day and the spark they once had for what is possible in life is beginning to fade out. To me, it sounds like they are unknowingly compromising the ability for themselves to be happy in the future. Many of my friends will end up taking jobs that are far from their ideal choice. I commend their efforts to secure good paying work after school but I am afraid they will end up not loving and living life to the fullest. I too want to find a job to support my lifestyle but I am not ready to settle.

Something I never want to see in my life is stagnation. I would like for my career to be something that I am constantly growing into and never arriving at. To have found a path you are comfortable on is equally as noble as not knowing exactly what you want to make of your life. Just because we are graduating doesn’t mean that we should stop questioning and exploring new ideas. There is a certain level of fear that being instilled in the minds of the American people every day and this fear is making us afraid to explore our thoughts freely. Having traveled abroad to Europe recently, I long for the new perspectives from new people that enlightened me so frequently during my time there. There is a bubble that each of us as individuals struggle to
break out of every day. Either we can remain the same person we were yesterday or we can actively work to improve ourselves on a personal level. There is a chance that even I will fall into the same place of dullness and complacency that I am currently trying to warn my friends about.

To avoid this, I would like to write a letter to my future, 25-year-old self, that I will be able to read four years from now to make sure I am still pursuing my dreams and continuing to make new dreams. The letter will read as following:

Dear _____,

Where ever in the world you are reading this, I hope the sun glistening in your eyes as it warms your face and makes you smile. If you are alone, I hope you are content and happy with yourself. If you are among company, I hope you are surrounded by people you love, and that love you back. I hope the waves you find are endless, and the mountain roads you one day return to are as snowy as ever. Don’t lose sight of where you came from and where you are destined to go. Give thanks every day for the wonderful bounty that Earth makes available to you and never take your life for granted. Take only what you need and give as much as you can. I hope your travels are only beginning and your dreams are only getting bigger. Believe in yourself and know that I will always believe in you. Be positive and you will find your way. If you can do all this, you will know peace.

Love, Your 21-year-old self

In conclusion, I would like to thank everyone who has been part of my learning process this semester, in any way, shape, or form. This has been my most insightful and eye-opening semester spent here at the University of Vermont. I am grateful for each and every one of you that has helped me along the way. It is because of people like you, that I am able to grow and be inspired. My only hope is that, in some way, I will have done the same for you.
NR 206 Final
This piece was written as a way for me to get outside of my boundaries as a student. You may be able to tell that I am not an experienced poet, but that’s what makes this a great piece of work. It is creative, fun, profound, though provoking, and took me a great deal of time to complete. Overall, I am proud of the piece I have produced! The topic of gratitude was introduced late into the class and had a true impact on me.

The Story of Three

This story does not simply begin with three,
Instead the three have shaped
The story for me.

Not to say they are the only ones
To have a profound effect on me,
But for now, I’ll stick with the story of three.

This story has no rhyme or rhythm,
No catchy tune or sign of Whitman.
Just a story by me about the three.

It came to me from lessons in class,
From which a trip was born to the past.
A trip that led me to the story of the three.

Inspirations from the class,
That made me think clear and fast,
To not take for granted the simple things in life before they pass.

It’s easy to lose sight,
Of those simple things in life.
The ones that become too normal to notice.

A warm house,
Food on the table,
Clothes on your back.

But do not plight,
When it seems, the simple things are lost from sight.
Take some time to recall those things that may have been overlooked.

When times become tough,
Think of those that have lost it all.
Or dream of what you may take for granted.

Recently, this was me,
Complaining about work, homework, money, politics.
As I sat in my warm house, surrounded by friends, eating a warm meal.
It was in that 206 class that inspired me to take a different path.
To look at life in a different light.
To recognize the luxuries, I take for granted and to think of those less fortunate than I.

I still struggle with this task,
But have realized I am lucky to have the life I have.
Now it was shaped by many, but let’s begin the story of three.

Here comes a change of pace,
Something that did not come with haste.
Let’s get on from the intro and into the story.

I digress, I must delay a little more,
To begin with a bit of an apology.
For I do regret, you will never know the three like me.

It is a tragedy for all,
That the ability to show,
The true beauty of the three
And their profound impact on me.

The three are people in my life,
That I often take for granted.
A brother, a mother, and a lover.

Now this brother is not one from my mother.
As I have one true brother, Ben.
Instead, this brother is from another mother.

Our journey started many years ago,
In a small Vermont town.
From which a great friendship was born.

I cannot remember exactly when or how we met.
It was early on in our elementary school career.
From that day, a friendship flourished.

From grade school to high school,
We shared many passions.
From sports to music, to food, to attitude to the adventures had.

There’s too much to be said,
About the good and the bad.
So, I will save some time and get to the point.
There a bond between us, never to be broken.
   Even when I’m awoken,
   At eight on a Sunday morn’.

We bonded through the greatest and toughest years in a kid’s life.
   We stuck together through thick and thin,
Spending nearly every day together; laughing, playing, learning.

There were and still are many times when I disregard him.
   Calling, calling, calling to reach me,
   Yet I ignore him.

   All the while,
   He only wants to see,
   What I am doing.

After high school our paths diverted.
   His took him across the country, Utah.
And mine stayed in our home state, Vermont.

I saw him grow and grow, having the time of his life.
   Skiing, biking, hiking, meeting new people.
   Adventuring. Living.

   My brother has shown me,
   Many places I thought I would never see.
Full of energy and adventure, he took me across the country.

   Sometimes I take for granted,
   The loyalty of this brother.
But now I recognize the importance of our bond.

I could go on all day about this brother of mine,
   Whom has inspired the adventurer in me.
   As I seek to move across the country.

   Next is the mother,
   And this time there is no other.
   The only one I will ever have.

I love my mother tremendously,
   As many do with one like mine.
   Mine is special.

   She has a heart of gold,
   That shines so bright.
You can see it in her eyes, her smile.

She has seen trials and tribulations,
   Ups and Downs,
   Deaths and disabilities.

   A brain tumor found,
   A husband lost.
Now she cares for three, on her own.

   Like her heart,
   She has shines through it all.
   With an undeterred spirit.

Sometimes I wonder how she does it.
   How she remains so positive, happy, joyous.
While I, seek to anger, confusion, pessimism.

   On her own, she raised two boys.
   She sent them to college.
   She sacrificed for everything we needed; wanted.

Always remaining together, strong.
   I have watched for years,
   Learning from the best.

   To be the best person,
   To all people.
   No matter who they are.

   To always smile and think through tough times.
Not to worry about the uncontrollable nature of life.
   She is the reason I am who I am.

   It tears me apart.
   She is my bedrock, yet at times,
   She’s the one I crash my anger on.

   Even this she takes.
Without flinching, she takes the blunt of all my troubles.
   Just so no one else does.

   Like the brother,
   I often take her for granted.
   Failing to pay her the gratitude deserved; and more.
And like the brother,
There is far more to be said.
But if I went on longer, there would be not time for the other.

Now off we go,
In search of the final piece of three.
The one that truly makes me, me.

It is time for the lover,
The one that holds me together.
For whom, my passion burns like fire.

She grips me tight when all is well,
But grips me tighter when times are ill.
I find similarities between the mother and lover.

The trueness of character,
Is easy to see.
Always putting others before herself.

She works hard,
Never complains,
And listens to me as I rant and rave.

She’s the newest chapter,
of this story of three,
But remains the most compelling to me.

She’s taken my heart and my soul,
How she did I’ll never know.
But she gave em’ back and made them full.

She forces me,
To strive to grow and grow.
To be the best I can be.

She’s a tough act to follow.
A perfect mix of character,
Kind, sweet, funny, smart, focused, and motivated.

An inspiration to all,
I look to her for strength, wisdom and comfort.
Whether she knows it or not.

The lover has challenged me,
To be bigger and think outside of myself.
To look forward; to chase my dreams.

Like the brother and the mother,
The lover’s taught me or than you know.
Still I take her for granted.

I’ll leave her story short,
And keep it sweet.
Because the rest of this story is mine to keep.

It seems it’s time to wrap up this story,
To conclude on why this matters so much;
To me.

Now these three, are not all that make me, me.
Yet they are the ones,
I take for granted mostly.

It’s often those closest,
That fall victim to disregard.
Not in the true sense, just lost in the everyday routine.

A simple lesson learned from class.
When times are tough,
And when times are great.

Look beyond the present,
To be grateful for the simple things.
But most importantly,
Express gratitude to those around you.

Thank you.
Example 1:

What has been the biggest source of learning for you during college?

I learned more about myself in college than anything else. No one person, class, subject, or assignment was my biggest source of learning. For me, college itself, holistically, for what it was, was my biggest teacher. Looking back, I see college as a sliver of the world ahead of me; with lots of people from different places with different perspectives and experiences. I think I could have guessed that four years ago as a high school senior, seeing as how college is supposed to prepare you for “real life.” But that being said, I wasn’t at all prepared for college.

I came from a small town high school of about 450 kids grades seven through twelve and lived in an even smaller town. My parents, especially my dad, always stressed that grades were paramount to my education, so naturally I became a straight A student. I don’t think I was ever directly threatened about what would happen if I ever got a B, but I didn’t want to find out. Below grades on my parentally established list of priorities was sports, with an emphasis on baseball. My dad being what some would call a hard ass, and my naturally athletic build, I got pretty good at that too. I left Oxbow High School as an outstanding student and the only twelve-letter athlete to graduate in years.

With my affinity for procrastination, I applied rather late to one school, UVM, which I knew I would get into. Even then it was ultimately my Dad’s advice that led me to choose this school, and it genuinely felt like it made sense for me to become a Catamount. I accepted my admission along with my longtime friend and scored a less-than-desirable room in the Converse dormitory. I had no way of knowing how much my college experience would be devalued by living there for my first year. The dorm was isolated from other dorms, and the floors were short and full of single bedrooms for people that preferred privacy. My roommate was not exactly a social butterfly, and he also had a new girlfriend to honeymoon with (a girl we both knew since kindergarten). Before I knew it I was in a rut of going to class, eating, and living in the dorm (mostly alone).

The problem here is I didn’t know how to get out, and I didn’t know anyone or seek out anyone that could help me. I wasn’t making friends, and I wasn’t having fun. Because I’m so stubborn and headstrong, I began to look at it like something I had to deal with. The word depression would pop in and out of my head, but I knew there was no way someone like me, a star athlete and academic guru, could be afflicted.

I powered through freshman year and came out alive, with As and Bs, which for some reason was okay now that I wasn’t in high school I guess. Thanks to the luck of the lottery, procrastination, or a combination of both, my roommate and I were assigned a room in Chittenden Hall, a puny shoebox dorm no more than 100 yards from Converse, in the last year before it was torn down. That being said, the guys I met on that floor are now my best friends, but I couldn’t escape what I see as my predisposition.

Flash forward four years to the present date. I am depressed, and I have been for years now. I’ve come to terms with it, but I’ve yet to pull myself out. I was actually in denial for the first couple years until, post-heartbreak, I consulted a lovely therapist who made me say it out loud, “I am depressed.” That was both hard and comforting in a weird jumble of emotions. One day, mid-nap, fifteen minutes before an appointment, I said to myself, “Just stop doing these things, and start doing these things, it’s that easy,” and I skipped the appointment and never went back.

I use the word predisposed in reference to the lousy status of my mental health. I spent plenty of time wondering how seemingly no one else had the same problems I was having. “How come making friends and
having fun is so easy for everyone else,” I would think. “If everyone else can live a fun life, than I can too,” I would think. I always tried to be strong, not let things bother me, and essentially suck it up when I was unhappy. I thought it unacceptable for me to be struggling so much and witness other people enjoy life with ease. It never occurred to me that I’d been through turmoil that other people hadn’t or that I would need to address those problems to be able to live happily. I always thought that the past is the past.

The frameworks I had in place were self-destructive, deprecating, and just mean. In turn I had no self-esteem or confidence. Every time I would make the slightest mistake that other people would dismiss, I would be punishing myself. The slightest interaction gone wrong would replay in my head and serve to prove that I was worthless. The only source of gratification I was left with was my physical appearance and maybe video games as well. I began to not care about things I normally would have like schoolwork. I got into a mentality where scraping by was good enough for me. It was hard for me to focus on real priorities like getting internships or talking to professors or joining clubs when I was constantly in a battle with myself.

It honestly sucks that I’m writing this, because it’s hard, it’s embarrassing for me, and I don’t talk about this stuff ever. I could talk about material from class or my direction for the future and actually create a coherent mélange of ideas from class but the fact of the matter is that my depression is still entirely present, and I know I need to deal with it before I can passionately apply myself to anything. It was during my college years that this depression percolated out from within, and it could have also been the time where I dealt with it and came out better than ever. That was not the case, but at least now I have a vague idea of what is wrong with me. The whole thing is confusing. I know my condition, and I need to help myself, yet it is so easy for me to avoid that help. I’m so stubborn that I will strongly defend the case that I’m worthless.

Sometimes it’s really bad, I’m really self-destructive, and other times I achieve little triumphs like a nice interaction with someone I don’t know very well or turning in a quality assignment. One thing I do know is that getting rid of depression is so much hard work, and that doesn’t seem fair to me. It’s not my fault entirely that I am this way, so how can it be fair that it’s so hard to outrun? I don’t know how my situation will pan out, but I do have a vision of myself in the future without this condition. That vision of myself can be friends with anyone, is incredibly motivated, and helps other people. Most importantly that vision of future _______ loves himself. Again, who knows exactly how I will get there, but where there’s a will, there’s a way.

Example 2

The Lens

I want to tell you about the past three years of my life. This experience (that will be described in the following personal narrative) changed my entire outlook on life—everything I thought I knew turned upside down. It is not a coincidence that all of this happened while I was in college. A lot of this story is deeply connected and intertwined with my education.

I’m not telling this story for attention; and I am not looking for pity, because a lot of people have to deal with this. For many of people, it’s a lifestyle.

Despite this, there’s a stigma, a taboo, around this subject. But in reality, it affects most people sometime in their life in some way. I’m going to tell you about how it affected me in hopes of opening up discussions and maybe making it less stigmatized.
About three years ago—I don’t know exactly when it started—I started to see the world differently. Although I’ve always been a skeptical and pessimistic person, for some reason, my attitude seemed to take on an almost permanent sense of negativity. It was as if a dark lens was cast over my eyes. The lens affected everything I tried to see. Through the lens, life looked and felt miserable.

I started using activism—which was previously fueled by passion and hope—to channel my anger and negativity into something that I thought was productive and meaningful. This was a very bad choice, I think, because activism can sometimes be addicting.

I started to fill my life with meetings and events to get the sadness out. I told myself I had to do all of these things to make a difference. But in reality I wasn’t really helping anyone, I was just hurting myself by spreading myself too thin.

Meanwhile I had stopped eating. I mean I still ate… But not nearly enough for a functioning human being. I started to lose weight, lose interest, and lose my personality. I stopped reaching out to friends. When they asked to hang out, I would lie and say I had homework. I would sit in my dorm and watch Netflix to forget reality for a few hours.

I sabotaged my own health by doing the opposite of what was good for me, in almost every way. My parents and friends were worried about me but the American attitude told me to just keep working, just keep going, to propel myself forward no matter what.

I dyed my hair black. I wore dark clothes. I know it sounds stupid, but looking back I think I tried to make myself look how I felt.

I went home for winter break, saw a doctor, and after a few weeks I was diagnosed with “major depressive disorder.” That was the worst Christmas and Hanukkah I have ever experienced. Everyone around me looked so happy, and the media was telling me that I had to be happy. But I was seeing the world through a different lens, and everything looked different to me. There was no value in anything, and I honestly just wanted to be unconscious as much as possible. My parents didn’t know how to be there for me, so they tried forcing me to eat, and told me to “lighten up” and “calm down” and “just be happy.” I felt guilty for not acting like the happy kid they’ve always known. My mother was heartbroken and confused. They didn’t understand why their daughter was so sad.

I started seeing a therapist, which helped a little. I got on antidepressants, which made me feel different, but not really better. I was making some progress, so I felt like I would be fine when I returned to UVM.

I stayed at UVM for a week, until January 16th. After that week, long story short, my family and I decided I had to go home. I had to withdraw from all my classes and take the semester off.

The months following were the worst months of my life. My friends were at college, my brother is in high school, and my parents both work full time. I felt like my psychiatrist was doing experiments on my brain, using trial and error to determine what meds I should be on. The side effects of the meds were (and still kind of are) awful. I had no control, and I felt like my mind was betraying me.

I spent about two months sitting on the couch in my living room, alone, watching television. I enrolled in a Political Science course at the community college, but other than that, Keeping Up with the Kardashians and How I Met Your Mother became my life—the reason I got out of bed in the morning. My mom would call me from work to check on me, accusing me of lying about eating (which I sometimes did). She told me to sleep more, drink more water, eat more food, smile more, and THEN I would be “fixed.” She told people that she was
going to “fix” me by fattening me up and doing the best she could to make me smile. I disappointed her again and again.

Even when my parents came home, I sat on the couch staring at the wall like a zombie. I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t want to be there, and I knew I needed to leave. I felt a physical pain in my body, a pain that made me want to stop living. I needed to get out, but the problem was there was nowhere to go. I didn’t want to be there, but I didn’t want to be anywhere else either.

My family and I would sit in the living room watching the news or Jeopardy (by the way, jeopardy became my one and only passion in life). I sat in the armchair, just as I had for hours during the day, and stared forward. When my parents tried to talk to me, the pain in my chest would well up and the tears started streaming down my face. This would happen almost every night for about two months. At first my parents would try to make me feel better, but as the days went on, they learned they couldn’t help. They started just genuinely saying “I love you, Rosie” and carrying on. That was the best thing they could have possibly done at that point.

We started doing puzzles. Massive puzzles. Like 2,000 piece puzzles. The feeling of finding that one puzzle piece you’ve been looking for for an hour was my oasis. It was addicting. I wanted to harness that fleeting feeling of satisfaction and excitement. I wanted to crawl into it and experience life with feeling and color again. I also became attached to my two cats, and played with them all day long (when I wasn’t doing puzzles). I started filling my days with puzzles and cats, which was an odd yet effective coping mechanism for me.

Strangely, the biggest turning point for me was in late February, driving in the car to class. I was listening to the radio, when all of a sudden I came across a morning radio show based out of New York City. (it’s called Elvis Duran and the Morning Show, I don’t know if you’ve heard of it—it’s nationally syndicated). It was hilarious, and for the first time in a while I laughed uncontrollably for five minutes straight. That made me realize that it COULD get better. It opened up the possibility that life would be okay, that this lens wasn’t permanent. It was hard to believe, but it gave me some hope.

My therapist told me that exercise can be more effective than antidepressants, so I got a gym membership.

I started being borderline obsessed with going to the gym. Not in an unhealthy way, though. It was one more reason to get out of bed in the morning, to choose to live. Motivation was still hard to find, so I wouldn’t let myself leave my room in the morning until I put my sneakers and gym clothes on. I would eat an apple and walk out the door and drive to the gym. When I came home I allowed myself to eat a big breakfast, because I deserved it.

I started waking up at 5:30 AM every weekday so I could listen to Elvis Duran and the Morning Show live. At this point my parents thought I was crazy, but honestly it was just me coping with depression. I smiled more often and I thought about death less.

I started gaining muscle because of the gym, and I felt like I had more control over my life. I felt like I had some control over what was once a downward spiral.

In April I got a job working at a greenhouse, and I took care of flowers all day. I made a few friends at work, and I learned a lot about plants. Around the beautiful flowers, I started to see color again. I caught glimpses of vibrancy and bold beauty. My mind was stimulated and I started to believe the lens was not permanent. Although I still cried every day, I had a bit of hope that it wouldn’t be like this forever.

We talked about my return to UVM for a while. My parents were being fiercely and stubbornly overprotective, trying to control my every decision. Eventually, we decided I should go back to school and get on with my life.
I had the tools to manage myself and keep myself sane, and my parents trusted that I wouldn’t fall into the downward spiral again.

So far in the past two years I’ve had a lot of bad days, but also a lot of good days. I’m not going to lie and tell you that it’s not hard, that the lens is gone, and that I’m all better. I still question whether or not life is worth it, or if I should even be here at all. But I know that part of me, somewhere, believes that it’s worth it to keep going. So that’s what I intend to do.

So back to the point: all of this definitely does not define me. If you have a broken leg, you don’t let it define you. If you have a heart attack, you don’t get it define you. My struggle right now is trying to convince myself that depression doesn’t define me or my life, and that it’s just a lens that I can’t take off right now. But as long as I can remember it’s just a lens, I can manage.

That is the most valuable takeaway I have gained through my college experience. Having the experience of feeling as if I had a mold of sadness and disparity molded to my face completely broke me down, and opened me up to being rebuilt. I never would have had the amazing learning experiences I had throughout college if my walls weren’t broken down beforehand. NR 206 would not have made this big of an impact on me if I had not been broken before and truly understood what it felt like to want to cease to exist. This feeling made actually existing that much more vibrant and colorful.

My depression and my education co-evolved, and this process played a role in helping me become the beautiful, ever-growing person I am today. I’ve come to understand that the only constant is change.

Mostly, college taught me this: the lens won’t stay forever. Even if it seems molded to your face—it’s not permanent. Nothing is.
Appendix 9: NR206F Community Project Proposal

Project Description -- NR206 Fall, 2016
Kristen Andrews

Local Youth: Creating the Conditions for Thriving with the Land

Overview:

The project takes place on a 16 acre farmstead in rural Lincoln, VT and the surrounding 5 town community

The intention of this project is to develop **foundational relationships** to explore the role of
connection
gratitude
reciprocity
in the social, ecological, economic and spiritual realms
in creating the conditions for meaning in the lives of youth.

Research will involve:
1. interviewing youth and leaders of local land-based organizations,
2. consulting the land itself
3. pilot projects.

Students will be asked to utilize:
• social, ecological, economic, and spiritual lenses concurrently
• models of alternative economies and socially engaged permaculture
• practices of deep and reflective listening

This project is best suited to students who are really interested in spending time developing and deepening skills for listening to the beings of the land in conjunction with researching the existing needs and resources of a community.

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“Generosity of soul and tangible effort in the face of the constant pressure of decay are what give people purpose, fertile imaginations, vitality, a feeling of usefulness, and self worth.”

Martín Prechtel, Secrets of the Talking Jaguar p. 281

Background
12 years ago, I chose the name Blue Meadow Farm for the 16 acre homestead farm in the hills of Lincoln, VT, of which I am the current steward. The farm is 4 miles from the town of Bristol, Mt Abraham Union High School and Bristol Elementary School and 2 miles from the Lincoln Community School. It is a 40 minute drive from UVM.
Blue Meadow Farm Mission statement: Our actions will work toward planetary healing through responsible earth stewardship, generosity and the emanation of positive, loving energy.

Since its inception in 2004, this mission has been carried out by running a small scale, certified organic farm and raising children who possess the skills to care for their bodies, minds, spirits and the earth and her beings. We have nourished ourselves by growing and processing vegetables, herbs, flowers, winter kale, and at various times, chickens, sheep, goats and cows. Among the products we have produced, shared with our neighbors and sold are vegetables, milk, yogurt, cheese, chicken, lamb, berries, eggs, cut flowers, herbal medicinal tinctures and salves, and wool. We have a built a strong relationship with the local schools and over the years and have provided vegetables, offered educational farm field trips, and taught farm-related classes and activities in the schools.

A Vision Looking Forward
At this juncture, our family constellation has changed, the children are getting older, and it is time to stop and think creatively about how to best utilize the resources of this farm and land in the years ahead. We no longer have the labor capacity to manage this farm for ourselves and these times demand that we look beyond our own needs.

The intention of this project is to develop foundational relationships to create the conditions for this land to support local youth to thrive- engaged in practices of connection, gratitude and reciprocity.

These relationships will be built through exploration of social, ecological, economic and spiritual lenses and venues., and through practices of deep and reflective listening.

As a team, we will interview and listen to leaders of local organizations embodying aspects of connection, gratitude and reciprocity. These will include schools, a retreat center, a wilderness preserve, a holistic health collective and a food rescue operation.

Simultaneously, together and individually students will learn and practice skills to consult the beings of the earth and listen to the wisdom they offer.

Patterns, insights and the coalescence of energy will emerge from the information collected.

These insights will inform ideas for collaborative, community based proposals and pilot projects designed to support local youth.

Who am I?
I am a student in the UVM MS in Leadership in Sustainability program, and am currently developing a thesis project. This NR206 project will inform and guide the direction of my research.

I am a student of the Gift Economy model where generosity revives and feeds the human spirit wearied by the market economy.

I am a student and practitioner of socially engaged permaculture, sustainable farming methods and medicinal herbalism.
I have been working with my community in the fields of education and agriculture for the past 30 years.

I am deeply engaged in consulting the land itself along with the human community as ideas are generated. I carry out a daily practice to deepen my own awareness and connection to the mystery of the natural world.

Guiding Questions:

1. How can local youth be supported by utilizing:
   a. the resources of the farm and this land?
   b. the Gift Economy model?
   c. the principles of socially engaged permaculture?
   d. the shared social, ecological, and economic resources of this community?
   e. Human spiritual connection to the land?

Project Description/ Expectations of Students

Activities:
1. Students will spend time observing the physical and spiritual qualities of the land currently called Blue Meadow Farm. An overnight camping experience on the land will begin this process.

1. Students will travel to the Lincoln/Bristol area once per week to meet with community members and/or spend time on the land.

1. Students will become familiar with some provided resources describing the principles of socially engaged permaculture and the Gift Economy model.

1. Students will engage with 2-3 of the community partners listed through on-site interviews. The focus of the interviews will be on gaining insight into the needs of youth in the community as well as the resources that are currently available. Interviews will seek to explore how community organizations embody gratitude, connection and reciprocity.

At least one interview will be with a group of local youth.

1. Students will collaboratively develop:
   1. A list of priorities, available resources, and potential barriers
   2. A list of potential project ideas which support the vision for youth, incorporate the concept of a gift economy and/or the principles of socially engaged permaculture, and utilize the resources of the farm, the land and the local community.
1. Students will choose an idea from their list and develop a one-day pilot project to be carried out with a group of local students. This pilot project will be designed to both inspire and engage the youth, as well as inform the final proposal.

**Deliverables:**

1. Students will document their own insights about this piece of land and how it should best be used in these times using a variety of artistic modalities.

2. Students will document the insights they gain from seeking the perspectives of local people and community organizations through interviews and visits.

3. Using information and insights gained from their time on the land, interviews, and the pilot project, students will collaboratively propose a path forward for this piece of land comprised of an intertwined economic, ecological, and social plan of action. The proposal will include:
   
   a. Who will be involved (community groups, age groups, etc)
   b. What activities will take place
   c. Where the activities will initially take place and how the impact of the project will spread
   d. How the project will be sustained over the long term
   e. Why this project is appropriate for these times on Planet Earth on this piece of land
   f. An artistic expression of the purpose of or motivation behind this proposal

**Support I will provide:**

1. I will lead some activities and exercises designed to help students learn some basic skills for listening to the land
2. Resources on the Gift Economy model and social engaged permaculture
3. Transportation to and from Lincoln for the initial overnight and the interviews
4. Delicious food and fun art supplies for the overnight
5. I will gather the groups of youth for the interviews and the pilot project. I have a relationship with a grade 5-6 class at the local elementary school which may be very excited to participate
6. I will help set up the interviews and will participate as a supportive observer.
7. I will support and participate in the pilot project as requested by the students
8. I will make myself available for consultation with students once per week at UVM and by phone or email at other times
9. I am open to offering other means of support if needed and requested!

**Resources of the farm include:**
A 30’x60’ high tunnel  
A woodshop with basic hand and power tools  
A farmhouse kitchen well equipped for processing food and medicine  
A 24’ x 36’ barn with stalls, a hay loft, a large freezer and a farm stand window  
Vast quantities of moveable fencing  
The supplies necessary to build a rainwater catchment system for the greenhouse  
A rolling chicken tractor  
Solar panels for electricity and hot water
Resources of the land include:
A gravity fed spring water system
7 acres of open pasture
1-2 acres of cultivated garden space
6 acres of woodland, consisting of deciduous and coniferous forest
A magical, rushing brook which runs through the woods
A wide range of wild medicinal plants, trees and fungus
Deer, coyotes, turkeys and a wide variety of other birds

Some local resources of the community (possible collaborators) include:

The Watershed Center  http://www.thewatershedcentervt.org
The Watershed Center is a non-profit corporation supported by local citizens. It was founded in 1995 to promote conservation and stewardship of the land. TWC provides public access to three parcels of this healthy, beautiful, productive land – the 664-acre Waterworks Property, the 94-acre Lost Pond Forest, the 194-acre Middle Forest, and the four-acre Norton Property in Bristol Village.

Metta Earth Institute  http://www.mettaearth.org/about-metta-earth-institute/
Metta Earth Institute is an educational retreat center focused on exploring solutions for a global shift of consciousness supporting the revitalization of a care based society and a rejuvenation of nature and earth.

The Hawthorne Center  http://www.hawthorncentervt.org
The Hawthorne Center is a collaborative holistic health clinic, educational center, and apothecary in downtown Bristol, Vermont.

Middlebury Foods  http://middleburyfoods.squarespace.com
Middlebury Foods provides wholesome food at unmatched prices to households throughout central Vermont. They work with local organizations, schools, farmers, and communities who believe that nothing should come between families and affordable, healthy food.

Local Public Schools:
  Mt Abraham Union High School  http://www.mtabevt.org
  Bristol Elementary School  http://www.besvt.org
  Lincoln Community School  http://www.lcsvt.org

The North Branch School  http://www.northbranchschool.org
The North Branch School is a non-profit, independent school in Ripton, VT serving middle school age children (grades 7-9). Education at NBS is centered on self-directed and active learning and fosters a strong community based on close student-teacher-parent relationships. With twenty-seven students and a low student/teacher ratio, The North Branch School is able to build a rigorous, flexible, personalized and engaging environment.
Contact:
Kristen Andrews
696 Forge Hill Road, Lincoln, VT 05443
802-458-5055
Blue Meadow Farm: The Gift Economy, Local Youth, and Earth Stewardship

Figure 1: Blue Meadow Farm, by Chrissy Doherty

Project Report Submitted to: Kristen Andrews
Current Owner and Steward at Blue Meadow Farm, Lincoln, VT
kristen.andrews@uvm.edu | 802-458-5055


Project Consultants: Kristine Corey, Chrissy Doherty, Rose Thackeray

Affiliated Organizations: The Hawthorn Center; The Watershed Center

Course Information: NR 206 Environmental Problem Solving & Impact Assessment
Professor Zachary Ispa-Landa;
Graduate TAs Kristen Andrews, Finn Yarbrough, Kathryn Rigley
Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources
University of Vermont 2016

Designated Contact: Chrissy Doherty chrissy.doherty@gmail.com
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Abstract

Today's youth are widely distanced from nature and are subsequently without a sense of place. There is also a lack of reciprocal, nourishing relationships between local youth and community groups in many communities. In the towns of Lincoln and Bristol, Vermont, this absence of connection to place through both community and earth is apparent.

Blue Meadow Farm is a sixteen acre homestead farm in Lincoln, Vermont currently stewarded by Kristen Andrews and her family. Blue Meadow was presented with a unique opportunity, rather than a problem, to utilize resources present on the farm in a way that Kristen felt called to: by creating the conditions for youth and all people to embody the fruits of generosity, local youth will become and remain interconnected, impactful, supported and giving members of their local and global community.

Faced with this opportunity, our group, The Stargazers, began to consider the roles we could play in fostering this vision into a tangible reality. We began by conducting a site analysis at Blue Meadow farm, where we assessed the resources on the land as well as the skills and visions that each team member, including our community partner, possessed. Next we held meetings with two community groups to speak about their roles in the community, hear their goals for the future, and connect ideas of how each group could foster reciprocal relationships with young people in the community as well as other community groups. The Stargazers also planned and hosted classroom activities at the Lincoln Community School with the intent to engage second grade students in hands-on lessons teaching them ways in which they could engage with their environment, through the specific lens of cow production. Finally, our group concluded our project by documenting connections we saw within the web of community systems in Lincoln and Bristol, that we have gotten to know these past few months.

Acknowledgments

The Stargazers would love to thank Kristen Andrews for her generosity in including us in this project: for welcoming us into her home; for introducing us to her family and friends; for instilling in us the importance and relevance of gratitude and reciprocity in both daily practice and long-term projects.

Thanks are also due to NR 206 Professor Zachary Ispa-Landa for creating an overall course and semester long project that emphasize the importance of personal growth and advancement through problem-solving (or opportunity-fostering!).

Works Cited
Finn Yarbrough should also be commended for his work as our project advisor. For his helpful meetings, constructive criticisms, and thoughtful banter, we thank him.

Patty Schoenhuber was wondrously accommodating and helpful in allowing our team and work with her second grade class at the Lincoln Community School. We would also like to thank all of the students we worked with for their curiosity, questions, and helpful feedback.

Rachel Edwards and Emily French of the Hawthorn Center should be thanked for their time taken to engage in contemplative conversation in their place of work, and for welcoming our group to return to the Hawthorn Center as community members.

Geoff Davis and Chris McGrory Klyza were incredibly helpful and supportive of our project and allowed for productive engagement with the Watershed Center. For that, we thank them!

Introduction

As one of the teaching assistants for this course, NR 206: Environmental Problem Solving and Impact Assessment, the team was introduced to our community partner Kristen Andrews before this project was mentioned. When the team had formed under Kristen’s guidance as a community partner she offered for us to come and stay on her land overnight, to begin to understand the natural and human components interacting at Blue Meadow Farm. Throughout the semester Kristen has served as both a resource for our course logistics as well as for our broader project working with her.

Today’s youth are distanced from nature and are subsequently without a sense of place. There is a lack of reciprocal relationships between community groups and local youth. Our efforts have focused on the opportunity to use the gift economy model to create a place-based educational program using Kristen Andrews’ land at Blue Meadow Farm in Lincoln, Vermont.

Concerns about potential long term effects of nature-deficit have influenced legislative action as well as community collaboration in effort to foster a sense of place and purpose in young people. This movement has also lead to many grassroots projects that encourage children to spend more time nature. Our pilot module and future plans for Blue Meadow Farm incorporate increased opportunities for young people to connect to land through community relationships. The opportunity for Blue Meadow Farm and community partners to create and maintain reciprocal relationships also creates a more holistic curriculum available to the community’s youth. One of the drivers of this project was the notion that increased exposure to land-based service efforts at Blue Meadow Farm, the Bristol Watershed, and other natural areas in the Lincoln/Bristol area will begin to foster a sense of connection in the natural environment and their community. By increasing the youth’s ecological literacy with plants, we encourage a connection with the earth and gratitude.

Youth are increasingly seeing environmental, social, and economic issues, of global and local scales as we enter a world of “declining energy and resource availability” (Holmgren 2002). Research shows the “beneficial relationships between sustainability education, science education, and permaculture itself” (Lebo 2012). One major downfall of conventional education as it “promotes extrinsic motivation” through grades and qualifications to learn something versus utilizing intrinsic motivators in order to find reasoning for “learning internally” (McNamara & Storch 2012). These intrinsic motivators are also what might deepen one’s sense of place or feelings of involvement and purpose in a community. Our current education system is not meeting these specific needs of many children. Our project works to improve development of internal motivators by connecting students in the Lincoln/Bristol to natural areas and to partners that can offer opportunities of
learning and responsibility. In keeping with the research and work by Lebo and McNamara this project seeks to embed a different way of thinking in the youth which can have a significant impact on their development of a sense of place. McNamara is of the belief that when positive emotions in educational settings are fostered, learning is improved. The classroom activity at the Lincoln Community School was informed by this theory, with the belief that hands-on engagement encourages the previously referenced positive emotions. This activity infused an afternoon school day with positive education system practices through the utilization and fostering of a learning community, linked between different generations.

This project also works to build a new sort of social capital within the Lincoln/Bristol community. This new capital is one of the gift economy: that is, an economic system based on reciprocity rather than exchange. To further explain the gift economy, one must elaborate on the current capitalistic economy, which is one that empowers few and disempowers many (Vaughan 1991). Because capitalism has so many values that are misaligned with the actions needed to be taken for combating climate change, connecting to the land, and engaging communities, new economic models have emerged as alternatives. The gift economy requires selflessness, allows the recipient to determine a value of the gift’s benefit, and aspires to be a chain-reaction rather than a single transaction (Service Space 2016).

**Project Goals & Objectives**

In collaboration with Kristen Andrews of Blue Meadow Farm, we have identified two main goals for this project:

**Goal 1: Lincoln/Bristol youth build lasting reciprocal relationships with community partners.**

*Objectives:*
1. Spend time on Kristen’s land to develop a sense of place and begin to envision possibilities for the farm (September 17th)
2. Conduct interviews with The Hawthorn Center and The Watershed Center, taking note of their missions, visions, and collaborations they would like to see bringing community youth closer to nature (November 2nd & 4th)
3. Consolidate findings, visions, connections into a visual representation of the how the gift economy model could be utilized in the Lincoln/Bristol community (December 8th)
4. Follow up community partner interviews with a report of our findings and suggestions around fostering reciprocal relationships (December 15th)

**Goal 2: Lincoln/Bristol Youth to engage in experiential learning opportunities**

*Objectives:*
1. Have initial outline for pilot module (October 15th)
2. Interview community groups taking note of their missions, visions, and collaborations they would like to see bringing community youth closer to nature (November 2nd & 4th)
3. Further develop nature-based educational programming to pilot at a school in the Lincoln/Bristol area using feedback from community groups (November 15th)
4. Contact Lincoln Community School’s second grade teacher to pitch pilot idea and set date for us to go to the classroom (November 20th)
5. Implement pilot module & engage in hands on exercises with the second grade class of Lincoln Community School (December 14th)
Methods

Our approach to address this opportunity was to encourage and support the community and organizations around Lincoln and Bristol in their efforts to connect youth with land-based activity and other methods of place-based engagement.

One strategy that we have utilize in order to inform this project will be researching relevant literature. We used these research methods because this project is a preliminary and background assessment of potential opportunities for Blue Meadow Farm to engage local youth by collaborating with some other community partners. In order to have adequately assessed and produced a plan for community engagement, it is important to have educated ourselves through various research methods on topics like nature deficit, the gift economy, permaculture, and outdoor education, amongst others.

Our project plan utilizes a gift economy model in our design for the communities’ youth. We have focused on what the youth can offer to their community, what community partners can give the young people, and how these offerings honor the land. Creating lasting relationships between these youth and the community partners has been a primary goal so that this gift economy model will continue to be paid forward. We hope to have proven that a world based on “giving and forgiving, not [just] retribution” is possible (Vaughan 1991).

The classroom pilot module was planned throughout the semester and tested in a second grade classroom at the Lincoln Community School on December 14th, 2016. The planning process was informed by land-based community groups and community leaders. We first constructed a series of interview questions for our meetings with community members. We then met with two groups in the Lincoln area: The Watershed Center and The Hawthorn Center. In these interviews we found links between the missions of these two land-based programs in relation to our group’s goals. A meeting with Kristen was then held in order to critically reflect on the most effective ways to synthesize the community's wants and aspirations into a cohesive pilot module to be used in local schools. In order to strengthen our vision for the community, focus was placed on discussing ideas that seek to encourage the goals of more effectively supporting love and well being for the community, with a focus on the youth of the Lincoln/Bristol area.

During our meeting with Kristen we were informed that the second grade class at the Lincoln Community School had just finished up a unit on cows. We designed our lesson plan based off of that information in order to continue to build off of the students pre-existing knowledge. Our lesson plan included three stations: hay bale dissection, grass seed planting, and mozzarella cheesemaking. The students were split up into three groups and had about fifteen minutes at each station.

At the hay bale station students were asked to (neatly) pull apart the flakes of a hay bale in order to find dried seeds, of which they would later plant. As they pulled out dried heads of clover and alfalfa they were taught about the many different components that make up a bale of hay. The vocabulary word: ruminant, was also focused on in order to teach them the formal term for animals that can digest hay.

The seed planting station utilized egg cartons and potting soil in order to create a small scale hay field planting. As the students at the hay bale station gathered millions of seeds they were brought over to the planting station where students could make their own egg carton of grass seeds to take home with them.

The mozzarella cheese station focused on tying together the process of cows eating hay for energy to produce milk, which is then used to make cheese. The students partook in each aspect of the cheese production; diluting
rennet and citric acid in water, bringing the raw milk to 55 F, adding rennet and citric acid, bringing the raw milk to 95 F, and then separating the curds from the whey!

Results & Deliverables

A creative collaboration resulted in a systems thinking diagram explaining all the resources of the community partners, with the youth at the middle, acting as a catalyst, with arrows connecting all of the organizations. This is a map of giving, describing what each group can offer individually and where there is overlap amongst the organizations. This deliverable presents an artistic representation of the driving forces behind our project, expressing opportunities for collaboration and involvement between these groups and the youth. The diagram represents our interpretation of how the gift-economy model could be applied in the Lincoln/Bristol area, specifically in relation to this project and the relationships which we fostered.

By giving the final draft of the diagram to Kristen, and sending a copy to our other community partners, each group will have a visual representation of the connections made and the shared visions amongst them. The diagram was purposely kept simplistic and easy to understand, so it can serve the community partners as a reference to their connection to the community and youth. We hope this diagram will be the impetus to new programs and workshops for the benefit of the youth and the community partners.
The process of creating our visual representation of our project gave insight to what principles were really at the core of our intentions, i.e. reciprocity, gratitude, education. The process and the outcome of the diagram was a success because we were able to condense all we had learned in a cohesive and visually appealing way, showcasing the essence of our project: to give.

Another successful part of our project was that our interviews mirrored a deliberative dialogue with community partners, enabling our conversations to be more fruitful and dynamic. The Stargazers, The Watershed Center, and The Hawthorne Center members all left with glowing hope for future development of programs and food for thought about nature and community connection. We received feedback from Kristen that members from both The Hawthorne Center and The Watershed Center were ecstatic and inspired by our conversations. Enthusiasm and passion for the environment as well as community healing were evident in our meetings as ideas bounced back and forth, feeding off one another. All community partners discussed how they wanted to be more connected with their community and were grateful that we wanted to help them navigate how to do this and brainstorm ideas. Rachel Edwards, from the Hawthorne Center, told Kristen that she was so happy to have met with us and that we had a meaningful discussion that sparked ideas in her that she had not thought of before. The Stargazers and the community partners both offered and learned a lot from one another. We instilled mutual inspiration between one another that will keep our visions and goals growing from here on out.

Conclusion

Throughout the semester we have reached various milestone achievements in pursuit of this project. Most notably, our team created a rapport with both The Hawthorn Center and The Watershed Alliance. During both individual interviews our team began to create an interconnected relationship amongst all of the groups by introducing the organizations to one another. We shared the vision and opportunity that Kristen had for Blue Meadow Farm and the potential roles in which those two affiliated organizations could play in creating programs to reconnect local youth to nature. Through these initial meetings our team created a lasting relationship between all three organizations as well as the NR 206 course. Our goal of instilling reciprocity among community relationships was reached through these newfound relationships.

One obstacle we encountered throughout the semester included complications with scheduling interviews with our partners. There are multiple community members involved in both The Watershed Center and the Hawthorne Center, so finding a time for all of those who wanted to be involved alongside our schedules was difficult. This type of difficulty will almost always be encountered during group projects but one suggestion to improve here would have been to begin scheduling discussions with these organizations earlier in the semester.

Another major constraint for our project was the length of time within the semester that was available to complete our deliverables. Our project is centered more around opportunities, not problems, so keeping realistic goals and aspirations for our project partner at Blue Meadow Farm and her aspirations to be more involved with the community was necessary yet difficult. One suggestion for improvement here would to have had created a more concrete and realistic vision for what our team could produce in a semester in order to serve our community partner and affiliated organizations.

One of the Hawthorne Center’s goals is to create a free monthly clinic for community members. The Hawthorne Center is currently working out the kinks for the clinic and how they could make it completely free. We discussed the opportunity to connect with the Watershed Center or Blue Meadow Farm for access to land for wild crafting opportunities. A possible way to engage the youth could be to have them in the forest learning
how to identify medicinal plants and scavenge for them for the clinic. The Hawthorne Center and Blue Meadow Farm could also work with the youth to make basic tinctures, tea and salves that can be used in the free clinic.

The Watershed Center has one thousand acres of land in Lincoln/Bristol that need upkeep; they would like to see increased membership and funding. A myriad of recreational activities are offered on this land and they would like to see an increase of visitors to the land. Young people of the community can help by stewarding the land through trail maintenance, wildcrafting/removal of invasive species, and intentional planting; by tabling community events and marketing the Watershed Center to the community; by planning and participating in events hosted at the Watershed Center.

Moving forward, we suggest that at least one of the three community partners of which we worked with this semester continues involvement in the NR 206 course. We suggest that Blue Meadow Farm pitches a follow up project to next semester’s cohort of students to work on. Next semester, another team of students could continue this project utilizing this document as well as our system diagram explaining the interconnected relationships that have been fostered this semester.

Works Cited


NR206 Project Proposal: **Project Based Learning and Compassionate Conservation**

Optimum group size: 6

Partners:
Kristen Andrews, UVM Leadership for Sustainability Program, The Watershed Center
David Brynn, Vermont Family Forests, The Watershed Center

**Project Overview**

Two Addison County non-profits, [The Watershed Center](#), committed to community, conservation and education and [Vermont Family Forests](#) a forest health conservation organization seek to utilize the 1000 acres of The Watershed Center to cultivate connection to self, others and nature. The focus of this project is on creating the conditions for local youth to form and solidify these connections as they practice

- engaging in an eco-conscious* trail building project which benefits the community
- embodying gratitude, reciprocity and compassion throughout the planning and building process

UVM Students will work collaboratively as consultants to Vermont Family Forests and The Watershed Center to *simultaneously develop and self-test* a replicable project-based curriculum model.

**The Project:** Students will become familiar with a small, forested ecotone on Watershed Center lands where hikers must ford a muddy and/or slippery stream crossing. They will identify the challenges and opportunities and design and build the needed **trail bridge**. Wood types available on Watershed Center land include northern white cedar, eastern white pine, hemlock, red pine, white oak, black locust, and tamarack.

*David Brynn, an experienced trail builder, will be available for consultation during the design process, will arrange for access to necessary tools and materials and will join us for the 3 building/retreat days.*

**The Practice:** In weekly 1 hour group sessions and on their own, students will engage in practices designed to cultivate self awareness through gratitude, reciprocity and compassion. Through group discussion and a personal process project, students will integrate these concepts into the context of the bridge building process. Group members will share the responsibility for leading these sessions.
(choosing a short inspirational reading or activity and developing discussion questions) and participating as students.

*Kristen Andrews will attend these practice sessions. She will lead the first session and participate collaboratively thereafter. She will also provide curriculum development support as needed. A list of discussion resources will be provided, which students may choose to utilize.*

**Curriculum Development:** UVM students will use the Project Based Learning curriculum model to “package” the Compassionate Conservation project and practice process for use with local high school aged youth.

*Our definition of *eco-conscious* embodies self renewal for all beings on these 4 levels:

**Ecological:** Optimizing the beauty, biodiversity, integrity and resilience of the ecosystem. (conservation)

**Social:** Optimizing the holistic health, biodiversity, integrity and resilience of the humans involved in the design, building and long term use of the bridge. (compassionate connection)

**Economic:** Optimizing The Gift Economy model with minimal capital input by partnering with community organizations to learn and practice skills, construct a community resource, and host a Beltane bridge dedication celebration. (reciprocity)

**Spiritual:** Optimizing opportunities for awareness, gratitude, reciprocity and silent contemplative time throughout the process.

**Expectations of the project:**

**All members of the group must commit to full participation in order for the project to be successful.** Full participation means attending all sessions prepared and on time, ready to offer open, heartfelt personal insights and questions.

1. **Weekly group sessions** with Kristen at UVM during regularly scheduled lab time throughout the entire semester. This time will be used for trying out awareness practice exercises, discussion, and sharing of progress on process journals and for curriculum development. (1 hour/wk)

2. **Daily personal awareness practice and reflection** (10 min/ day) Using a self determined awareness building process and artistic modality, each student will practice and reflect on this daily practice and how it manifests in the building process. (1 hr/wk)

3. **3 building days/overnight retreats** at The Watershed Center in February 18-19, March 25-26 and April 29-30 with David and Kristen. These 3 days will include bridge building under the guidance of David as well as group and solo contemplative time in the woods, guided hikes in The Watershed, group discussion, documentation--- and delicious home cooked meals. (8 hrs of engagement each)

4. **Research, documentation and curriculum development:** methods of building an eco-conscious trail bridge, awareness development resources and activities and utilizing the project based learning model (1.6 hrs/wk shared group work)
5. **Deliverables** will include:
   a. A Project Based Compassionate Conservation curriculum model website including:
      1. A Project Based Learning description of the project
      2. [Project Design Overview](#)
      3. [Essential Project Design Elements](#)
      4. Video documentation of the building process
      5. Personal testimonials documenting the ecological, social, economic and spiritual experience of the process and how it has been impacted by practices of awareness, gratitude and reciprocity.

   b. Design and construction of a trail bridge bridge at The Watershed Center in collaboration with David and Kristen

   c. A celebratory presentation of the completed bridge to the community during the April 30th Beltane celebration at the Watershed.

Work days, journal projects and the website will utilize a variety of modalities of learning and communication including but not limited to music, visual art, sound, poetry, photography, movement, building artistic and/or functional forest structures, sitting meditation, walking meditation, cooking, group discussion, reading, contemplative writing.

*This project is designed to be completed in 5 hours per week over a period of 10 weeks. Approximate time breakdown is as follows:*

- **24 hours of onsite building and retreat**
  - *(8 hours of engagement for each of 3 sessions - 9 am Saturday- 9 am Sunday)*
- **10 hours of personal awareness practice and reflection**
- **16 hours** of weekly discussion, documentation and deliverable development
- **50 hours**

**Who we are:**

**Kristen Andrews**
Kristen is an educator, farmer, and student of the spiritual realm, deeply connected to plants and wind. She has been a facilitator of project-based learning for the past 20 years. Currently a student in the UVM Leadership for Sustainability Master’s Program, her research is focused on the role of gratitude, reciprocity and earth and human connection in education. Kristen is a member of The Watershed Center board of directors.

Her blog can be viewed here: [http://blog.uvm.edu/kmandrew/](http://blog.uvm.edu/kmandrew/)
Her “vision” video can be viewed here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1brSGXGuYI&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1brSGXGuYI&feature=youtu.be)

**David Brynn**
David is a forester, educator and philosopher deeply dedicated to the natural world and human community on physical, emotional and spiritual levels. Throughout his career, he has conceived and led
numerous project-based learning opportunities for UVM students and the greater community. His work includes founding and cultivating the following organizations:

Vermont Family Forests
http://www.familyforests.org

Hogback Community College
http://www.familyforests.org/public-education/HogbackCC/

The Watershed Center
https://thewatershedcentervt.org

**Compassionate Conservation Project Pitch**

In these times, we recognize that our desire and ability to conserve the land we call home depends on the strength of our compassionate human connection to self, others and nature, especially for youth.

This project is an opportunity to explore the link between that *compassionate connection* and *environmental community service*.

The Watershed Center is an Addison County non-profit which has protected over 1000 acres of local forest for the community.

As a part of my work in the Leadership for Sustainability Program at UVM, David Brynn of TWC and I would like to work with UVM students to *develop and carry out* a *project based curriculum model* for youth which cultivates connection to self, others and nature.

We’d like you to work with us to do 3 things at once:
1. design and build an eco-conscious forest trail bridge for the community
2. practice gratitude, reciprocity and compassion in the context of the project
3. document a process which can be used with local youth.

In the Leadership for Sustainability program we believe our best path forward in these times is to **deepen natural and human relationships**

The Watershed Center in Bristol manages 1000 acres of local forest for the community.

Our collective question is
How can this resource be used to benefit youth?

We’d like you to join us in **developing and piloting** a *project based learning curriculum model*

**Involving:**

1. designing and building an eco-conscious forest trail bridge for the community
2. cultivating practices of gratitude, reciprocity and compassion in the context of the project
Appendix 12: NR206S Community Project Student Proposal

Cultivating Connections to Self, Others, and Nature Through Compassionate Conservation

Proposal Submitted To: David Brynn, Executive Director at Vermont Family Forests
david@familyforests.org
Kristen Andrews, UVM NR 206 TA and Community Partner
Zac Ispa-Landa, UVM NR 206 Professor
Emma Sass, UVM NR 206 TA

Proposal Submitted On: February 10, 2017

Project Contacts: Milo Civita
Kimberly Lizotte
Isabel Nass
Miguel Reda
Juli Tyson

Designated Contact: Isabel Nass
(302) 887-6326
isabel.nass@uvm.edu

Problem Assessment and Context:

As a developed nation, the United States has shifted focus away from the environment and towards technological innovation and globalization. The pressure to compete in a globalized world has influenced our education system by reducing our capacity as a people to connect with ourselves, one another, and maintain a sustainable relationship with the environment (Scherner 2000). This issue can be explained by recent national education policies, including the No Child Left Behind Act, which enforces the “application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education” (U.S. DOE 2002) and the increased use of technology and social media by young adults across the United States. Priority is placed on productivity and linear growth, requiring people to function in a more mechanical, less compassionate manner in which they lose touch with their roots to natural spaces (Scherner 2000). Echoing the call to action in Cradle to Cradle, “challenging the notion that human industry must inevitably damage the natural world” is essential to shaping a new environmental paradigm (McDonough & Braungart 2002).

Environmental health is human health, and our environment is rapidly degrading because of human exploitation of the natural world. This raises the question of values, and how we prioritize the environment in relation to other aspects of our lives (Roszak 1995). In order to form reciprocal relationships with our environment, we must first value the environment (Forbes 2003). This requires environmental consciousness on a national scale. As individuals, our values are shaped by our experiences as children and adolescents. By immersing youth in nature through education, they can foster relationships to the environment that they will carry with them into adulthood. Values formed in childhood influence decision making as adults which can in turn change the trajectory of the environmental crisis we currently face (Chawla 1998).
Two Addison County non-profits, The Watershed Center, committed to community, conservation, and education and Vermont Family Forests, a forest health conservation organization, seek to utilize 1000 acres of The Watershed Center to cultivate connection to self, others, and nature. The focus of this project specifically is to create the conditions for local high-school aged youth to form and solidify these connections as they practice 1) engaging in an eco-consciousness and 2) embodying gratitude, reciprocity, and compassion by connecting to the landscape through a mindfulness framework created and trialled by our UVM team.

As a group, we believe a connection to nature is vital to our holistic health. This includes our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. The connections we develop with nature in our childhood and adolescence define the values we carry with us into adulthood. Environmental health is human health and in order for people to cherish the environment, they must first experience it. Our hope is to encourage environmental stewardship in younger generations by providing them with tools to reach a higher awareness of the life around them.

**Goal 1:** Have a bridge constructed from on-site materials that maintains the integrity and beauty of the landscape while addressing the functional need of a safe crossing of the designated stream.

**Objectives to Achieve Goal 1:**
1. Conduct research on wood use and generate a list of attributes and uses for construction for northern white cedar, eastern white pine, eastern hemlock, red pine, white oak, black locust, and tamarack by February 18, 2017.
2. Conduct research on common forest bridge designs and generate a list of important considerations for building, safety, longevity, and the surrounding ecosystem by February 18, 2017.
3. Discuss suitability of different forest bridge designs in the landscape surrounding the construction site as well as the materials that we have available on site in our meeting on Tuesday, February 21, 2017.
4. Draft blueprints or find suitable blueprints, for designated bridge design by March 25, 2017.
5. Identify any tools or materials we will need to acquire prior to the start of construction to ensure our ability to complete the bridge on schedule by March 23, 2017.
6. Contact David by March 23, 2017 to request any needed materials and tools.
7. Identify appropriate trees to be harvested for lumber, with the help and advice of David Brynn on the scheduled workday on March 25, 2017.
9. In the meeting on Tuesday, March 28, 2017, discuss the steps that need to be taken to complete the bridge by April 29, 2017 and schedule an extra volunteer work day if needed.
10. Complete bridge construction according to the specific plan developed in the meeting on the scheduled workday on April 29, 2017.
11. Present the completed footbridge at the Beltane Celebration on April 30, 2017.

**Goal 2:** An organized, repeatable project-based curriculum intended to strengthen human connection and eco-consciousness* will be available on an easily accessible media platform.

*eco-consciousness- a way of being that prioritizes conservation, compassion and connection, and reciprocity and embodies self-renewal for all beings on ecological, social, economic, and spiritual levels

**Objectives to Achieve Goal 2:**
1. Identify and become familiar with at least one gratitude practice per team member that can be completed in ten minute daily sessions by February 14, 2017.
2. Practice this ten minute gratitude practice, or personal process project, once per day from February 14 - April 30, 2017.

3. Throughout the duration of the project, reflect on the process of gratitude practices in a personal journal.

4. Meet weekly (every Tuesday morning from 10:30-11:30 AM) with Kristen and the full project team to reflect on and share experiences, as well as develop and self test activities that will deepen the understanding of eco-consciousness in high-school aged individuals.

5. Conduct research weekly on awareness development activities, methods of building an eco-conscious trail bridge, and activities utilizing the project based learning model and come prepared with notes to each of our scheduled Tuesday meetings for discussion.

6. Carry out and reflect on the effectiveness of various individual or group compassion and gratitude exercises at the construction site in Bristol, VT on each of three work days (February 18, March 25, and April 29, 2017).

7. Using various mediums, such as photography, sketching, video footage, and more, document the bridge building process throughout the aforementioned workdays.

8. Organize the exercises, bridge building process, and documentation into a publicly accessible format by April 30, 2017.

Methods:

Our team will work collaboratively as consultants to Vermont Family Forests and The Watershed Center to simultaneously develop and self-test a replicable project-based curriculum model. We will familiarize ourselves with a small, forested ecotone on Watershed Center lands where hikers must ford a slippery stream crossing. We will identify the challenges and opportunities of the project area and design and build the needed trail bridge, based on careful research and consultation with David Brynn of the Vermont Family Forests. Wood types available on Watershed Center land include northern white cedar, eastern white pine, hemlock, red pine, white oak, black locust, and tamarack, and the bridge will be constructed primarily of on-site materials. David Brynn, our community partner and an experienced trail builder, will be available for consultation during the design process and will participate in each of the three building/retreat days.

In weekly one hour group sessions, and on our own, we will engage in practices designed to cultivate self awareness through gratitude, reciprocity, and compassion. Through group discussion and a personal process project, we will integrate these concepts into the context of the bridge building process. Group members will share the responsibility for leading these sessions and participating as students. Such responsibility may include choosing a short inspirational reading or activity and developing discussion questions. Kristen Andrews will attend these practice sessions. She will lead the first session and participate collaboratively thereafter. She will also provide curriculum development support as needed. A list of discussion resources will be provided, which we may utilized in the development of a curriculum.

Our project will require our group to work with the Vermont Family Forest and the Watershed Center to ensure that our project-based curriculum will be able to be implemented with success by local schools. This will be achieved by our group working with our community partners through trial and error on various project based learning materials. We will evaluate the effectiveness of these lessons/activities through meeting weekly with our group to. Group members will also be required to journal and with these journals we will have discussions

Evaluation and Assessment:

Evaluation will be an ongoing part of this project in order to keep us on track, so we will be keeping daily journals to reflect on our mindfulness practices and come prepared to reflect in our weekly meetings. Journaling will record feelings or thoughts we have during the week while we are separated or in smaller groups
practicing mindfulness. Then, once a week we will meet with our community partner, Kristen, for an hour in
order to reflect on what has been going well for us, what we are liking, and what isn’t working for us. The intent
is to use this to help us track our own internal sense of gratitude and compassion, while giving us something to
look back on and compare to how we personally feel at the end of the project.

Another source of measuring our progress will come from statements made by each of us before we start
building, and a statement after we finish building. In this statement we will ask ourselves to reflect on our
current state of gratitude and connection to self as well as the land. This will allow us to record initial personal
goals and aspirations for the project, and hopefully show a general difference in attitude from start to finish. Our
community partners have asked us to brainstorm and write up a list of goals, ideas and thought on the project,
specifically what we want to give and receive, which can be included in these statements. Revisiting this
assignment at the end will help measure the effectiveness of the project by examining what from our goals we
have or have not accomplished and how successful, grateful, compassionate, and connected we feel at the end.

We will also keep extensive documentation of the building progress on our retreat weekends. This will
include recording feelings, actions, sounds, thoughts, and anything else we find significant while we are out in
Bristol, Vermont, including documenting all stages of the building process. We will present all of this
information and documentation on a website that we design together and that will be available to our NR 206
instructors and community partners. As part of the assessment of the success for this website, we will ask
community members including those in Vermont Family Forest and Watershed Center, Mount Abraham Union
High School students and teachers, and Mike Blouin (UVM) to get on the website to take a look around,
navigate it, and let us know what they get out of it and how useful they find it. The website will have comments
sections, and a place for feedback, which will help reveal blind-spots, and/ or assumptions of ours.

At the end of our project there will also be a community celebration and grand opening of the bridge.
Here we will document how many attendees there are and interact with as many of them as possible. During our
interactions we will be aware of people’s reactions and feelings about our project, and their enjoyment or
distaste of it. This will give us a chance to directly experience and see the some immediate impacts of our
project. We will be able to engage with community members and have conversations around how they feel
about what we accomplished, and if they see themselves returning to our bridge and surrounding area.

Ideally by the end of the project we will have helped our community partners test a new nature
pedagogy. By completing this project, our community partner will gain knowledge and insight on their vision of
education from a younger generation’s perspective. Our experimentation, and implementation of mindfulness
practices, journaling, reflection, gratitude, compassion, and bridge building will help them decide further steps
for their vision of this nature pedagogy.

References

Chawla, Louise. Significant Life Experiences Revisited: a Review of Resources on Sources of


McDonough, William, and Michael Braungart. Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make


Appendix 13: NR206S Community Project Student Report

Cultivating Connections to Self, Others, and Nature Through Compassionate Conservation

Final Report Submitted To: David Brynn, Executive Director at Vermont Family Forests
david@familyforests.org
Kristen Andrews, UVM NR 206 TA and Community Partner
Zac Ispa-Landa, UVM NR 206 Professor
Emma Sass, UVM NR 206 TA
Final Report Submitted On: May 11, 2017
Prepared By: Milo Civita
Kimberly Lizotte
Isabel Nass
Miguel Reda
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Abstract
This service-learning partnership involved two main parts: the amendment of a problematic stream crossing on the main trail in the Waterworks property through the construction and installation of a footbridge, and the development of a project-based learning curriculum to be self-tested throughout the semester during the bridge construction process. The entire framework of the curriculum development and construction process was focused on compassionate conservation, and aimed to cultivate eco-consciousness in young community members by establishing repeatable lessons that facilitate these mindsets and practices. The curriculum was developed specifically for use in future project-based learning scenarios by the community partners, David Brynn of Vermont Family Forests and Kristen Andrews from the Watershed Center. As a group, Team Thank You believes a connection to nature is vital to holistic health. This includes physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. The connections developed with nature during childhood and adolescence define the values carried into adulthood (Chawla 1998). Environmental health is human health and in order for people to cherish the environment, they must first experience it. The team’s hope is that the project-based learning curriculum they developed and published on a public website will encourage environmental stewardship in younger generations by providing them with tools to reach a higher awareness of the life around them.

The bridge itself - made of northern white cedar (Thuja occidentalis) harvested on site and constructed with the five group members, community partners, and a log forwarder - had its own impacts. At the Waterworks annual Beltane Celebration on April 30, 2017 the bridge was presented to the community members that regularly use the property and Team Thank You members were able to hear the individual impacts the new crossing would have for the community. Overall, Team Thank you found that the embodiment of an eco-conscious mindset and practicing daily gratitude exercises had a positive impact on the group dynamics, community partner relationships, and general ability to complete deliverables to the fullest extent.

Acknowledgements
On behalf of Team Thank you, we want to acknowledge and express gratitude for the guidance and support that our community partners, Kristen Andrews and David Brynn, have provided us over the course of the semester in helping us shape this project-based learning curriculum in a way that was expansive and eye opening. Thank you to our professor Zac Ispa-Landa for providing us the opportunity to participate in such a rewarding community project. And a big thank you to Emma Sass for her support, oversight, and encouragement on this entire process.
Introduction & Background
Two Addison County non-profits, The Watershed Center, committed to community, conservation, and education, and Vermont Family Forests, a forest health conservation organization, sought to utilize 1,000 acres of The Watershed Center to cultivate connection to self, others, and nature. The focus of this project specifically was to create the conditions for local high-school aged youth to form and solidify these connections as they practice 1) engaging in eco-consciousness and 2) embodying gratitude, reciprocity, and compassion by connecting to the landscape through a mindfulness framework created and trialled by our UVM team.

As a developed nation, the United States has shifted focus away from the environment and towards technological innovation and globalization. The pressure to compete in a globalized world has influenced our education system by reducing our capacity as a people to connect with ourselves, one another, and maintain a sustainable relationship with the environment (Scherner 2000). This issue can be explained by recent national education policies, including the No Child Left Behind Act, which enforces the “application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education” (U.S. DOE 2002) and the increased use of technology and social media by young adults across the United States. Priority is placed on productivity and linear growth, requiring people to function in a more mechanical, less compassionate manner in which they lose touch with their roots to natural spaces (Scherner 2000). Echoing the call to action in Cradle to Cradle, “challenging the notion that human industry must inevitably damage the natural world” is essential to shaping a new environmental paradigm (McDonough & Braungart 2002).

Environmental health is human health, and our environment is rapidly degrading because of human exploitation of the natural world. This raises the question of values, and how we prioritize the environment in relation to other aspects of our lives (Roszak 1995). In order to form reciprocal relationships with our environment, we must first value the environment (Forbes 2003). This requires environmental consciousness on a national scale. As individuals, our values are shaped by our experiences as children and adolescents. By immersing youth in nature through education, they can foster relationships to the environment that they will carry with them into adulthood. Values formed in childhood influence decision making as adults which can in turn change the trajectory of the environmental crisis we currently face (Chawla 1998).

The first goal of this project was to have a bridge constructed from on-site materials that maintained the integrity and beauty of the landscape while addressing the functional need of a safe crossing over the designated stream. The proposed objectives included in-depth plans to conduct research on the type of wood and bridge design we would use for the project. However, as the project developed, Team Thank You and community partners were able to collaborate on these logistics under the guidance of David Brynn. The labor to build the bridge was performed on three work-days throughout the semester, and the bridge was unveiled and celebrated at the Vermont Family Forests’ Beltane festival at the end of the semester. The project’s second goal was to have organized, repeatable project-based curriculum intended to strengthen human connection and eco-consciousness (defined as a way of being that prioritizes conservation, compassion, connection, and reciprocity, and embodies self-renewal for all beings on ecological, social, economic, and spiritual levels) available on an easily accessible media platform. In order to achieve this goal, each member of Team Thank You identified their own gratitude practice to do once a day, and reflected on those experiences with periodic journal entries. These reflections were further discussed in weekly meetings with Team Thank You and the community partner,
Kristen Andrews. These meetings were also where lesson plans were teased out, and thoroughly designed the intentions and actions of each of the three work-days. Upon completion of the bridge and curriculum, Team Thank You transferred these exercises and documentation of the bridge building processes to a publicly available website for future groups to utilize. As a group, Team Thank You believes a connection to nature is vital to our holistic health. This includes our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. The connections we develop with nature in our childhood and adolescence define the values we carry with us into adulthood. Environmental health is human health and in order for people to cherish the environment, they must first experience it. The hope was to encourage environmental stewardship in younger generations by providing them with tools to reach a higher awareness of the life around them.

Methods
Team Thank You worked collaboratively as consultants to Vermont Family Forests and The Watershed Center to simultaneously develop and self-test a replicable project-based curriculum model. They familiarized themselves with a small, forested ecotone on Watershed Center lands where hikers used to brave a slippery and heavily eroded stream crossing. They identified the challenges and opportunities of the project area to design and build the needed trail bridge. This was done based on careful research and consultation with David Brynn of the Vermont Family Forests. Wood types available to choose from on Watershed Center land included northern white cedar, eastern white pine (Pinus strobus), hemlock (Tsuga canadensis), red pine (Pinus rubra), white oak (Quercus alba), black locust (Robinia pseudoacacia), and tamarack (Larix laricina). Team Thank You chose to construct the bridge using Northern White Cedar based on its rot-resistance, longevity, and recommendation from David Brynn. David, an experienced trail builder, consulted the team during the design process and participated in each of the three building/retreat days. In weekly one hour group sessions, the team engaged in practices designed to cultivate self awareness through gratitude, reciprocity, and compassion. They were also encouraged to engage in these practices on our own. Through group discussion and a personal process project, Team Thank You integrated these concepts into the context of the bridge building process. Group members shared the responsibility of leading these sessions and participating as students. This responsibility often included choosing a short, inspirational reading or activity and developing pertinent discussion questions. Kristen Andrews attended these practice sessions, led the first, and participated collaboratively thereafter. She also provided curriculum development support as needed.

Deliverables
Team Thank You was successful in their goal by constructing the bridge crossing on-site at the Vermont Family Forest in Bristol Vermont as well as developing a curriculum to be used for replicating another compassionate conservation project. There were three workdays designated to complete the first goal of building a bridge using on-site materials to allow people to cross the stream while keeping the stream habitat intact. Our team met with our community partners before the first work day to plan the schedule for the day to allow us to accomplish what we needed to get done for building the bridge as well as allowing time for us to test out mindfulness practices. The actual construction of the bridge was completed over three workdays which were approximately 6 hours long each day. On the first day, our team met on site with our community
partners, we assessed the building site and with the help of our community partner and local forester David Bryn to determine the best location on-site for a crossing. Team Thank You then assessed trees needed to build the bridge using Biltmore sticks to determine features such as Diameter at Breast Height (DBH), approximate height of the trees as well as other characteristics marking them with surveyor’s tape to be cut down. The second work day consisted of the team assessing and cutting a few more trees and transporting them from the cutting site to the building site using sleds and a log forwarder. More mindfulness practices were also tested in the field to build into the curriculum of the compassionate conservation project. The third and final work day was focused on constructing the bridge with all of the harvested timber. The team laid down the foundation and constructed the rest using drills. There were periods of time during the day where the team assessed the project and focused on fine tuning the individual mindfulness practices.

The team also met weekly with one of the community partners to review individual mindfulness practices developed by each team member. At each meeting the team also planned for the next work day and evaluated previous work days focusing on what could be improved for the curriculum. The team also developed a curriculum for the Vermont Family Forests to use when working with local school on other compassionate conservation projects using place and project-based learning styles. Each team member developed their own personal gratitude practice to be used as a part the curriculum for the compassionate conservation project. Throughout the project each team member tested their individual mindfulness practice seeing what worked and what did not working to improve it to be most effective in connecting participants of compassionate conservation to nature. Each student has written a description of their individual mindfulness practice which can be used by any student participating in the project.

In addition Team Thank You developed a website for the Compassionate Conservation projects to be used by the Vermont Family Forest when working with local schools. This website outlines the project that Team Thank You worked on as well as having the entire curriculum available along with examples and testimonials from the team. Additional resources for the project can be found on the website at https://sites.google.com/view/compassionateconservation/home

Discussion, Recommendations, Conclusion

Team Thank You’s project was a huge success. The team ended up with multiple, high quality deliverables that didn’t seem possible at the beginning of the project. They achieved both of the goals they set out to complete, and built stronger connections to each other and the land in the process. Team Thank You’s first goal was to complete a bridge for a safe crossing that would prevent further erosion of the stream bed. The bridge extends far enough over the sides of the bank on either side and with the traffic now going up and over the stream, instead of down and through, further erosion should be prevented. They were also successful in conservation of the Waterworks property. They harvested all the wood for the bridge from the property from a nearby spot through the Honorable Harvest, and with the help of David Brynn the team made sure to take trees that they felt the forest was most willing and able to give up.

Team Thank You was successful in achieving their second goal of creating an organized, repeatable project-based curriculum intended to strengthen human connection and eco-consciousness available on an easily accessible media platform, through turning the experiences and activities throughout the project into mini-lessons and a curriculum. Team Thank You became a close-knit group of friends throughout this project, they became more resilient and aware of themselves and their own mind-sets. There is no quantitative science for
feelings of mindfulness or eco-consciousness, but they all agree the project would not have gone so smoothly without a focus on the two. Team Thank You, though they didn’t run into problems among themselves and their ability to work together and complete objectives, they did find it difficult to balance self-testing the project-based learning themselves and designing the curriculum for it. They had to keep in mind what age group the curriculum was for, and think about how to keep high-school students engaged. With the project complete however, these seem like miniscule worries from the beginning because in the end the curriculum came out of everything the team was able to achieve and deliver.

It is also important to keep in mind that Team Thank You can only speak from their own perspectives and how this project made them feel. They want to acknowledge their own power and privilege as college students in Vermont, and they have pushed themselves throughout the semester to remain aware of how people of other cultures, backgrounds, and identities may perceive or practice gratitude, mindfulness, and conservation. Their hope is that this project will be repeatable and help connections of other students, but their work and how it made them feel is very unique to their own experiences.

For future and follow-up work Team Thank You would suggest a survey of the Waterworks property to determine what spots need the most and what those spots need. A few more mini-lessons may be useful to beef up the curriculum a little more, possibly a video of David Brynn explaining how to fell a tree or a write up of what he knows about the Abenaki and how they used to use the Property. The website could also use a map of the property, and the map could display spots that need trail work, spots where wildlife was spotted, and historical spots. Team Thank You also suggests that when recruiting new teams to do this project-based learning, that the mindfulness and gratitude part are emphasized as well as the ability to do hands-on work. The team was attracted to the “Compassionate Conservation” project for these reasons and they believe it influenced how well they worked as a team.
Appendix 14: NR206S Community Project Student Reflections

Compassionate Conservation Project Student Reflections

Final meeting debrief:

Beltane participation:
What was it like for you to participate in a community ritual and integrate the presentation of your bridge?

Student responses:
“The energy increased as the project progressed, knowing that the Beltane celebration was coming up.”

“It made me feel like service learning is real- and the community is benefitting. I saw our project play out on a larger scale for the community members- who filled me with positivity!”

“The music and the dancing made me feel like we were part of a community. It reminded me of the May Day celebrations we had back home when I was in preschool.”

“It was a way to reach back out to the community we were serving.”

“It made me realize we were truly filling a community need.”

“It was great to see the immediate reactions of the people when they saw the bridge for the first time. I saw that the community was just as thankful as we were for the project.”

Reciprocity
“One of the important goals of service learning is to create the conditions for reciprocal exchange. I’d like to ask each of you to comment on the balance you experienced between what you gave to this project and what you received as a result of participating in this project”

Student responses:
“I felt my growth coming full circle”

“The gratitude practice created a scaffolding of positivity where I could assign positive value to adversity. I felt fully reciprocated”

“I engaged readily in reciprocal exchange. I feel way more able to collaborate now.”

“I needed more balance in knowing what the end product would look like. The students should be able to see a drawing of what the bridge will look like at the end before building it.”

Community Partner: “The engagement with the community that the students provided was extremely valuable to us. The Watershed Center is energized by your commitment and compassion. We got a lot more than a bridge!”
Gratitude
“We have been talking about gratitude in class this semester as a tool which can be very useful in the process of environmental problem solving and in maintaining an upright stance in group work. Considering the entire project process over the course of the semester and the interactions you had with both human and non-human beings, I’d like to ask each of you to share an example of a time when you experienced a warm orb of gratitude toward or from a human or non-human being that has remained lodged in your heart.”

Student Responses:
“The first tree felling where we practiced the honorable harvest.”

“The blind luck we had with the weather every day we worked in the woods.”

“(CP)’s level headedness as we dealt with challenges.”

“Doing something for the community while having fun and doing hard physical work as a change from classroom work where the focus is on achievement.”

“The bridge is a physical reminder of how much gratitude we put into the bridge and a place we can return to to relax and enjoy it.”

“Connecting working with forest resources and stewardship to mindfulness and seeing trees as individuals.”

(CP): “Paul. You students brought him back into our community”

(Paul is an older man who, after the death of his son in a car accident several years ago, began walking the Watershed land daily. He stays off trail and rarely interacts with others. During our second building day, Paul approached us and watched us work for a while. The students welcomed him and asked him about his knowledge of the area. On the third building day, Paul returned to see the progress on the bridge and again spoke with the students, complimenting them on their work. The next day, at the Beltane celebration, Paul appeared again. He joined in the dancing and the dedication of the bridge. Afterwards, he stayed around to tend the campfire. I asked him if he attends the Beltane celebration every year. (This was its 13th year) He said “Well, I’ve watched it from the woods a few times, but never come down. I always wondered how the ribbons got woven together like that.”

Excerpts from Team Thank You’s Final Report which summarize their collective learning:

“Overall, Team Thank you found that the embodiment of an eco-conscious mindset and practicing daily gratitude exercises had a positive impact on the group dynamics, community partner relationships, and general ability to complete deliverables to the fullest extent.”

“They want to acknowledge their own power and privilege as college students in Vermont, and they have pushed themselves throughout the semester to remain aware of how people of other cultures,
backgrounds, and identities may perceive or practice gratitude, mindfulness, and conservation. Their hope is that this project will be repeatable and help connections of other students, but their work and how it made them feel is very unique to their own experiences.”

“Team Thank You also suggests that when recruiting new teams to do this project-based learning, that the mindfulness and gratitude part are emphasized as well as the ability to do hands-on work. The team was attracted to the “Compassionate Conservation” project for these reasons and they believe it influenced how well they worked as a team.”
Appendix 15: NR206S Excerpts from Student Final Expressions

Excerpts from the NR206 Final Expressions of Learning of individual members of Team Thank You

“I am proud to say that the community project my group and I worked on over the course of this semester has been one of the largest successes of my college career. Its focus on gratitude and mindfulness has made me give a lot of thought to how “who we are” is principally based on what we have done right in our lives. We should be grateful for the things that we have going for us, that give us the agency to create and foster our own happiness and seek out our own meaning. This class has also taught me the importance of maintaining balance and an open-mind. Yes, I have done a significant amount of hard work during my undergraduate studies that I am proud of, and am thankful to have had the opportunity and privilege to do. However, I am as much an accumulation of failures as I am a collection of victories. Both truths are what define me as a college graduate, and what will continue to define me as the person I strive to continue becoming.”

“We each embraced in our own way the opportunity to engage with nature in a way that was very different from any of our previous academic studies.”

“(In class) We heavily discussed the difference between fixing, helping, and serving. I truly believe that we served the community of Bristol in the construction of our bridge. We served the forest by participating in the honorable harvest and taking only what we needed for the bridge. We served the people by constructing a solution for a tangible community need. This didn’t hit me until one elderly woman expressed her gratitude, explaining that her friend had recently passed and had been unable to access certain areas of the forest because she couldn’t cross the stream. She thanked us for building the bridge, on behalf of her and of others who otherwise would be unable access the Waterworks property in its entirety. This was important for me to hear because it extended the impact of our project beyond myself, and my group. Our project impacted the local community in a positive way. They were grateful of our time, dedication, and efforts.”

“Self-reflection on parts of one’s own life that don’t necessarily help them achieve things in the conventional sense, but may be contributing to individual creativity, well being, or general positivity.”

“Artist’s Statement: This is a piece of writing I completed inspired by the feelings I’ve been having about our non-human and more-than-human friends that share everything in this world with us. I really began to look at birds last fall, but over this past semester in NR 206, my "addiction" "obsession" whatever you may call it, really took off. We emphasize our community partners so much so that sometimes we forget that all of the natural world is our partner in any project that we complete. We owe it to all of nature.

Last fall I began to bird in a class at university. Last fall I began to bird, and I never stopped. Don’t get me wrong, I had watched birds before, but there’s a difference between looking at the birds and seeing them.

I grew up watching the Great Blue Heron fish in the cool shallows of the Atlantic Ocean in Harpswell, Maine. Whenever the Heron would arrive, my heart raced, I jumped up in excitement to tell my mom he was back, again. He. The Great Blue Heron, not ‘it.’ He came for dinner most days of the summer, probably catching the same crabs my brother and I would set traps for off the dock.”
He would stand as still as a statue with the water stretching up his long, slender legs, past his knee joint. His knees would bend backwards, lowering his giraffe-like neck towards the water, cocking his head and scanning a place to strike.

If I could go back, I would spend hours watching this heron. If I could go back, I would grab my dad’s binoculars and get intimate with his slate grey plumage, and the “S” curve of his neck. If I could go back, I would tell him his black and white striped crown makes him look like royalty.

I wish I had observed and took notes on his diet, made notes on behaviors, and learned his feeding schedule, all things I’ve learned to do since I started birding last fall. It’s one thing to spot the bird, it’s another to get to know them."
Appendix 16: Article in Addison Independent on the Beltane Celebration
https://issuu.com/addisonindependent/docs/05-04-2017

A celebration!

“THERE WAS MUCH” to celebrate at the Triadic Watershed Center this past May. On May 6th, the center’s annual Beltane celebration, a traditional Pagan spring festival, began with a new 20-meter constructed living fence. The fence, built by graduate student Kristin Andrews, was intended to serve as a “Compassionate Connection” for frogs. The fence was installed as a collaborative effort between the Watershed Center and local residents. Graduate student Kristin Andrews organized what is being termed the “Compassionate Connection Project.” The fence is designed to serve as a habitat for amphibians, helping to create a safer environment for these creatures. On May 6th, a large crowd gathered at the Watershed Center to celebrate the opening of the new fence. The ceremony included speeches, music, and dance, followed by a bonfire and outdoor activities. The event was well-received by all, with many expressing their appreciation for the efforts made to create a more sustainable and connected community. Photos by Annette Blais.
Appendix 17: NR207 Discussion on White Privilege

Compassion for the fears of white people

As a TA for the course NR207 Power, Privilege and the Environment, I facilitated a discussion on white privilege among about 10 white students, most of whom were male. They had selected this group because the topic was “digging deeper into the understanding of white privilege.” They all felt that they understood the basic concept of its destructive power, but weren’t sure what they personally could do to interrupt the cycle. All seniors, the topic of their UVM graduation came up, and the idea that their diploma was due, in part, to their white privilege. There was obvious discomfort around the circle. I asked them if, given how hard they had worked to meet the requirements for graduation over the past 4 years, it felt as if this white privilege idea was somehow discounting the magnitude of their efforts. As they nodded, I asked, “Does it feel like someone is trying to take something away from you?” From this place of compassion, we were able to have a discussion, as hard working white people, about the impact of the subverted fear of loss we were all carrying around in our white bodies. From there, we were able to trace the feeling back in history, all the way to the slave owners who feared their slaves would revolt against them or that they would lose their workforce and their livelihood if slavery were abolished. This perspective also helped the students develop compassion for the degree of anger a black person may be carrying around in his/her body. I noticed shifts in perspective among those students that day that had the potential to newly illuminate some roots of racism. I suggest that this new appreciation for diverse historical experience might have been inspired by recognizing collective pain, fear and anger with compassion, and without judgment in community.
Appendix 18: Middlebury Senior High Youth Group Homelessness Presentation

Homelessness Panel Presentation- Nov 6 7-8:30 pm
Senior Youth Group, Middlebury Congregational Church

Panelists: Doug Sinclair, Samantha Kachmar, Elizabeth Ready, Jonah Heiser, Kristen Andrews

7-7:15-
Youth are divided into small groups of 4-5 to complete page 1 of the worksheet which asks them to:
   Take a look at the VT homelessness data on this page.
   As a group, come up with 5 questions you have about what it is like to be homeless.

7:15-7:45-
Panelists introduce themselves telling briefly (2 min max):
   -what they do at work
   -why they have chosen this work

   Small groups take turns asking their questions. Panelists take turns answering.

7:45-8:00-
Youth return to small groups to work together to brainstorm as many answers as they can to questions on page 2 of the worksheet
   1. If you and your family were to suddenly lose access to your home, and none of your close relatives and friends had the capacity to take your family in, what would be your most pressing concerns?

   2. What circumstances can you imagine that might cause a person to become homeless? (Try to come up with at least 5)

   3. Why might some people be more at risk of becoming homeless than others?

   4. What types of services do you think a community should provide in order to prevent and/or address homelessness?

8:00-8:15-
Return to large group and share and combine answers on large whiteboard. Panelists will give info on various social services provided in Addison County.

8:15-8:30- snack and closing prayer
Take a look at the VT homelessness data on this page. As a group, come up with 5 questions you have about what it is like to be homeless.

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5.
AFTER the panel presentation, work together as a group to brainstorm as many answers as you can to these questions:

1. If you and your family were to suddenly lose access to your home, and none of your close relatives and friends had the capacity to take your family in, what would be among your most pressing concerns?

2. What circumstances can you imagine that might cause a person to become homeless? (Try to come up with at least 5)

3. Why might some people be more at risk of becoming homeless than others?

4. What types of services do you think a community should provide in order to prevent and/or address homelessness?
Appendix 19: Middlebury Senior High Youth Group Serving Angels Activity

**Serving Angels - reciprocity and the potential for joy**

An interactive discussion led by Kristen Andrews
December 12, 2016

**Brief Project Summary:**
When well-meaning people set out to engage in service, sometimes we end up unknowingly participating in and perpetuating power dynamics. These unintentional oppressive words or acts can be subtle or not so subtle and are examples of what has come to be known as implicit bias or micro-aggressions. Conversely, when people are able to access a genuine connection that feels balanced and reciprocal, even when they come from vastly different experiences, service can be mutually satisfying and even joyful. This piece includes 4 short vignettes set in service situations I experienced and questions for discussion.

**Central Question:**
What are the conditions that promote joyful, mutual connection in service situations?

**Intended Audience:**
A High School Youth Service Group comprised of white students in grades 9-12 at Middlebury High School, Middlebury, VT
This group is preparing to embark on a one-week service trip to the Sioux River Indian Reservation in June 2017. This presentation will be one part of a series of weekly offerings during the school year designed to broaden the perspectives of students in preparation for participating in a service project with people with life experiences unlike their own. Students will be divided into small groups of 6-10 as they grapple with the questions for discussion. A large group share will conclude the session. Topics of other presentations in this series will include causes of homelessness, white privilege and systemic racism.

**Relevance:**
Destructive dynamics of power and privilege are currently rampant in our society (and ramping up as I write.) This project seeks to begin to address these dynamics using the venue of service.

**Purpose/Goals:**
This writing piece is designed as a series of discussion platforms forming the basis for thoughtful, authentic group discussion. The purpose of the pieces is to depict examples of both implicit bias/micro-aggressions and balanced, joyful, reciprocal service in action. The students will be given the latitude to interpret the provided questions for discussion from their own viewpoints. They will then be encouraged to reflect upon and examine their own reactions, habits and realizations.
Buried in a parka, Cathy coaxes her numb fingers to wiggle a coat hanger between her car window and it’s rubber gasket and then around the inner lock handle. “Are you locked out?” I inquire, with concern as I deliver rock salt to her doorstep. “Yeah.” She mutters, without looking up. “Did you call the police?” I suggest. “They only come if a kid is trapped in the car,” she reports, jerking the wire upward again. I turn to leave, but then hesitate. I pull gingerly on the outer door handle, hoping it might enhance the coat hanger’s work and free the latch. For a few minutes, we jiggle and yank together, trying to time the movement of the two levers to release the lock. “Do you have to get to work?” I query her. “Yeah, I was supposed to be there at 3.” Suppressing a hoarse cough, she offers, “my boyfriend’s got a key, but he’s all the way down in Brandon.” We are repeating the same ineffective motion over and over, moving the lock handle some, but not enough to open the door. “Can you take the bus?” I suggest. “Yeah, but I’m broke.”

I move a few feet away, behind my car, and pull out my phone. Cathy continues her rhythmic prying. I punch in 9-1-1. “I work for the John Graham Emergency Shelter and I have a resident here who needs to get to work and is locked out of her car,” I inform the dispatcher. “You’ll have to call a locksmith,” she replies matter-of-factly. I ramp it up a notch, hoping to make the situation appear desperate enough to elicit a favor. “This woman has nothing!” I plead. I trudge back over and offer to pay the bus fare to get Cathy to work. She shakes her head, her chin protruding. ‘I’ll just wait ‘til my boyfriend gets home.” “OK” I relent, “Sorry I can’t help.” “It’s OK” she assures me.

Questions for discussion:
1. Is it OK? For whom? Why? Why not?

2. Who has the power in this situation? Does anyone gain or lose power during this interaction?

3. How might the power in this situation have been distributed differently?

4. What examples of reciprocal service are happening in this story? How can you tell?

5. How would you have handled this situation if you were me? If you were Cathy? If you have time, discuss this quote in the context of the story above.

“Serving is different from helping. Helping is not a relationship between equals. A helper may see others as weaker than they are, needier than they are, and people often feel this inequality. The danger in helping is that we may inadvertently take away from people more than we could ever give them; we may diminish their self-esteem, their sense of worth, integrity or even wholeness.” (Excerpted from Helping Fixing or Serving? By Rachel Naomi Remen, 1999.)
Serving Angels

Plates of chicken potpie are steaming and streaming from the kitchen, delivered by grinning middle schoolers in the basement of the Congregational Church of Middlebury. The tablecloths are crimson and white checked, festooned with mandalas colored with markers and surrounded by pine boughs. This week, the North Branch School has taken on the Community Supper. The school’s 27 kids have raised the money to buy the food, planned the menu and spent the day baking enough lasagna and apple crisp to feed 250 people.

Dottie Neuberger oversees the sponsoring group each Friday night. Her rule is that every tablecloth stays on its table until the last guest gets up to leave. Before dinner, Dottie delivers a stern message to the servers. “If one of our guests asks for something extra, you tell them ‘I’ll see what I can do,’ and then come see me. We try to avoid saying ‘no’ to these people, because that’s what many of them hear every day in their lives.” She softens to an earnest tone. “This is important work, and we couldn’t do it without folks like you.” Dottie, widowed and retired, served 30 years as a high school substance abuse counselor. Wearing a pilled black fleece over a pink turtleneck, in knock-off brand running shoes, she ambles from table to table. “Good evening Mr. Boudreau! How’s that little dog of yours?” “Hey, Emma, you were just terrific in the play at school last Saturday!”

A student at the piano plays holiday tunes as each guest’s beverage order is filled. After serving, the hosts sit down in the empty seats at each table. “How was your week?” 14-year old Alex asks Sue. Bundled in a wool coat, her grey ponytail poking out from under her hat, she peers at him. “Not too bad.” Alex perseveres. “Do you like soccer?” Sue brightens. “My grandson plays at Barre City. He’s the goalie. What position do you play?”

After dinner, several guests help with the table clearing and collect take out meals to bring home to family members. I ask Dottie what makes this venue work so well. Glancing off into the distance, she confesses. “I’m not sure, but each week, I feel as if I am serving angels.”

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why do you think Dottie insists that the tablecloths stay on the tables until the last guest leaves?
2. Would you feel comfortable as a guest at this dinner? What details help you determine this?
3. What examples of reciprocal service are happening in this story? How can you tell?
4. Who has power in this scenario? How can you tell? How might the power dynamics be different?
5. What do you think Dottie means when she says “Each week, I feel as if I am serving angels?”

If you have time, discuss this quote in the context of the story above:

“Serving is different from helping. Helping is not a relationship between equals. A helper may see others as weaker than they are, needier than they are, and people often feel this inequality. The danger in helping is that we may inadvertently take away from people more than we could ever give them; we may diminish their self-esteem, their sense of worth, integrity or even wholeness.”

A Loaf and Fish

An unemployed engineer with two children, Mike is practicing his breading technique. He came to Community Kitchen Academy (CKA) at the Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf for affordable culinary training. "Then I realized you get to see people eating the food that you make," he discloses, eyes twinkling. "One time I saw a little kid waiting for his mom in the Food Shelf. He was maybe 6 or 7, kicking his feet, kind o’ bored. I asked him if he liked banana bread and handed him a warm loaf. To see how delighted he was made my day."

JoAnn, a black CKA student and a single mom, aims a stiff stream of water at remnants of breaded fish on the bottom of a pan. "Last year I got my Master's at UVM in Education and Social Work. I wanted to get some cooking skills to make myself more useful," she submits. "Last week, we planned and cooked a brunch for the CKA accreditation committee. They asked us questions to see if the program should continue." She recalls, "They were interested in us as people. It was a real confidence booster to know that we kept the program going for people in the future."

"Can I take your picture for my article on power and privilege?" I ask when we are done talking. "You can use my words, but not my picture," is her flat reply. Even when the class lines for a group shot before I leave, JoAnn refuses, calling from the dish room, "No, I’ve got to get these dishes done."

Questions for Discussion:

1. What are some possible reasons Mike’s eyes were twinkling?

2. What do you notice about the information JoAnn shared with me? Can you guess what she might be experiencing as she speaks with me?

3. Why do you think JoAnn did not want me to take her picture?

4. What examples of reciprocal service are happening in this story? How can you tell?

5. Who has power in these scenarios? How might the power dynamics be shifted to make them more equal? Less equal?

If you have time, discuss this quote in the context of the story above:

"Serving is different from helping. Helping is not a relationship between equals. A helper may see others as weaker than they are, needier than they are, and people often feel this inequality. The danger in helping is that we may inadvertantly take away from people more than we could ever give them; we may diminish their self-esteem, their sense of worth, integrity or even wholeness."

Closing the Gap
Flushed, Emmet wipes the corners of his eyes on the arm of his shirt. "I'm not sure I can do this right now." He apologizes. It's the day after the 2016 election and I have asked him to tell me why delivering hot meals to people experiencing food insecurity is necessary. "Every population we serve will be even more vulnerable now," Emmet fears, as he loads up the mobile steam table with the day's work of the Community Kitchen Academy students.

"Two pulled porks and a teriyaki chicken; braised cabbage and spinach salad on both please, dressing too!" Mary raves. "The Food Truck dressings are sooo delicious!" She and her grandson Eric have brought their wagon to carry the cargo back to Eric’s mom, who will soon be arriving home from work. Mary and throngs of her neighbors at the Northgate Apartments in Burlington look forward to a free meal on Wednesday evenings when Emmet Moseley, manager of The Good Food Truck from the Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf pulls in. I ask them, "why?" "The food is always fresh, tasty and healthy!" "The truck is clean and sanitary." "The truck staff is so patient with the children!" Kids carry stacks of to-go boxes home on their bikes for family members. One woman orders an extra meal to deliver to her friend who is just home from the hospital. "She brought me meals when I was sick last year," she recalls. Emmet has learned that "getting what you need when you’re food insecure is a full time job, and convenience really helps." On the truck, Emmet strives to "meet people where they’re at and be consistent." "We say ‘See you next week!’ and people can trust us to show up." "Our shiny truck looks really different than everything in the Projects. Our customers feel valued, special."

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why does Emmet become emotional when I ask him about his work?
2. Why might some people resist coming to the Food Shelf facility even if they or their children are hungry?
3. How is the Good Food Truck different than the Soup Kitchen at the Food Shelf?
4. What does the menu on this particular night tell you about Emmet and his customers?
5. Are there examples of reciprocal service happening in this story? Where and amongst whom?
6. Who has power in this scenario? How can you tell? How might the power dynamics be different?

If you have time, discuss this quote in the context of the story above:

"Serving is different from helping. Helping is not a relationship between equals. A helper may see others as weaker than they are, needier than they are, and people often feel this inequality. The danger in helping is that we may inadvertently take away from people more than we could ever give them; we may diminish their self-esteem, their sense of worth, integrity or even wholeness."

Leadership For Sustainability Essential Questions:

1. How can we create the conditions for wellbeing for all life?
2. How do we deal with the harm caused by:
   a. unequal levels of power and privilege
   b. unconscious bias?

LFS Theory of Change: We learn from the wisdom of natural ecosystems

1. We're all different - unique potential, differentiation
2. We need each other - interdependence
3. We can always improve - self organization

LFS Aspiration (our job):

Deepen our awareness of nature and one another

I asked myself how we could deepen our awareness of power and privilege as service group members so that we can be in the best position to create the conditions for wellbeing for all life.

I spent several weeks traveling around to places where people were giving and receiving food. I interviewed people and watched, focusing my attention on levels of reciprocity and power.

I wrote 4 short stories from these experiences to share with you tonight. Then I wrote some questions- to which there are no right answers. I’m very interested in what you will come up with as you consider them!

Tonight’s discussion is designed to help us deepen our awareness of how service can:

1. create the conditions for wellbeing through reciprocal relationships
2. cause unintentional harm through unconscious bias due to power and privilege differences

In small groups your leader will read the story and you’ll discuss the questions together. I hope many viewpoints will surface! Then we’ll come back together to share key insights we discovered through the discussion.

Aspiration:
Creating the conditions to deepen awareness and increase capacity to step into our unique potential to feed, nourish, cultivate and serve wellbeing and love for ourselves and the whole.

Resources


Appendix 20: Middlebury Senior High Youth Group White People Discussion

Presentation of The MTV film White People, by Jose Antonio Vargas to the Senior High Youth Group at the Middlebury Congregational Church
April 30, 2017

Introduction:
Review these terms:

Racism:
1. Claims racial differences in things like character and intelligence
2. Asserts the superiority of one race over another
3. Seeks to maintain dominance through beliefs, behaviors, language and policies

White Privilege:
A subtle system that contributes to the maintenance of racism and gives white people
1. A sense of entitlement (ex: scholarships)
2. Perks and advantages (ex. bandaids that match your skin)
3. Elevates the status of white people (ex. white people with a criminal record are 5% more likely to be hired than a person of color with a clean record)

White People Questions for discussion:
1. What is it like to be young and white in Middlebury? in today's world?
2. In what ways do you (we) enjoy white privilege?
3. Why do you think is it so hard for people to recognize, acknowledge and talk about white privilege?

What’s next? (Some thoughts to walk away with for continued contemplation)

- By saying “I don't see race” to indicate we don't hold racial biases we’re essentially saying to people of color, “I don't see you.”

- Pointing to other people's white privilege, without (or instead of) looking at our own, is a distraction from true anti-racist action.

- Take responsibility for educating yourself about racism.

- It's important to listen when people of color talk about their experiences with oppression and not to dominate conversations about race. But opting out altogether can be just as harmful.

- Appreciating a diverse group of friends or colleagues does not take the place of confronting white privilege.

From: Why Talk About Whiteness, Anti-racist Understandings for Educators by Emily Chiariello
Appendix 21: Invisible Leadership Style

Invisible leadership style

“A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.”
· Lao Tzu, (Tao Te Ching, 2015)

The Compassionate Conservation project was in collaboration with David Brynn, a local forester and steward of the 100 acres of The Watershed, and was designed to increase community connection between young people, the Watershed itself and the community members who frequent the trails. David, who manned the chainsaw and knew this forest intimately, ultimately designed the bridge, playing the role of expert. My role in the project was to create conditions for joyful connection to all beings. I attempted to do this using the invisible leadership style described by Lao Tzu. my work included:

- Developing a flexible structure for the project which the students would fully define
- Supporting the students as they created and practiced their own personal gratitude practices
- Cultivating the relationship with David and the Watershed Center
- Managing the logistics so that David’s responsibilities were limited to showing up on building days
- Introducing the Honorable Harvest protocol, (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 183)
- Introducing the concept of Project Based Learning
- Learning to fell a tree for the first time alongside the students
- Bringing the pot we used to make lunch over the fire
- Providing guidance and feedback on the website they created to document their work
- Creating space for the students to work independently on the project products, individually and cooperatively
- Filming a video of David and the students hauling a log with the forwarder- so that they could see themselves and share the experience with others
- Inviting the students to participate in the community-wide Beltane Celebration at the Watershed where they presented their bridge and received feedback from those who would be using the bridge regularly
- Soliciting and listening to student feedback on their project experience


As I prepared for my presentation of this project, I designed a schematic diagram that illustrates the scope of the project and how each of the component parts ultimately support planetary wellbeing. I began with education and an assumption that joyful connection would be a path toward planetary wellbeing. I then utilized the educational tools of gratitude, reciprocity and honoring pain (compassion.) In the context of these tools, I witnessed emerging conditions for diversity, interdependence and self organization, (characteristics present in natural systems.) Finally, when we as humans are engaged in mirroring the wisdom of nature, opportunities for physical, emotional and spiritual integration (wholeness) become uniquely possible and planetary wellbeing is enhanced.