

**SERVICE-LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT:**

*A Field Guide for Teachers*



**National Service-Learning and  
Assessment Study Group  
October 1999**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Marc Hull

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Marge Petit

**Service Learning Consultant**

Sheila Bailey

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Susan Bonthron (documentation consultant) and Rick Gordon (National Study Group Facilitator) edited the contributions from each local study group that comprise the body of this Guide. Rick Gordon wrote chapters 2 and 9; Susan Bonthron wrote Chapter 1 and designed, edited and formatted the document. They would like to thank all the National and Local Study Group members for their cooperation in this three-year effort.

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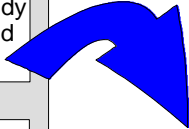
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# *A Visual Guide ...*

## **SECTION ONE: Why read this book?**

**Chapter 1** introduces the Field Guide and the work of the National and Local Study Groups — the teachers and educators who wrote it.

**Chapter 2** briefly summarizes many thorny issues the study groups faced and the conclusions about assessment we eventually came to share.

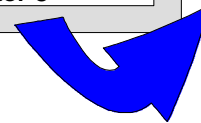


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**Planning for assessment:**  
DC developed an assessment planning process for service-learning activities  
**See chapter 3**

**Rubrics for Looking at Student products:**  
Maine collected rubrics teachers can use that help provide feedback on student work, and used them with on-demand tasks to assess student learning  
**See chapter 4**

**KWLs and Anchor Tasks:**  
California combined student self-assessment and teacher-generated anchor tasks to assess three dimensions of service-learning  
**See chapter 5**

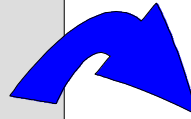


*...to this Book*

**Inviting students into the process:** Vermont investigated how teachers can invite students into the assessment process right from the beginning  
**See chapter 6**

**Service-learning can demonstrate standards:** Colorado detailed how state standards can be met across many subject areas through a curriculum about food and hunger  
**See chapter 7**

**Planning and reflection tools:** New Hampshire developed coaching tools to help teachers plan and incorporate high-quality assessment into service-learning  
**See chapter 8**



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# **1** INTRODUCTION TO SERVICE- LEARNING, ASSESSMENT, AND THE NATIONAL STUDY GROUP

## **Service-Learning and Education Reform**

Recent advances in understanding the human brain, intelligence, and how we learn<sup>1</sup> indicate that successful schools need to provide

- ◆ rich, safe learning environments that address multiple realms of intelligence;
- ◆ opportunities for experiential learning to promote construction of knowledge and understanding;
- ◆ opportunities to develop both intelligence and skills through mediated learning;
- ◆ opportunities to transfer learning through reflection; and
- ◆ balanced assessment measures that include portfolios and performance assessments as well as more conventional standardized tests.

At the same time, there exists a widespread movement in education reform toward standards-based education that emphasizes both content knowledge and the development of critical thinking, problem-solving and social skills that apply across the fields of knowledge. State standards are now in place across the country that try to define exactly what it is we want all our students to know and be able to do.

The confluence of these two streams in education reform—brain-based learning and standards-driven education—place service-learning neatly at the center of education reform. Service-learning as a teaching and learning strategy can help teachers move away from traditional learning and assessment practices toward authentic assessment, standards-based education, development of critical thinking skills and social responsibility—practices in line with current trends in research and education reform.

## **What is service-learning?**

Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that combines the principles of experiential learning with service to the community. Through service-learning, students develop as citizens, learn problem-solving skills, and experience a sense of social responsibility by engaging in thoughtful action to help their communities. Students involved in

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<sup>1</sup>Robin Fogarty provides a very brief encapsulation of the research on brain-based learning in her article entitled “The Intelligence-Friendly Classroom,” (*Phi Delta Kappan*, May 1998).

service-learning deepen and reinforce their newly acquired content knowledge and skills by using them to address real community needs. They experience themselves — and are perceived by others — as competent, contributing members of the community.

Practiced at its best, service-learning offers a bridge from traditional teaching practice to richer learning environments and opportunities, and it frames the thinking process about student learning and assessment in which educators across the country are now engaged.

## **The National Study Group on Service-Learning and Assessment**

As the Serve America initiative in 1992 grew into the Learn and Serve America Initiative that now operates in every state of the union, educators began to ask what it is that students were learning through service and how such learning could be identified and assessed. Practitioners of service-learning understood its positive effects on students, but they also understood that assessment drives teaching practice, and without some means to assess what students learn through service, they would not be able to justify time spent on service-learning in and out of the classroom. In October 1994, Vermont took the lead in organizing a National Service-Learning and Assessment Network (NSLAN) to identify issues and questions around assessing student learning through service. As a direct outgrowth of this network, the National Study Group (NSG) on Service Learning and Assessment was formed in October 1996, with a generous grant from the Corporation for National Service and support from the Council of Chief State School Officers. The NSG met a total of eight times in the period from October 1996 through June 1999, engaging in rich discussions about assessment versus evaluation, student learning, state standards, and authentic assessment tools and techniques. Many of us also met with local study groups throughout that period.

**Our Members** The National Study Group comprised state service-learning directors, assessment directors and consultants, evaluators, researchers, and professors of education from California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Washington State. It also included representatives from four organizations: Outward Bound, KIDS Consortium, East Bay Conservation Corps, and Close Up Foundation. Appendix A provides a complete member list.

**The Challenge** The National Study Group had to grapple with many issues around assessment before we could begin to define what we could realistically expect to accomplish. Our goal eventually became the production of a field guide for teachers to help them develop assessment techniques useful in their service-learning curriculum. Not wanting to reinvent the wheel, we also recognized that teachers already used many assessment strategies they could apply to service-learning, and that part of our job was simply to instill confidence in teachers about what they were already doing, and to help them see the connections between

various service-learning activities and the state standards that they were trying to incorporate into their curricula.

**The Focus on Student Assessment** The National Study Group purposely focused on student assessment rather than program evaluation. We understood that the two are interrelated, but felt that while significant progress had been made in determining best practices in service-learning, there was an increasingly widespread demand for knowledge in the field about how teachers can and should identify and assess what their students learn through service. We were also interested in sustaining service-learning as a *teaching strategy integrated into the curriculum* rather than an add-on program.

One of our first steps was to form local study groups (in California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, and Vermont) comprising an assessment consultant and four or more classroom teachers already using service-learning strategies. These local study groups focused on finding best practices in the assessment of student learning through service in both content and skills areas. Classroom teachers were invited because National Study Group members felt strongly that we needed to pay close attention to what teachers were already doing (and were able to do) in order to ensure that the tools would be useful, applicable, and field-tested in real settings. Local study groups established their own priorities in choosing which state or local standards and which content and skill areas they wanted to address in collecting or creating assessment tools. Officially, the mission of the National Study Group was to:

- ◆ provide guidelines to the local study groups to develop standards-based tools to assess (or develop assessments for) student learning through service;
- ◆ critique the tools collected or developed by the local study groups;
- ◆ document and share information about what the local and national groups are doing.

**Assessment as Feedback** Student assessment has multiple purposes, including grading, sorting, diagnosing strengths and weaknesses of students, evaluating effectiveness of curriculum and delivery models, reporting to parents and schools, identifying misunderstandings, offering a sense of direction, and celebrating accomplishments.

Responding to the latest research in the field, the NSG chose to focus on *assessment as feedback that helps students learn*. We discussed what kinds of feedback contribute most to student learning. We agreed that students need to know what is expected of them, what they have done well, and what they need to improve on (as well as how to improve).

Responding to the recent establishment of statewide standards, we also recognized that students need to be familiar with their state standards and to know where their work stands in relation to those standards. We came to the unavoidable conclusion that paper and pencil test results could not

supply students with enough feedback to improve their work. At worst, such tests only provide feedback on how well a student can memorize and regurgitate content matter, or how skilled students are at taking tests. Even at best, such tests alone do not provide sufficient feedback to teachers about whether and how well their students are meeting established standards.

When we began to gather and examine assessment tools such as rubrics and checklists, we quickly discovered that it was meaningless to look at the tools unless we could also look at the context in which they were used, including the standards they addressed, the student work (product or performance) chosen for assessment, and the criteria used for assessing the work. Toward that end, we eventually developed two “planning tools” to help teachers in local study groups develop exemplars of thoughtful service-learning experiences. Study groups then used and transformed these planning tools in ways that best suited their work. The exemplars each group developed attempt to align selected standards with student products/performances, assessment criteria and tools, and benchmark examples of work that meets those standards.

At its meeting in January 1998, the NSG discussed how we would disseminate the work we were collecting, and decided on a format for the document you are reading now. Our idea was to develop a field guide that would help teachers plan or align their service-learning strategies to incorporate all the elements discussed above. We hope that the resulting *Field Guide* will provide educators at all grades and levels with a professional development tool to help them use the strategy of service-learning as an integrated piece of their standards-based curriculum and assessment practice.

## About this Document

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The *Field Guide* you are reading is the culmination of this three-year effort by our national and local study groups to research, test, and share what we have discovered. It is aimed at teachers who are interested in using service-learning as a teaching–learning strategy, regardless of whether you have been engaged in service-learning before. It is organized as follows:

### Section One

Section One comprises the two introductory chapters:

#### **Chapter 1: “Introduction to Service-Learning and Assessment”**

This chapter introduces the work of the National Study Group and this *Field Guide*.

#### **Chapter 2, “Recurring Issues with Assessment of Learning Through Service”**

Chapter 2 encapsulates our learning about assessment over the three years of our work together in national and local study groups.

## **Section Two**

Section Two is the heart of this guide. Each of its chapters represents the work of a state study group and offers a unique “gift” to the field in its particular approach to the topic of student assessment of learning through service. All six chapters begin with a list of the study group members, an abstract providing a brief overview of the chapter, a Table of Contents indicating the main subject areas covered, and a brief description of the state context in which the study group was operating. Many chapters also include a description of the study group’s process. The chapters are described below.

### **Chapter 3: “Planning Service-Learning Classroom Assessments: A District of Columbia Case Study”**

Members of the District of Columbia study group describe an assessment planning process that can help students meet standards while they engage in service-learning. The chapter offers a road-map for planning assessment strategies that address standards with examples from a particular case study.

### **Chapter 4: “Using Rubrics to Assess Learning Through Service in Maine”**

The Maine study group focuses on collecting and creating rubrics that help direct and provide feedback on student products and performances commonly generated by service-learning. Their approach to assessment is a combination of rubric-based authentic assessment and on-demand tasks determined by individual teachers.

### **Chapter 5: “KWLs and Anchor Tasks: Assessing the Dimensions of Student Learning Through Service”**

California’s study group identified three dimensions of student learning that occur during service-learning. Their chapter explores combining the student self-assessment (KWL) with the teacher-generated anchor task as a strategy for assessing student learning across all three dimensions. Their approach is applicable to all service-learning projects and activities.

### **Chapter 6: “Invitation to Learn: Involving Students in the Assessment Process”**

Vermont’s study group investigates how teachers can invite students into the learning process by involving them in the planning and assessment of service-learning. Their example is a service-learning unit on gardens closely linked to standards that emphasizes collecting multiple sources of evidence to provide a rich picture of student achievement.

### **Chapter 7: “What’s for Lunch? How Does Food Affect You and the World?”**

Colorado’s study group chapter investigates how service-learning itself can be an excellent method for demonstrating student achievement of standards. It details an example project about Food and Hunger, showing how service-learning can address standards through an inquiry-driven model integrated across a wide variety of disciplines.

### **Chapter 8: “Improving Teaching and Learning in New Hampshire through Effective Assessment of Service-Learning”**

The New Hampshire study group shares their challenges in

grappling with assessment issues, and presents the “Planning and Reflection Tool” they developed to help coach New Hampshire teachers in high quality assessment of student learning through service. Their study group process has broadened and enriched the assessment discussion statewide.

## **Section Three**

Section Three includes a final chapter about the study group process itself along with two appendices:

### **Chapter 9: “Reflections on the Study Group Process”**

This chapter addresses the issue of using study groups as a format for action research by teachers and other educators. It summarizes what the National Study Group members learned about working in study groups with their states.

### **Appendix A: National Study Group Members**

An inclusive list of members of the National Study Group who shared in the effort to produce this guide. (A list of local study group members precedes each study group chapter.)

### **Appendix B: Resource Bibliography**

A bibliography of books, Internet websites, and other resources to help teachers who want to pursue the goal of incorporating useful assessment strategies into their service-learning practice.

## **How to Use the Guide**

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We have formatted this document to fit a looseleaf binder in the expectation that you will add your own exemplars, notes, and research. The *Guide* is designed to be accessible from a number of different points, depending on your interests and experience. If you are new to the field of service-learning, you might want to read it consecutively; if not, you might choose to browse whatever chapters catch your eye. No one chapter need be read as a prerequisite for any other. The ideas and approaches offered here are not “prescriptions for good practice.” They are meant to provide suggestions and clues about how to develop your own service-learning strategies and assessment tools. Feel free to adapt and refine them to suit your site and standards.

We hope the *Guide* helps to clarify the complex process of aligning your assessment practice with standards and student work related to service. Our ultimate goal is to integrate service-learning as an acceptable teaching and learning strategy in the curriculum of schools nationwide. We can accomplish this if we ensure that student learning through service addresses desired standards and is assessed using appropriate tools and processes that validate the skills and knowledge students gain through service. In doing so, we can also help to build a bridge toward a *culture of assessment and reflection*, developing collaborative networks within and between schools, communities, and from state to state that can help us move toward more meaningful assessment practice.

# **2** RECURRING ISSUES WITH ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING THROUGH SERVICE

## **Assessment is a Complex Issue**

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Our three year study of the assessment of learning through service involved national leaders in service-learning and assessment, teachers who had long experience with service-learning, and some who were new to the field. There were study groups in each of six states and a national study group made up of educational leaders. In each of these settings, we talked and thought and explored and talked some more.

Our most significant learning from this experience has been that *assessment is a complex issue*. We initially hoped to discover and refine a set of tools to help teachers assess what students learn through service with the intention of offering them to the field. We learned that it just isn't that simple. We also learned that thinking deeply about assessment and discussing it with others provides some of the best professional development and learning educators can experience.

What we offer in this guide is insight into our learning — the common themes that arose from state to state and the understanding (if not answers) we arrived at by struggling with issues of assessment, service, and student learning. Foremost among these was the understanding that *assessment could be at the heart of learning* — that assessment was not simply about grading, but was a process that entailed setting goals, clarifying expectations, generating evidence of student competency, and providing feedback in a variety of ways. Done well, assessment works in service of learning, to help teachers, students, and families be better able to help students succeed in school and beyond.

## **A Vignette**

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Students in Ms. Lary's class are producing a video history of their town. Students collect information by interviewing senior citizens, researching at the historical society, collecting old photos and town records. Through careful analysis and editing, the students create a fifteen-minute film that brings the history of the town to life. This video is presented at the Senior Citizen Center and becomes a much valued resource at the town library. From this service-learning experience, Ms. Lary knows the students learned a great deal about history, interviewing, video production, working with others, writing and editing, and, perhaps most importantly, about sharing time with members of an older generation. Unfortunately, Ms. Lary can't see how to assess all this — and she knows that when the state test comes along in the spring, Tim and Sally and Michael won't be able to show what they learned on this statewide assessment. As usual, Tim will be too nervous to concentrate, Sally's reading deficiencies will limit her ability to follow directions and read questions, and Michael just

doesn't work well under strict time pressure. She knows that nowhere on the test will there be a chance to explain how students have learned to work together or how their connections with seniors make theirs a stronger community. Nor will the writing prompts on the test provide a place for the thinking, drafting, feedback, and editing that is her students' normal writing process in her class.

Distressed by the disconnect between her students' learning and the assessment methods she uses, Ms. Lary joins an assessment study group at her school. When her colleagues begin to discuss their reason for forming this group, they realize they share the same challenges. After a year of reading in the field, talking to other teachers, and visiting classrooms, Ms. Lary is ready for this service-learning experience again. This time, she helps the students clarify from the start the standards they will be working on in this project. For each standard, the class determines what would constitute quality work. As students work on this project, Ms. Lary checks on their progress, records observations on their work in class, leads in-class discussions about successes and challenges, and has students write short responses to detail their contributions to the work and what they see as their strengths and weaknesses. Ms. Lary gives students a test that asks them to give advice to interviewers, to write an essay on the town's history, and to discuss one thing they felt they learned from working with seniors. In addition, she collects and provides feedback not only on the student's final script and video, but also on individual interviews and writing drafts to get a complete picture of how each student has done on this service-learning project. Most of this, she realizes, is what she always had done, but until now she has not been so conscious about its purpose or how to document it. By clearly identifying the assessment process and including her students in it from the start, Ms. Lary found she not only had a much better handle on what each student had learned, but she found the quality of the student work improved as well.

Essentially, the vignette above is characteristic of the process many of us went through in our study groups. Like Ms. Lary, we knew that valuable learning was happening during service-learning, but we didn't know how to capture it. The remainder of this chapter encapsulates what we have learned.

## **Lessons Learned**

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**Assessment is different from evaluation** We spent a good deal of time simply distinguishing these terms. Evaluation, for us, refers to feedback on programs as a whole. Assessment refers to feedback on student learning. Until recently, evaluation has been more of a focus in service-learning than assessment. Partly due to requirements of funding sources, programs were required to report on hours of service, numbers of students involved, people served, money spent, and so on. These "macro" programmatic measures reflected what was done but not necessarily what was learned. Student achievement in general, rather than specific student learning, was evaluated indirectly through measures correlating test scores and grades with participation in service.

To better understand how service impacts student learning, a more "micro," personal view is necessary. Assessment should tell us how individual students are doing — what are they learning and what are they struggling with? While this can be a more challenging process than simply counting hours served or giving a test, it offers a much richer picture of what results from service. Done well, assessment provides students with feedback on their performance and direction for improvement, and it helps teachers better articulate the effectiveness of this approach to learning. While part of the assessment process involves evaluating the quality of student work, this information should be used less to sort students and more to help inform teachers how to adjust learning experiences to assure each student's achievement of desired standards.

Program evaluation is necessary and will continue to be a valued reflection on program implementation. But the specific learning that occurs through service demands greater attention. Student assessment helps to promote student growth and development and justify the continued support of service-learning as a viable path to student learning. The list in **Table 2-1** compares program evaluation with student assessment, seeking to distinguish the relative merits and challenges of each.

**Table 2-1: Comparison of Program Evaluation and Student Assessment**

<b>Program Evaluation</b>	<b>Student Assessment</b>
Programmatic	Individual, personal
Feedback on programs	Feedback on students
Reporting mainly to higher ups	Reporting to students
More numerically based	More competency based
Tells what was done	Tells what results occurred
Generalizes	Specifies
Formative and Summative	Formative and summative
More easily verifiable and validated	More challenging to establish validity/reliability
Tends to follow more set procedures	Requires relationship, judgment, expertise
More generic process and structure	Context-dependant and idiosyncratic
More easily learned & applied	Requires developmental learning for assessor
More confined and manageable	Unlimited and expansive
Can be viewed as "paperwork"	Can be meaningful and emotional
More product oriented	More process oriented
Assesses service provided	Assesses learning related to service

**Assessment is not a bad word** For many study group participants, their initial feelings about assessment were quite negative. Assessment was associated with grading, sorting, testing, and increasing student anxiety. Assessment was viewed as separate from teaching and learning. One person felt assessment followed the “gotcha” model — spotlighting students’ lack of knowledge, misunderstanding, or poor work habits.

After much work, we came to see assessment as a “collaborative success venture between teacher and student” (Cumbo). Assessment can be a positive tool rather than a punitive one. Assessment is about feedback to the teacher and the student to inform us how things are going and what needs to be adjusted to assure student learning. Assessment is a process “happening all the time in the good teacher’s classroom, where one is determining if a particular student is falling behind or where and when things should be retaught” (Weiss). Coming to see assessment as “not a dirty word” takes time; unpacking our assumptions, traditions, and beliefs about assessment is a complex task.

**Assessment is a challenge to discuss** “What I now know about assessment now is that at first it’s hard to talk about; then, it’s easy to talk about and hard to do. Then it gets easier to do but hard to decide how much to do. Then it is hard not to see that everything is connected to assessment when you’re in the business of education.” (Preble). Becoming a good assessor, like most learning, is a developmental process. In contrast to the picture created by mandated large scale testing, there is no simple tool for assessing learning, especially learning through service.

For many, their initial perspective viewed assessment as grading: The student hands in a piece of work and the teacher determines a grade for it. Sometimes this grade is based on predetermined and public criteria. More often, the grade relates to a more general feeling about the quality of the work. A more sophisticated consideration of assessment begins to raise issues of standards and criteria. What “counts”? What constitutes quality work? How do I know if my criteria are comparable to those used by other evaluators? Am I consistent from one student paper to the next? Am I consistent from one assignment to the next?

Then there is the issue of improving the quality of student work. Simply grading work after it is completed and telling students it is inadequate doesn’t necessarily help students improve the quality of their work. Letting students in on what is expected up front can help them produce better work. As the adage goes, “it is much easier to get somewhere if you know where you are going.” Further, giving feedback that is more specific than an overall grade helps tell each student what exactly they did well and what they need to improve upon. This too can help improve quality.

Thinking further about assessment, teachers begin to consider whether any single product ( a test, essay, term paper, lab report, etc.) is a reliable measure of student learning. How do we include students who may not

be as adept as test takers, writers, or speakers? What if it was just a bad day for the student when they worked on the test, paper, or presentation? These are questions of evidence — what evidence do you have that reflects student learning and how solid is this evidence? Could the student have understood the material but not have shown it in this product? Or could the student have produced a good product but not understood the material? Here is where having multiple pieces of evidence and multiple measures can provide a richer and more reliable picture of student learning. Teacher observations of students participating in s-l, student self-reporting in journals, peer feedback on contributions of team members' work, working drafts and completed products, comments from those served, and in-class reflections on the service together can substantiate our assessment of student learning.

Finally, when we have all this information about student learning, what do we do with it? How can we use our understanding about what students have learned and what they have not to shape future learning experiences? How can we adapt to meet individual student needs? How does our assessment inform our instructional practices? Suddenly, assessment has become central to all we do in the educational enterprise.

Once we get past the view of assessment as only grading and begin to see the complexities and challenges all educators face, it gets easier to talk about. When we talk about it, we begin to find ways to improve our assessment, to formalize the informal, to make the implicit more explicit, to clarify the cloudy. Soon, assessment becomes something we may want to be doing all the time, and in a way, good teachers probably do this. They are always assessing who is engaged and who is drifting off, who looks puzzled and who looks confident. And they are continually adjusting their teaching to pull this kid in here, to help this one over there. The New Hampshire chapter highlights this journey of teachers learning to talk and think more deeply about assessment.

**Assessment is a process, not an event** We began the study group process looking for assessment tools to use in service-learning. After collecting many tools from many teachers, we realized assessment wasn't really about just having better tools. Without knowing more about the context — the setting, the students, the time of year, the previous work students did, the details of the service-learning — it was difficult to see the value of any particular assessment tool. As we came to understand, "Assessment is a process — it's not just having a tool, but knowing how to use it, when to use it, when it's appropriate, how to use the results" (Gordon).

Given the importance of context, we can't provide one model for assessment that fits all situations. What we can offer is our overall understanding about assessment based on a lot of thinking and working together. In the end, study group participants came to see that assessment:

- is complex and multi-dimensional
- centers on feedback
- is rooted in context (i.e., situational)
- can be done by the teacher and students

- is both informal and formal
- is on-going (i.e., it should occur not just when work is done but while students are working and learning).

The chapters from each state study group elaborate on one or more of these ideas. Vermont highlights the involvement of students in the assessment process. California offers a strategy for on-going, embedded assessment throughout the learning process. Maine provides examples of how rubrics can be adapted for wide range of contexts. District of Columbia gives us a case study of how to manage the complexity of assessment within a service learning project. Colorado gives us a rich example of the multi-dimensional possibilities of service-learning and assessment. New Hampshire shows us the developmental process of teachers as they increase their understanding and application of assessment practice.

**Standards help guide the assessment process** In the current national educational climate, much of our conversations at the National and State level naturally revolved around standards. Once we came to see assessment not as a means to sort winners from losers but as a process for feedback on student learning, *standards became a real aid to the learning process.*

Realistically, we know there is always more out there than we can possibly teach in the confines of the school calendar. Teachers are always making choices about what is most important to learn and how to address these learning goals. State standards help provide a lens through which to make these choices.

We debated over where standards enter the learning process. For some teachers, standards are identified first and then used to design learning experiences. Others choose a learning activity, such as a s-l project, and then identify what standards are best related to this experience. In either case, the standards help define what is addressed, and more importantly, what is assessed. If feedback is to be concrete, specific, and useful to individual students, not every aspect of a s-l experience can be assessed. Knowing which standards are priorities, teachers can work with students to specify quality criteria, develop student competency, and generate evidence of achievement related to that standard. Thus, standards serve as a resource for teachers that provides focus, phrasing, and expectations that can guide the learning and assessment process.

**Expect the Unexpected** Part of the wonder in service-learning lies in its unintended results. Some of the most gratifying moments in service-learning happen when students go beyond the expectations we hold or when serendipity steps in to offer a unique learning opportunity. If we only assess standards we plan for, these magic moments may be easily missed. On the other hand, if we are so open as to leave everything to chance, many valued standards may never be addressed in a student's school experience. By opening the door to some degree of uncertainty, service-learning paves the way to the possibility of unexpected learning.

Leaving open opportunities for students to express their learning, to choose from a variety of products, and to explore areas of particular interest can help generate evidence of these unintended results. The KWL tool that the California chapter details is one way to let students share what they have learned, whether planned for or not. Portfolios are another strategy to allow for different representations of learning from students. And as the Maine chapter shows, almost any product can be assessed using rubrics created by teachers and their students. Whether the learning was planned for or arose in the course of providing service, the process of assessment — identifying standards, producing evidence, offering feedback — can be essentially the same.

**Service-learning itself can be an assessment** Study group members came to the conclusion that assessing what students learn through service is not really different from assessing any learning experience. Whether students learn through a lecture or a lab or a research project or service to the community, the function of assessment is to determine what students learned from this experience. The same tools can be used regardless of the learning method. In any of these settings, teachers can test for content knowledge, review student writing for insights into their thought processes, or observe students at work to see skills demonstrated.

The one major distinction for service-learning, like other experiential learning opportunities, is that much of the evidence of student learning is demonstrated in *the act of performing* the service itself. Rather than separating the learning and the assessment (such as when students acquire information through reading or a lecture and then need to demonstrate their learning on a separate assessment such as a test or paper), service-learning can be the way students both learn and demonstrate their learning. As students perform their service, they produce evidence of learning. The brochure for the recycling center, the planning for a community forum, the data collection on water quality, the guide to the nature trail — this work of s-l generates evidence that can be assessed. Maine's chapter helps us see the range of products produced in s-ls and how they can be assessed.

One challenge with service-learning is that some demonstration of learning occurs “in the field” and may therefore be harder to capture. To address this, teachers need to establish processes to capture this learning. For example, observation is a great source of evidence, but if undocumented, much of this evidence can slip away from a busy teacher's mind. Observation checklists or anecdotal record keeping can help retain these observations. Likewise, some of students' best work can occur when working with other students or alone, when no adult is watching. Journal entries, peer evaluations, and group discussions can all serve to help document this learning. California's chapter elaborates on one widely applicable tool that can help capture student learning from start to finish of a service-learning project.

Ultimately, service-learning might be one of the best means for assessing student learning. Through service-learning, a wealth of evidence can be collected that demonstrates student achievement along a wide range of

standards. Generated in a real world context, this evidence can serve as a truly authentic assessment of what students know and can do.

### **Service-learning is particularly good for addressing certain standards**

While service-learning can serve as a vehicle for demonstrating achievement of almost any standards, study group members felt it was particularly useful for certain standards that are difficult to see evidenced through other assessment methods. For example, citizenship and social responsibility are uniquely well demonstrated in service-learning. In fact, it is hard to see how these can be demonstrated strictly in classroom settings. Other standards, such as those related to problem solving, decision making, and teamwork, while potentially addressed through other learning methods, are often deeply embedded in the service-learning process.

### **Involve kids in the assessment process**

When assessment is perceived to be more about learning than grading, students become integral to the assessment process. As emphasized particularly in the Vermont chapter, students can be involved at every stage of the assessment process. They can help determine the standards to be addressed and they should be part of deciding the criteria for what constitutes quality work. Students can help choose what will provide evidence of their learning. They can provide feedback on the work of their peers and they can assess their own work.

This is what Grant Wiggins calls the “no surprises, no excuses” approach to assessment. If what we are aiming for in education is learning for all students, then it seems logical they should all know up front what is expected of them. In common sense terms, it’s a lot easier to get to St. Louis if you know that is where you are heading. Bringing students into the assessment process from the start — letting them know what they are expected to learn and what quality work looks like and what “counts” — leaves no surprises for students. Knowing the target, and given appropriate support, feedback, and time for improvement, all students can eventually meet the standard.