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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of 5 stakeholder groups--students, parents, community organization representatives, guidance counsellors, and secondary school principals--in dealing with a mandatory secondary school graduation requirement in Ontario. The requirement is that students must complete 40 hours of eligible community involvement activities during their high school years in order to graduate. Ten stakeholders were interviewed regarding the nature of the community involvement program, what makes it work, and suggestions for improvement. The study found that although this program has the potential to provide a meaningful experience for students, and students are seen to gain from their experience in multiple ways, it depends substantially on the commitment of students, educators, and community organizations to make it worthwhile. Stakeholders recommended changes to the current program, which included making it a more structured process that would increase the consistency of how this program is implemented, finding ways to curb cheating and to reduce the administrative burden on schools, having more support from the Ontario provincial government and Ontario Ministry of Education and Training in the promotion and communication of this program, and developing partnerships between community organizations and schools to enrich the application of this program.

This study concludes with a recommendation that the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training consider introducing Service-Learning, a curriculum-based experiential service and learning process, as an enhancement to the current community involvement program.
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Thank you to my lifelong friend, Gillian Saloojee, for reminding me that writing a thesis is like climbing a mountain. As she said, sometimes the peak disappears from view, but that does not mean it is not there. That thought kept me motivated. I have finally reached that summit!

Last, I wish to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Ken and Hazel Wardle, who encouraged me in everything, and fostered a love of learning and of serving. I love you and miss you both.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

I grew up in South Africa, in a family where community service was seen to be natural and necessary. My father was a minister. From a young age I was involved in projects to raise money for worthy causes and was encouraged to volunteer my time to assist others. I have a very strong memory of a church outreach visit to an impoverished rural community hospital that was dealing with a tuberculosis outbreak. I was quite young at the time. Whilst I cannot remember exactly what our purpose was in visiting the hospital, I can remember encountering people whose life experiences were very different from mine and who seemed to be happy in spite of their illness and poverty. Their attitude to life had more impact on me than the result of their illness did. I also remember the wonderful time we had as a church group, traveling together on the long bus ride to the hospital. We sang, told stories, and had fun. There was a real community spirit. I have always had positive associations with community involvement, and it gave me a sense that while I was giving to others, they were also giving to me. I think that this early experience with volunteering hooked me as a volunteer for life.

In 2002 I took on a personal challenge to raise $25,000 for a breast cancer organization, as they wanted to build a serenity garden for use by people who have cancer. I invited five other people to join me in raising the money, each of whom had lost someone to cancer as I had. We raised the money in 7 months, and today there is a lovely garden that we helped to create. It is called a healing garden, and it certainly served that purpose for our team as well as the people who visit the garden. None of us had any experience raising money or professed to enjoy asking people for
donations, but the cause had us go beyond that, and we discovered so much about ourselves, and each other, in the process.

Out of this group accomplishment came a garden, and much more. At a group level we felt such a sense of achievement. Two of us became Board members for the breast cancer organization. Empowered by this accomplishment, I realized that I could make a difference in communities that I cared about. I became interested in fundraising and volunteering with a much higher level of intensity than before.

The literature on the effects of volunteering on the volunteer supported what I had personally experienced. Volunteering has many benefits which include improved physical and mental health, active citizenship participation, and occupational advancement (Wilson & Musick, 2000). When I reflected on how much I had grown through volunteering, I wondered how to create situations where youth would be inspired to want to volunteer, as I had been.

I also thought of people such as Craig Kielburger. Craig, at the age of 12, decided to do something to end child labour and has since gone on to build his own foundation and have an impact on the world. A chance reading of a newspaper article about a young boy in Pakistan, a slave carpet-maker turned activist, caused Craig to become intrigued about the situation. The concept of child labour, and the location of Pakistan, were both new to him. A visit to South Asia to investigate for himself, at age 12, turned Craig into the activist he is today (Free the Children, 2005). The direction of his life was dramatically changed by what he saw, and the world is better for it.
Another reason for my interest in the topic of volunteering comes from watching my children go through high school in Ontario. In 1999 the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training introduced a new graduation requirement for secondary school students—40 hours of mandated community “involvement” (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999a, p. 9). This involvement consists of community service to be performed in a place or places of the student’s choice, as long as the work is not paid work, replacing paid work, or part of a course for which the student would obtain a credit (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training).

Although the community involvement requirement has not been called volunteering, probably due to its mandatory nature, I became interested in whether the mandatory program would provide valuable experiences that would encourage youth to continue volunteering. Janoski, Musick, and Wilson (1998, p. 498) contend that people can acquire the habit of volunteering, and this habit is formed by being in places where the “dispositions” required for volunteering are formed. They state that getting youth involved is important for volunteering, and they see no harm in compelling students to volunteer as part of a school activity (Janoski et al.). Based on these views, it is possible that the Ontario program could lead to longer term volunteering if it is a meaningful experience for youth. I’ve seen firsthand what the program looks like in both a private and public school environment and have seen some of its strengths and weaknesses.

**Purpose of the Study**

It is assumed by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training that community involvement will benefit both students and the community; but there is little literature
on the Ontario community involvement experience. Although this graduation
requirement has been in place for 8 years now, the Ontario Ministry of Education and
Training has not formally evaluated the program’s outcomes (Brown, Pancer,
Henderson & Ellis-Hale, 2007; Livingstone, 2006; Meinhard, Foster, & Wright,
2006; Ontario Network--Canada Volunteerism Initiative [OCVI], 2006a). To date
there is little academic understanding of the community involvement program from
the point of view of the multiple stakeholders. So the purpose of this study is to
explore the experiences of the primary stakeholders who are part of the community
involvement process, with a particular emphasis on what makes for a quality or
meaningful experience. The significance of this study is that it will add to the
literature on what is working within the current guidelines of the Ontario 40-hour
program and will broaden this literature by adding the perspectives of multiple
stakeholders. The study will also provide feedback to the Ontario Ministry of
Education and Training on the value of this program, as currently implemented, as
well as providing information that may lead to changes to the program. Service-
learning literature from the United States will be used to provide insight in evaluating
the meaningfulness of the Ontario program and in making recommendations.

Rationale

I have had several conversations with principals, students, and teachers on the
merits and drawbacks of the community involvement program as it now stands. I
attended a conference recently and got engaged in discussing the community
involvement program with the principals at my table. I was surprised, and
disappointed, to hear their views of the Ontario program. One principal’s initial
reaction was to say “great program in theory, but it should be scrapped.” Another told me of a young man who had offered to mow an elderly man’s lawn each week of the summer if he just signed a form. The man willingly signed the form and never heard from the young man again. No doubt the young man submitted that form as if his mandatory hours had been completed, and the school did not follow up. The third principal told me that when the program was introduced by the Ontario Ministry, principals were under the impression that it was something that the parents would monitor and that schools would not be involved in its administration. This view is somewhat supported by a statement from Bruce Smith, the Assistant to the Ontario Minister of Education and Training at the time of implementation, who stated that the program was designed to be self-directed (McLeod & Nicholson, 1998). These comments had me realize that although the service program is seen by people to be a good concept, it is not necessarily a successful one in their minds. As a result of these conversations I decided to find out what makes the program meaningful for those who feel they have benefited from it, from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders.

**Education and Community Service**

The concept of students being involved in their community as part of their education is not a new one but can be traced back to the work of education philosophers such as John Dewey.

Discipline, natural development, culture, social efficiency, are moral traits—marks of a person who is a worthy member of that society which it is the business of education to further. There is an old saying to the effect that it is not enough for a man [sic] to be good; he must be good for something. The something for which
a man must be good is capacity to live as a social member so that what he gets from living with others balances with what he contributes. What he *materially* receives and gives is at most opportunities and means for the evolution of conscious life. And education is not a mere means to such a life. Education is such a life. (Dewey, 1916/2005, p. 208)

Dewey wrote of the need for students to be involved in their communities as part of their education; to be experiencing the world around them and reflecting on the "full meaning" of those experiences (Dewey, 1916/2005). He also wrote of being of service to others. It seems perhaps it is out of this work, as well as out of religious teachings, that the concept of students learning while engaged in service to others was born (Kraft, 1996).

In the United States this practice of combining service with learning is called "service-learning"; it is a well-established grassroots-initiated educational practice (Kraft, 1996). Service-learning (or service learning) is a term used to refer to community service programs that are integrated into the school curriculum. In some schools these programs are optional; in others they are required. The programs involve students in their community, doing good for others without pay. They seek to extend learning beyond the classroom, although they often incorporate a structured process of reflecting on the experiences through writing and talk (Kraft, p. 136).

In Canada there is less history of formalized service as part of education. However some students have long been involved as volunteers in the community of their own accord, and many private schools and religious schools had community
service programs in place long before it was a graduation requirement in Ontario (Brown, Meinhard, Ellis-Hale, Henderson & Foster, 2007; Meinhard et al., 2006).

**Background of the Problem**

When the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training introduced the Community Involvement Program in 1999, they formalized service to the community as a part of the education system with the intention of increasing the level of youth involvement in their communities (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999a, p. 9).

The community involvement requirement is designed to encourage students to develop awareness and understanding of civic responsibility and of the role they can play in supporting and strengthening their communities. The requirement will benefit communities, but its primary purpose is to contribute to students’ development. (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, p. 9)

The program was outlined in Memorandum 124a from the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1999b). The outline covered the purpose of the program and its parameters, as well as giving sample forms for Boards to use. According to Brock (2001, p. 56), the Ontario community involvement program came out of recommendations of the 1994 Royal Commission on Learning and the 1997 Premier’s Advisory Board, where the former stressed the need for schools and communities to have stronger links, and the latter recommended that the government introduce voluntary action learning (or community service) and that the course be implemented as either a compulsory or voluntary credit for high school graduation.

The community involvement program is also said to have been inspired by somewhat similar programs in British Columbia and the United States, although those
programs are sometimes government funded or have financial incentives for students built in to fulfillment of the program (McLeod & Nicholson, 1998). The community involvement program does not include funding of any type (McLeod & Nicolson).

**Why Have Community Service Programs?**

Service-learning programs in the United States can be traced back several decades, although they started to become more mainstream in the 1980s (Billig, 2000; Kraft, 1996). In 1993 the Community Trust Act authorized the spending of federal dollars on school-based service-learning programs (Koliba, Campbell & Shapiro, 2006) and this Act spurred the dramatic growth of adoption of service-learning programs in schools, colleges, and universities.

Service-learning programs in the United States were promoted as a means to combat the downturn in youth involvement in their communities and to boost declining academic scores (Billig, 2000; Billig & Welch, 2004; Brock, 2001). The Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1999a) states that the community involvement requirement is designed to encourage civic involvement, although Brock states that the need for enforcing volunteering in Ontario may have been overstated. She contends that while youth volunteer activity in the United States was found to be in a sharp decline, those figures do not necessarily support what was happening to youth in Canada (Brock).

According to the 2000 (Canadian) *National Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating*, 37% of youth aged 15–24 years were volunteering at that time (Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, 2003). In the 2004 *Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*, this number had increased to 55% of youth aged 15
24 years, which included "volunteering" in mandatory programs. According to the 2004 statistics, youth volunteers accounted for 17% of total volunteer hours, of which 106 million hours were contributed by youth volunteers in mandatory community service programs (Hall, Lasby, Grumulka, & Tryon, 2006). Interestingly, the authors note that, on average, youth involved in mandatory programs contributed the same number of hours as did those not mandated. In Ontario, 50% of people over the age of 15 volunteered, according to the 2004 survey results (Hall et al.), which means that youth volunteering across Canada was at roughly the same level as the volunteer rate of the Ontario population in general.

When the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training introduced the 40-hour mandatory requirement for community involvement, they emphasized that its purpose was primarily to benefit the student, although the community would also benefit (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999a). The program appears to be based on an assumption, that is supported by literature from the United States and Canada, that having youths involved in the community is beneficial both to youths and to the community they serve. Their involvement and civic engagement strengthen their communities (Camino, 2000; Finn & Checkoway, 1998).

Although the Ontario program intuitively seems like a step in the right direction, and appears to be working in a similar direction to other community service programs in Canada and internationally (Brown, Meinhard, et al., 2007), the Ontario program does not appear to have attracted much academic research to date (S.D. Brown, personal correspondence, 8 February, 2007; Livingstone, 2006). There appears to be very little published research from education faculties (only King, Warren, Boyer,
Chin, 2005 could be found, although there are Masters’ theses) on the incorporation of community involvement as a component of education. Those showing interest in studying the program tend to be from areas such as policy development or voluntary sector studies (Brown, Meinhard, et al., 2007; Brown, Pancer, et al., 2007; Meinhard et al., 2006). To date most of the literature is in the form of discussion papers (Livingstone; Meinhard, et al., 2006; OCVI, 2006a, 2006b), although there are new studies that are about to be published (Brown, Meinhard, et al., 2007; Brown, Pancer, et al., 2007, Henderson, Brown, Pancer & Ellis-Hale, 2007; T. Taylor & Pancer, 2007).

Community Service Across Canada

There is an international trend to include community service in some form in high school education, and all of the Canadian provinces and territories have adopted a community service program of some description in their high school guidelines (Brown, Meinhard, et al., 2007).

The United States has many nationwide service initiatives which are either community service programs or service-learning programs. The fundamental difference between the two types of programs is that the former is not normally part of the school curriculum, while the latter is integrated into school curriculum, with an emphasis on learning as well as community service, and the programs are structured to include reflection as part of the process (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kraft, 1996). Two of these national service-learning initiatives include Learn and Serve America, which provides grants to service-learning programs (Spring, Dietz, & Grimm, 2006) and the Corporation for National and Community Service, which provides service-learning
grants and offers programs that support service-learning initiatives at a national and local level. There is no such national focus in Canada (Brown, Meinhard, et al., 2007). As education is the responsibility of each province and territory in Canada, it is not surprising that Brown, Meinhard, et al. found that each province and territory has a distinctly different program. The authors found that there was a general lack of reference to the community service programs by boards contacted in their study, which led them to conclude that “it is clear that community service and service learning initiatives are not salient features of high school curricula across the country” (Brown, Meinhard, et al., 2007, p. 3). They found that many school board websites do not mention the program, and front-line staff are largely unfamiliar with the practical aspects of its implementation. Allmendinger (2006), in her study of board adherence to Ministry guidelines on community involvement, found that none of the boards she studied met all of the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training requirements for content in the documents and forms that they were using for this program. She also found a wide variety of implementation methods across school boards. Brown et al. (2007a) make note that unless the provinces have made funding available to support community service programs, the implementation of board and school based programs rests with the willingness of staff members to take on these projects in addition to their other “extraordinary responsibilities” (Brown, Meinhard, et al., 2007, p. 3).

In addition to the differences in programs within and between provinces and territories, there is also a difference in implementation of these programs in public, private, and religious schools (Brown, Meinhard, et al., 2007). Community service
has long been part of the educational approach adopted in religious schools (Brown, Meinhard, et al., 2007, Meinhard et al., 2006) and is often incorporated into compulsory courses (Brown, Meinhard, et al.).

**Implementation of the Ontario 40-Hour Community Involvement Program**

Although there is ample literature showing the value of having community service as a part of the high school experience (Billig, 2000; Bradley, 2005; Furco, 2002; and others), the community involvement program was introduced very quickly, without giving schools much time to prepare for the additional responsibilities. It was also part of a larger curriculum reform process that reduced secondary school in Ontario from 5 years to 4, with the corresponding curriculum content changes (Henderson et al., 2007; Meinhard et al., 2006). Hence schools were under a lot of pressure to accommodate the new requirements, and it is likely that the community involvement requirement was less of a focus than were the curriculum changes.

Implementation of the Ontario community involvement program has been left mostly to the boards of education, that have tended to delegate these responsibilities to the school principals, who in turn tend to delegate the administration of the program to either teachers or guidance counsellors in the school (Brown, Meinhard, et al., 2007). As one principal explained to me, for many schools this 40-hour requirement has become something that is left to the students to fulfill, which supports what Brown, Meinhard, et al. found in their research, and at the school level it is merely an item for the school to check off on the list of graduation requirements. In order to graduate in Ontario, high school students have to gain 30 credits and pass the provincial literacy test (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999a),
making the community involvement requirement a small part of the overall requirements. Hence perhaps the lack of attention paid by boards to the program.

**Definition of Terms**

There is no one accepted definition for the terms community service or service-learning. In fact the differences in definitions are said by many authors to be a source of confusion and make it hard to generalize study findings within the field (Billig, 2004; Furco, 2002; Lowery et al., 2006; McLellan & Youniss, 2003; Pritchard, 2002). Often the terms “community service” and “service-learning” are used interchangeably (Billig & Eyler, 2003; Brown, Pancer, et al., 2007; Furco; Pritchard). But there are core differences between the two terms and it is within these differences that some of the recommendations of this study will be based.

In this work the descriptions for the terms will be as follows.

**Community involvement:** The name given to the Ontario mandatory graduation requirement, which is essentially a community service program. The core difference between this program and other community service programs is that the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1999a) specifically stated that it may not take place during school hours, and that it cannot be part of a school course. Schools appear to be peripherally involved in the administration of this program. This program is a mandated requirement. The Ontario program, while defined in a broad sense in Memorandum 124a (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999b), and in the curriculum outline of graduation (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999a) does not define the terms they used in the description of community involvement. It leaves the responsibility to the boards to define what would be
eligible and ineligible activities but provides the boards with few guidelines in that respect.

**Community service:** This term incorporates public service activities in the community, performed by high school students. These activities are not paid activities and can take place within school hours and with or without school involvement. These programs may or may not be mandatory.

**Service-Learning:** The United States *National and Community Service Act* (1990) uses the following definition:

The term “service-learning” means a method—

(a) under which students or participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that—

(i) is conducted in and meets the needs of a community;

(ii) is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program, and with the community; and

(iii) helps foster civic responsibility; and

(B) that—

(i) is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students, or the educational components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled; and

(ii) provides structured time for the students or participants to reflect on the service experience. (p. 5)

In general, service-learning (or service learning) is a term used to denote school-based programs that incorporate service to community (Kraft, 1996). They are similar
to community involvement experiences in that they involve students in their community, providing service to others without pay. They seek to extend learning beyond the classroom but are embedded within a course and its structure. The inclusion of reflection and reciprocity are key differentiating elements between community service and service-learning (Furco, 2002; Koliba, 2003; Rhoads, 1998).

The literature on service-learning stresses the importance of reflection (Butin, 2003; Kraft; Metz, McLellan, & Youniss, 2003; Rhoads; Scales, Blyth, Berkas, & Kielsmeier, 2000; Stukas, Snyder & Clary, 1999) as being essential to the effectiveness of service-learning.

The National Youth Leadership Council has developed a model of the service-learning cycle, which shows the steps in the service-learning process (National Youth Leadership Council, 2005). This cycle is included in the appendix (Appendix A.). It is not known how widely adopted this model has been, but it provides a framework for understanding the service-learning process in action.

Some authors hold that the focus of community service is more on the students than on the recipients (Basinger & Batholomew, 2006), although others point to the purpose of the service activity and say that it is more directed at the recipient (Furco, 2002). Service-learning is focused on both the students and the recipients (Billig, 2007; Furco).

**Summary**

In this chapter I have provided an introduction to the concepts of community service, community involvement, and service-learning. I have given background as to
why I am interested in studying the community involvement program in Ontario and how this study can contribute to the literature on the program.

In Chapter Two I will review some of the major literature on community service and service-learning in the United States as well as providing an overview of the literature currently available on the community involvement program in Ontario.

Chapter Three will outline the design and analysis used in this study. It will consider the limitations of the study and how these limitations will be addressed. It will also provide an introduction to the participants in the study and note how they were located.

Chapter Four will provide a descriptive account of the themes found in this study, drawing on the words of the five stakeholder groups in an attempt to understand their experience with this mandatory program.

In Chapter Five I will discuss the significance of the data and the themes that are isolated that cross those data. I will relate this information to the available literature on the community involvement program and to literature on service-learning programs. I will conclude this study with recommendations for the future of the community involvement program.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature on both the community involvement program in Ontario and community service and service-learning literature from the United States. It is through a review of the literature on community service and service-learning that one can understand the community involvement program in a context. As previously mentioned, there is very little literature available on the community involvement program, and therefore the information from the United States will form much of the context for situating community involvement as a tool for educational reform and good pedagogy.

The Ontario Community Involvement Program

The guidelines to the Ontario program are outlined in the Ontario Secondary School, Grade 9 – 12 Program and Diploma Requirements (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999a) and Memorandum 124a (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999b). The program is designed to develop “an awareness and understanding of civic responsibility and the role they can play and the contributions they can make in supporting and strengthening their communities throughout the province” (Ontario Ministry of Education, correspondence dated February 16, 2007). The Ministry does not define civic responsibility, nor does it explain how mandated involvement in the community will result in the enhanced understanding and awareness of civic responsibility and increased understanding of their role and impact in the community.

The community involvement program has been seen by some to be a potential source of labour for the nonprofit sector (Meinhard et al., 2006; Shaw, 2001),
although the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1999a) specifically stated that the community involvement should not replace paid work.

A letter received from the Ontario Ministry of Education (correspondence dated February 16, 2007) describes the program in very beneficial terms. The letter gives examples of “how students have improved the quality of life for patients in hospital by assisting with social clubs, exercise classes, pool clubs, and other programs.” The letter also acknowledges that community involvement can take place in schools, but doesn’t elaborate on what type of activities this would involve.

The Ontario Ministry of Education emphasizes the “considerable flexibility” included in the program, allowing for students to meet their graduation requirement in a “variety of settings” (correspondence dated 16 February, 2007). Quoting the work of King et al. (2005), the correspondence notes that students are able to meet this graduation requirement; however King et al.’s work showed that in the Spring of 2004, the year in which their study took place, 73.2% of graduates had fulfilled their 40-hour requirement, while 16.5% had 20 or fewer hours completed (King et al., p. 79). The Ontario Network—Canada Volunteerism Initiative, known as OCVI (2006a), found that 49% of their respondents, measured late in the school year, had not completed the hours, although 13% said they were in the process of completing them. One explanation for the OCVI statistics is that the students were in various grades at the time, but it could point to a problem for some students in completing the hours by the end of grade 12.
Community Involvement in Ontario Secondary Schools

There are few published studies of the mandated Ontario program (S.D. Brown, personal correspondence, February 8, 2007; Livingstone, 2006), although the literature is starting to build (Brown, Meinhard, et al., 2007; Brown, Pancer, et al.; Henderson et al., 2007; King et al., 2005; Livingstone, 2006; Meinhard et al., 2006; OCVI, 2006a for example).

The two most comprehensive studies completed to date have concerned the experiences of the “double cohort” graduates (Brown, Pancer, et al., 2007; Henderson et al., 2007; Padanyi, Meinhard, & Foster, 2003). Due to the reduction of high school from 5 to 4 years, there were two groups of graduating students in 2003: those who were completing their fifth year under the previous curriculum and those finishing after 4 years under the new curriculum. This group provided a unique opportunity to study both the frequency and effectiveness of volunteering for those for whom it was not mandated and the number of hours and outcomes for those for whom it was mandated. Interestingly, in both studies (Brown, Pancer, et al., 2007 and Henderson et al., 2007 are reports of the same study) there were very few distinguishing factors between the two groups when examining their experiences of community service during high school.

What Makes Community Service Meaningful?

In addition to the studies noted, the Ontario Network--Canada Volunteerism Initiative (OCVI), a federally funded program, undertook a study of 600 young people (current students or recent graduates) as well as 600 adults (parents, school employees and community agencies) to gain information on the community
involvement program (OCVI, 2006a). The research resulted in two reports on what makes the program meaningful as well as recommendations for change (Livingstone, 2006; OCVI). According to the research, the program’s value is that it teaches skills, builds responsibility, increases civic responsibility, and improves self-worth in that youth feel appreciated and involved (Livingstone; OCVI). The research found that the program has potential drawbacks which can detract from the meaningfulness of the experience including trouble accessing volunteer positions, inferior or inconsistent communication between parents, students, schools, and volunteer organizations, having the program presented in a negative manner, students that are unmotivated or anxious about the experience, a lack of parent support, and a lack of transport for students living in rural areas.

Research on the Ontario program has found that the majority of students included in the studies felt that their community service experiences had been beneficial (Brown, Pancer, et al., 2007; Meinhard et al., 2006; OCVI, 2006a). However there are moderating factors.

Brown, Pancer, et al. (2007) surveyed 1,500 second-year students concerning their community service experiences in high school. The researchers found that in order to be a positive experience, the community service needed to provide youth with a feeling that they had positively impacted their own lives or had made a difference to the recipients, and depended on the extent to which the students experienced a sense of emotional fulfillment, self-improvement, and career development (Brown, Pancer, et al., p. 20). In contrast, the experience was negative if the students did not feel they did something of significance, if they became
overwhelmed by the situation of the people they worked with, or there were logistical issues such as a lack of flexibility or awkward timing (Brown, Pancer, et al., p. 22).

Meinhard et al. (2006) found that if the program was challenging, incorporated student input, and had variety and opportunities for reflection, it was more meaningful.

**Benefits or Positive Outcomes of Community Involvement**

There are many examples of positive outcomes as a result of community involvement experiences. For example, Gulli (2005) interviewed a 17-year-old high school student on her experiences at a local hospital for cancer patients. “Hearing people’s stories and talking with them, I’ve learned so much about life experiences, and about what people have to live with....They have so much to offer, and it’s such a great thing to see” (Dushyandi Rajendran, cited in Gulli, 2005, p. 47). A student in Brown, Pancer, et al.’s study (2007) captured his/her sense of making a contribution by saying that “it was just really rewarding to see with just a small amount of time for me, to make such a big difference for other people” (p. 20). The Ontario Network—Canada Volunteerism Initiative sums up the beneficial outcomes as follows.

It involved youth in their community, created a sense of belonging/connectedness, allowed youth to test career directions, to gain work experience, to learn new skills, to have meaningful responsibilities, and to feel involved and appreciated in making a difference in their community. (OCVI, 2006a, p. 2)

In addition, the community involvement program introduces volunteering to students who might not have volunteered, and in fact these students may be the ones
most in need of the benefits of volunteering (Brown, Pancer, et al. 2007; Gulli, 2005; Padanyi et al., 2003).

Some community organizations, such as the YWCA Hamilton and the Lung Association (Livingstone, 2006), Volunteer Kingston, and the Boys and Girls Club of Niagara have initiated programs to maximize the success of the community involvement program. Certain school boards have initiated partnerships to help students obtain their hours and in a meaningful environment (OCVI, 2006a). On the Ontario Network—Canada Volunteerism Initiative’s website (which can be viewed at www.volunteer.on.ca), there is a tab for “success stories” that capture many successful ventures within the community involvement program. It is clear from these examples and others that the Ontario program is beneficial for those for whom it works.

**Critique of the Community Involvement Program**

There are critiques of both how the program is designed and how it is implemented. In terms of design, Meinhard et al. (2006) and the Ontario Network—Canada Volunteerism Initiative (OCVI, 2006a) have called for a more structured process for enhanced success.

The mandated nature of the community involvement program has been a source of critique (Brock 2001; McLeod & Nicholson, 1998; Meinhard et al., 2006; OCVI, 2006a, 2006b; Pupo, 2004). Brock contemplates the role of governments in promoting volunteer activity in society. She considers whether the government should be the encourager or enforcer in building support for the volunteer sector. She cautions that the government needs to be careful in taking on the role of enforcer, as it
has done in Ontario, in that the program may have unintended consequences, such as turning youth off volunteering. However, research by Brown, Pancer, et al. (2007) and Henderson et al. (2007) found that there were no negative consequences of the mandatory nature of the Ontario requirement on the participants in their study, as did Padanyi et al. (2003), and these findings are well supported by research on mandatory programs in the United States (including McLellan & Youniss, 2003; Planty, Bozick, & Regnier, 2006). Meinhard et al. state that the focus on the mandatory nature of the program has been a detriment in that it has “detracted from debate on the learning structure of the program, which, judging from studies on the effects of community service programs, is much more directly linked to successfully inculcating social responsibility and civic mindedness in students (pp. 9-10). T. Taylor and Pancer (2007) found that the quality of the experience had far more important an effect on attitudes toward volunteering than the mandated or nonmandated nature of the experience.

Authors such as Meinhard et al. (2006) raise a concern that 40 hours may be too heavy a requirement for students to fulfill in addition to their part-time jobs, extracurricular activities, and family responsibilities. This concern may be a valid one in terms of pressure on students, but the literature on service-learning has shown a very strong correspondence between the length of the placement and the noted outcomes (Billig, Root & Jesse, 2005a, 2005b; Spring et al., 2006). Although there is a moderating variable in that if these hours are completed in several different placements, they may not achieve the same benefits (Brown, Pancer, et al., 2007). According to S.H. Billig (personal correspondence dated February 16, 2007), 70
hours of service in one placement is the optimal number in order to maximize academic and civic outcomes.

The way that the program has been designed emphasizes the fulfillment of hours rather than the need for meaningful involvement (Meinhard et al., 2006; Pupo, 2004). There is no motivation to make the experience a challenging one (Livingstone, 2006). Some students leave their community involvement until Grade 12, when there is a scramble to complete the hours in order to graduate (Livingstone; Padanyi et al., 2003) These researchers found that some students did not complete their hours and therefore failed to graduate or graduated in spite of not having fulfilled this requirement.

There is also a tendency to front-load the completion of hours by completing them in grades 9 and 10 (OCVI, 2006a). While this satisfies the graduation requirement, some of the learning and social development benefits may be lost, as there is a cognitive development difference between the lower and higher grades (Miller, 1994), and it would make sense that this difference could lead to greater gains from the service interactions if conducted in the higher grades.

There is also a need for more clarity on implementation and follow-through on this program (Allmendinger, 2006; Meinhard et al., 2006). Brown, Pancer, et al. (2007) suggest that schools could hold information sessions for grade 9 students to inform them of the program and requirements, there could be volunteer fairs where community organizations come and introduce the opportunities to students, and schools could be more involved in placing students with community organizations. Students can find it hard to organize placements or can be unsure of how to go about
fulfilling the requirement, and further resources and assistance from the school would be helpful (Brown, Meinhard, et al., 2007, OCVI, 2006a). Certain writers have held that students from wealthier or more connected backgrounds have a definite advantage in finding their placements due to the influence of their parents (Livingstone, 2006; Pupo, 2004).

Brown, Pancer, et al. (2007) and the Ontario Network—Canada Volunteerism Initiative (OCVI, 2006a) found that some students are cheating when completing their community involvement forms, claiming hours that were not served. Due to a lack of resources and staff co-ordinators for this program, schools generally do not verify the documentation that they are given (Meinhard et al., 2006). Brock (2001) notes that monitoring is difficult. This program has also placed a demand on already stretched school resources (Brown, Meinhard, et al., 2007; Gulli, 2005; Meinhard et al., 2006).

Although community organizations can potentially benefit from the influx of youth volunteers, there appears to have been very little input from the community on what would make the community involvement program work for them (Livingstone, 2006; Shaw 2001). In fact, Basinger and Bartholomew (2006) contend that due to the training and supervision required and the variability of quality in student assistance, community organizations sometimes take on students more to foster a service mentality in the student than for what the student can do for them. Some agencies saw their purpose in taking on students as having two aspects: "We need to get things accomplished and we need to teach the students the importance of service" (Basinger & Batholomew, p. 20).
Recommendations Made in the Literature on Community Involvement

Recommendations in the literature focus on both design and implementation aspects of this program. Meinhard et al. (2006) suggest that a more structured program with meaningful placements and more school support would be beneficial.

The Ontario Network—Canada Volunteerism Initiative (OCVI, 2006a) recommends more clarity on program implementation and methods of evaluation. They wonder whose job it is to monitor community involvement. Is it the parents’ job? Or the schools’ job? They call for a more consistent implementation of the program. They suggest the need for more school support, in particular for new immigrants or people who live in rural communities where placements may be harder to find. The report recommends that we build on ideas from projects that are working, such as one in Toronto where a school and a community information centre have partnered on a student volunteerism program, or a program in Waterloo where a manual, brochure, and website have been developed to assist in matching students to volunteer activities. They also suggest volunteer days where community agencies come into schools to advertise opportunities, or setting up websites or hotlines where students can find out what’s available in their community.

The Ontario Network—Canada Volunteerism Initiative (OCVI, 2006a) also suggests linking the community involvement requirement to the required grade 10 Civics course, an option not currently available due to the Ontario Ministry’s specific statement that these hours may not be part of a school credit (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999a).
Brown, Pancer, et al. (2007) asked students for their suggestions for change. Some students had great difficulty finding placements, and the suggestion was that schools could be more actively involved in the matching process. Students called for tighter regulations and more monitoring to prevent cheating. Forms required by schools as proof of community involvement hours could be simplified.

Service-Learning

Billig (2004, p. 1) poses some key questions to be asked when trying to understand service-learning: What is it? Does it work? Does it produce outcomes? What does it take to work best? She concludes that the answers to these questions depend on who you ask. Herein lies much to be said about the current state of service-learning. It can be seen to be a philosophy, as in education reform, a curricular tool, as in a form of pedagogy, or a program, such as a course offering tied to teaching standards (Billig, 2000; Butin, 2003; J. Taylor, 2002). The definition that is used to describe service-learning initiatives depends on how you see the field (Billig, 2004). Due to the differences in how service-learning is seen, there is no one universally accepted definition of service-learning. The differences in the definition and the intermingling of the use of the terms community service and service-learning make it harder to compare studies (Billig, 2004) and program goals (Lowery et al., 2006).

More than half of the schools in the United States are now said to have service-learning programs in place (Billig, 2000; Butin, 2003; Kielsmeier, Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Neal, 2004) and the number of schools is growing (Bradley, 2005). Billig (p. 659) cites the motivation for the widespread adoption of service-learning as “helping students to become more active members of the community, increasing
student knowledge and understanding of the community, meeting real community needs, and encouraging students’ altruism and caring for others.”

Some Examples of Service-Learning Projects

In the United States there is an annual report on the state of service-learning in the nation, which is called *Growing to Greatness: The State of Service Learning Project*, produced by the National Youth Leadership Council since 2003 (*Growing to Greatness: The State of Service Learning Project* 2005 is an example). In addition to leading-edge researchers in the field of service-learning reporting back on a variety of aspects, it captures examples of service-learning initiatives taking place around the country. Some of these projects include creating videos of WWII veterans which are now included in the Library of Congress, mentoring students who are truants, interviewing people in government to get a clearer understanding of democracy, developing nature trails and educational materials on environmental matters, working to clean up a housing community, and recording stories of recent immigrants to the United States (National Youth Leadership Council, 2005). The projects are varied but invariably are followed with similar feedback from youth on how the projects helped them to see that they could make a difference, helped them to better understand the needs of people in their community, taught them interpersonal skills, and allowed them to experience the fulfillment of helping others in their community (National Youth Leadership Council).

After conducting a meta-analysis of the impact of service-learning programs in the United States, Bradley (2005) noted improvements in achievement tests (language and literacy measures, math and science scores), an enriched academic environment
with more relevant learning, school climate improvement, group cohesiveness or increased teamwork, feeling a greater sense of connection to the school and community, decreased student behavioural problems (such as fewer student absences or discipline problems), and significant improvement in behaviour and character development.

While many of these projects may seem very similar to community service in their nature, there are distinct differences in that the projects are part of a school course, with learning as well as civic objectives. In addition these projects would be incorporated into the students’ evaluation. Authors such as Eyler and Giles (1997) and Furco (1994) emphasize the learning aspect of service-learning as being integral to its value.

**History and Theoretical Foundations of Service-Learning**

In the United States hundreds of schools began to offer service-learning or community service programs during the 1980s (Kraft, 1996, p. 131). Kraft states that service-learning is the most recent manifestation of what is now almost a 100 year history of American educational reform attempts to bring the school and community back together, to build or rebuild a citizenship ethic in our young people, and to bring more active forms of learning to our schools. (pp. 134–135)

There are many theories that contribute to the foundation on which service-learning is based. Many researchers trace the theoretical foundations to the work of Dewey (Billig, 2000; Conrad & Hedin, 1989; Eyler & Giles, 1997; Furco, 2002; Rhoads 1998; and others) who felt that education takes place in conjunction with one’s interaction with one’s community (Dewey 1916/2005). Some authors have
gone further back, to the writings of Thomas Jefferson or the American philosopher William James (Waterman, 1997). Other theoretical links are made relating service-learning to Erikson's (1968) work on the role of the community in identity development, Bandura's (1986 cited in Scales et al., 2000) social learning theory, and Kolb's (1984) work on experiential learning. Links to Gardner's (1983) work on multiple intelligences have also been noted.

**Research Outcomes in Service-Learning Programs**

Billig and Eyler write that

the service-learning experience in and of itself typically leads to at least some sort of personal and social development outcomes, such as a sense of efficacy or valuing diversity, and some connection to civic life, that would not have occurred in the absence of service-learning. (2003, p. 259)

They continue by saying that research outcomes in the area of service-learning are best placed in the "promising" rather than "proven" category when it comes to ability to impact learning academic content (p. 262). Yet service-learning is generally seen to be favourable, especially in fulfilling the civic purpose of education (Billig & Eyler, p. 263).

While the body of research on service-learning has been steadily increasing since the mid-1990s (Giles & Eyler, 1998; Root, Callaghan, & Billig, 2005), and the research is becoming more rigorous in its design, service-learning studies remain somewhat contradictory in their outcomes (McLellan & Youniss, 2003; Scales et al., 2000). It is important to recognize that the same service-learning program doesn't necessarily have the same effect on all students (Furco, 2002). Studies can miss some
of these differences between students in their observations (Furco). Many studies report on positive outcomes from service-learning programs but there is a need for research on how these outcomes are achieved. (Billig & Furco, 2002; Butin, 2003; Furco; Giles & Eyler, 1998; Pritchard, 2002; Spring et al., 2006). Butin states that the claims of many service-learning advocates have not been adequately proven in research. The differences in the definition of service-learning, the intermixing of the terms community service and service-learning, and research design flaws can account for some of the reasons that service-learning is still a promising rather than proven pedagogy (Billig & Furco; Service-Learning Course Design, 2001). In addition, some feel there is a lack of research on best practices (Pritchard), although the Growing to Greatness project is a step in that direction.

Overall the research on outcomes from service-learning programs is predominantly positive. Even where results are not statistically significant, there is a positive momentum gained by service-learning. On a practical level, Kielsmeier et al. (2004) found that most of the principals that they surveyed believed that service-learning has a positive outcome.

Research on service-learning has found significant outcomes in the following areas.

**Academic**

Students in service-learning programs are found to be highly engaged (Furco, 2002; Spring et al., 2006) and achieve higher academic results than students who have not participated in service-learning (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Davila & Mora, 2007; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Scales et al., 2000).
Civic Education or Civic Participation

Service-learning results in students becoming more informed voters as well as adult volunteers (Billig et al.; 2005a; Eyler & Giles; 1999; Planty et al., 2006; Yates & Youniss, 1996). Yet some studies have found the link between service-learning and the future intention to vote to be not significant (Metz et al., 2003). Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins (in press) found that it is through service experiences that students gain civic skills. Billig and Welch (2004, p. 226) caution that studies show that service-learning only has strong civic outcomes when the service-learning activities are more intentionally connected to civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions, primarily through dialogue and assignments that specifically help students see the linkage and understand the meaning of their service.

Interpersonal Development

As a result of involvement in service-learning programs, students are found to show more empathy and caring as well as a broader awareness of cultural diversity issues (Butin, 2003; Rhoads, 1998; Scales et al.; 2000; Yates & Youniss, 1996). Studies show students gaining more self-confidence (Billig et al., 2005a). There is a reduction in high risk behaviours (Youniss, McLellan, Su, & Yates, 1999). Youths demonstrate an increased belief that they can make a difference (Spring et al., 2006) and generally have an expanded awareness (Furco, 2002). Service-learning is found to positively affect attitudes about volunteering (Spring et al., 2006). In their study of high school students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, Billig et al. found that 67% of
the participants reported that they had gained job skills and work experience while involved in service-learning experiences.

Several researchers (Hart et al., in press; Kuperminc, Holditch, & Allen, 2001; Scales et al., 2000; T. Taylor & Pancer, 2007; Youniss, McLelland, & Mazer, 2001; Youniss, McLellan, Su, & Yates., 1999; Youniss, McLellan & Yates., 1997) have suggested that quality service-learning experiences enhance the identity development of youth. Their suggestions are founded on the work of Erikson (1968), whose theory held that youth develop their sense of identity through interactions in their community. It is through dealing with others in situations that differ from theirs that youths are able to evaluate their values and ability to influence their society (Erikson). Hart et al. (p. 12) refer to this experience as an “anchoring point” against which youths measure themselves and their place in society.

Future Intentions to Volunteer

The results for research on future intentions to volunteer are mixed, although the majority of the studies included here show a positive correlation. Several authors (such as Janoski et al., 1998; Metz et al., 2003; Stenson, Eyler, & Giles, 2003) found that engagement in any type of service-learning predicted future service activity or volunteering, although Clary et al. (1998) found that those who are required to volunteer may not do so once the requirement is finished. Metz and Youniss (2003) found that 80% of the students that they studied got involved in voluntary service opportunities, for no school credit, once they had completed their mandatory service requirements. Planty et al. (2006) found that 2 to 8 years after the service-learning had ended, students were still volunteering.
What Does a Quality Program Look Like?

The quality of the service-learning program is of great importance to the outcomes achieved (Billig, 2007; Billig et al., 2005a; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Metz & Youniss, 2005; Spring et al., 2006; T. Taylor & Pancer, 2007). In 1998 researchers and practitioners in the United States developed the Essential Elements of Service-Learning (National Service-Learning Cooperative, 1999) in an attempt to guide teachers in developing high-quality service-learning programs (Billig et al.). These 11 elements have since been refined to become the 8 Principles of Effective Practice for K-12 Service-Learning (Weah, 2007). The principles are included in the appendix of this thesis (Appendix B). Researchers and practitioners in the United States are currently in the process of reviewing these principles in a standard-setting process (Billig; Weah,). The principles therefore provide a foundation on which to build high-quality service-learning programs as well as being standards against which service-learning programs can be evaluated (Weah).

Many studies of service-learning show a wide variation in how service-learning programs are adopted in practice (Billig, 2004; Furco, 2002; Scales et al., 2000 for example). Butin (2003) and Billig see this variation as a strength in some respects, in that it allows schools to give their programs a unique feel that is not predetermined. Research on service-learning has shown that moderators, such as characteristics of the service-learning experiences and characteristics of the teachers, affect outcomes (Billig et al., 2005b). Studies on service-learning have found that there are statistically significant variations in quality in school programs in the degree to which students were provided with challenging tasks, degree of youth decision making,
amount of discussion with teachers, the degree to which youth felt they were critiqued by adults in the program, and the degree to which they felt they were making a difference (Billig et al.). These researchers also found that student choice of the issue to study in their service-learning program influences the outcomes on measures of civic knowledge (Billig et al.).

Furco (1994) states that in order for a service-learning program to be sound it must clearly identify the academic purpose of the course, it must be structured to suit the needs of both the student and the community, and it must resolve any issue raised in the course of the service-learning program.

There have been studies on the type of service provided and whether it makes a difference to the outcomes achieved. Metz et al. (2003, p. 200) found that students engaged in “direct service,” where they provide services to those in need, gain more than those students engaged in background, administrative type work, which they term “indirect service.” Meinhard et al. (2006) did not find a significant difference between the types of service and outcomes.

Is Service-Learning Better Than Community Service?

Furco (2002) states that involving students in any kind of service program leads to significantly higher results on surveys measuring attitudes to school and on academic scores. Brown, Pancer, et al. (2007) and T. Taylor and Pancer (2007) state that being engaged in community service does not in itself explain the outcomes they were studying. For the program to be successful the student needs to feel well supported, learn skills, feel like they are making a difference, and have the opportunity to explore possibilities for the future (Brown et al.; T. Taylor & Pancer). Either service-
learning or community service programs could potentially offer these elements, although the fact that service-learning is integrated into a course and is a more structured process, with reflection incorporated into the process, it would seem likely that more consistent results would be gained. Brown, Pancer, et al. (p. 10) state that “much of the literature identifies service learning as greatly enhancing the effectiveness of a community service experience.”

Summary

In this chapter I have reviewed some of the major research on community involvement, service-learning, and community service. I have provided an overview of some of the significant outcomes noted by researchers when studying service-learning, community involvement, and community service programs. In addition I have considered whether service-learning programs are better than community service programs in their effectiveness.

In Chapter Three I will focus on the methods and procedures that were used to conduct this study, and the manner in which the data were analyzed. I will consider the potential limitations of the study as well as the efforts made to control for these limitations. I will discuss the role of the researcher and its potential impact and will document ethical considerations that have been taken into account in order to preserve the anonymity of the participants in this study.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This chapter provides a review of the research procedures used to collect and analyze the data for this study. It includes an overview of the research design, analysis, and ethical considerations as well as considering limitations of this research. The names of the participants in this study and the school boards with which they are associated have been changed to protect anonymity.

Research Design

This research was primarily focused on what makes for a quality, or meaningful, community involvement process in Ontario. Within this focus the research broadly centered on the questions posed by Billig (2004) when reviewing service-learning, namely: What is it? Does it work? Does it produce outcomes? What does it take to work best? In this study these questions were applied to understanding the experience of stakeholders in the community involvement program in Ontario. Of these questions, the final one formed the emphasis of the study. The actual questions used in the research are included as Appendix C.

A basic interpretive qualitative design (Merriam, 2002), also referred to as a generic design (Merriam, 1998), was chosen for this study as I was interested in understanding the participants’ perceptions of what makes for a quality community involvement experience in Ontario. Qualitative methods are designed to gather rich data, generally in narrative form (Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 1998, 2002). Schram (2003) explains that the qualitative researcher is “focused on particular people, in particular places, at particular times – situating people’s meanings and constructs within and amid specific social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and other
contextual factors” (p. 33). In exploring the experience of the community involvement process, I am aware that the stakeholders will be influenced by their contextual factors. “There are multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that are in flux and that change over time. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding what those interpretations are at a particular point in time and in a particular context” (Merriam, 2002, pp. 3-4). As a researcher involved in qualitative research, my role is to try and understand the participants’ experiences within their frame of reference, to the extent that that is possible.

Interviews were chosen as the method of data collection as “at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Siedman, 1991, p. 3). Using interviews as the basis for data collection therefore suited the purpose of this study. The interview questions were generated based on the literature, and were particularly influenced by the work of Billig (2004), Brown, Pancer, et al. (2007) and Allmendinger (2006). The interview questions were designed to answer Billig’s questions, but in this case regarding the community involvement program, as well as to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the stakeholders and what made the experiences meaningful for them.

A pilot study was conducted as a method of fine-tuning the interview questions and for me to gain an added degree of comfort with the interview process. For the purposes of this pilot, one representative from the community was interviewed regarding her experiences with the community involvement process. The interview questions were then fine-tuned to better elicit the in-depth information that was
sought. The final interview questions were reviewed by two graduate students and my supervisor in order to ensure that they adequately addressed the intent of this research.

Selection of Participants and Site

Creswell (2005) stated that “in qualitative inquiry, the intent is...to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon” (p. 203). In this case the phenomenon is the quality experience of the community involvement program. Miles and Huberman (1994) elaborated that “qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in-depth” (p. 27). A sample of 10 people, representing the multiple stakeholder views, was chosen for this research. The key stakeholders for this study were grade 12 students who had experienced the program, their parents, who, according to the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1999a), are seen to be key to assisting their children in the program, principals who, according to the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training give final approval on activities relating to the community involvement program, guidance counsellors involved in administration of the program, and representatives of community organizations that are recipients of the services offered by the program.

The method used to obtain this sample was purposive or intentional in nature, in that people who were known to have had a positive experience with the community involvement program were intentionally sought out. The study considered the point of view only of those who have found the community involvement program to be meaningful, in that it is their experience that this study seeks to understand. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 27) state that qualitative studies tend to be purposive rather than
random in their selection of participants. One of the reasons for purposive sampling, as stated by Miles and Huberman, is that when dealing with a small sample, random sampling can lead to a biased outcome. Due to the sample size involved in this study, and in an attempt to obtain richly descriptive information from different points of view, I looked for people who would be expressive and reflective in nature. In this manner I used a snowball technique in that I asked participants who else they knew who had had a positive experience with the community involvement program and would be forthcoming in discussing their experiences. In choosing students for the study, I sought out students who were in grade 12 and had completed their 40 hours, as I wanted to capture the perspectives of "graduates" of the program.

The students, principals, and one of the guidance counsellors in this study belong to the same board of education, of which I am also an employee. This was a matter of convenience in terms of gaining ethical approval for this study, as the process was more straightforward for employees than for researchers coming from outside the board, and I was also able to use my own existing networks in sourcing some of the participants. I did not personally know any of the participants in this study, although they were found through people I knew or their contacts.

The stakeholders in this study consisted of 2 high school principals, Roy and Ken, who both lead schools in the same school board. Both have been principals for several years. One of the guidance counsellors, Peter, is at the same school as Roy. The other guidance counselor, Pam, works for a neighbouring school board. Both guidance counsellors are heads of their departments, and both have several years of experience being guidance counsellors at the secondary school level. The parents in
this study are Ann and Chuck. Ann’s daughter went to the same school as did the two student representatives in this study, named Jill and Tara. Chuck’s son went to school in a different school board from the other students in this study. One of the community representatives, named Liz, works for a town that involves students doing community hours in the town’s recreational programs. Most of the recreational programs involve the students dealing with children, although some of the involvement could be more administrative in nature. The other community representative, Gail, is very actively involved in an after-school program which serves children from the age of 9 to 11 years of age. Secondary school students help in the operation of this program, and can gain community involvement hours for doing so. The two secondary students in this study were both grade 12 students who attended the same high school, a high school which is located in the same school board as that of Roy, Ken, and Peter.

Although the stakeholders were sought out because they represented one of the above groups, it ended up that of the 10 stakeholders; 5 were parents of children who had participated in this program. Therefore the two community representatives and one of the guidance counsellors reported on what they felt about this program as parents as well as reporting from their other stakeholder position.

**Data Collection**

The data for this study were collected using taped interviews, which were later selectively transcribed by the researcher. Each participant participated in an interview which was approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour in duration. The purpose of this interview was to gather the information on the participant’s experiences. Participants
were given the interview questions in advance of the interview, to give them time to reflect on their answers. Following the selective transcription of the interview, where I transcribed only the parts of the interviews that might be included in this research, the participants were given the typed transcript of the interview in order for them to verify the accuracy of the data. They were also given the option of receiving an e-mailed summary of the research outcomes after the study’s conclusion. The data were descriptive in nature.

During the interviews, rough notes were kept as prompts for further questioning and to note nonverbal behaviour. I was very careful to be as judicious as possible during the interview process in an attempt to gather information from the participants that was influenced as little as possible by my beliefs. In addition I was careful in my choice of words if I attempted to summarize what had been said, based on Miles and Huberman’s (1994) thoughts that

during an “open-ended” interview much interpretation occurs along the way. The person describing his or her “life world” discovers new relationships and patterns during the interview; the researcher who occasionally “summarizes” or “reflects” what has been heard is, in fact, condensing and interpreting the flow of meaning.

The interview followed a semistructured process, in which I asked the same questions of each participant as the foundation for the interview but allowed for variation in the follow-up questions asked as clarification or to promote more detail and a deeper understanding. In this way I followed Siedman’s (1991) view that although the interviewer comes to each interview with a basic question that establishes the purpose and focus of the interview, it is in response to what the
participants says that the interviewer follows up, asks for clarification, seeks concrete details, and requests stories (p. 59).

The researcher’s role is to “conduct a reading” of meaning (Schram, 2003, p. 33), which is essentially the researcher’s interpretation of the person’s response in its context. This process contributes to the qualitative research process being inductive in nature.

Due to multiple stakeholders being represented, and therefore presenting multiple perspectives, this study attempted to gain a well-rounded view of what makes for a meaningful community involvement experience. In working with multiple stakeholder—students, parents, school principals, guidance counsellors, and community organization representatives—the outcomes of this research could be compared to that of the Ontario Network – Canada Volunteerism Initiative (Livingstone, 2006; OCVI, 2006a) as a form of validation for their results, and a way to extend what their research had found.

**Researcher’s Role**

“The influence of the researcher’s values is not minor (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Although the researcher attempts to focus as much as possible on the participants’ interpretation of events, and their experiences, “the interviewer must nevertheless recognize that the meaning is, to some degree, a function of the participant’s interaction with the interviewer” (Siedman, 1991, p. 16). Therefore it is important for the researcher to reflect on their beliefs, values, and biases and how they might be impacting on the study’s data and interpretations (Mertens, 2005).
I recognized from the outset that I had beliefs that might impact my ability to be open-minded when interviewing participants for this study. I believe in volunteering and believe that it has great benefits for those who are involved, even if the “volunteering” is mandatory in nature. I hold the belief that as long as the outcomes are positive and beneficial to the student, it does not matter if the community involvement process is mandatory. My beliefs could potentially bias the outcome of this study, in that I could be looking for ways to reinforce them through the questions asked, the themes established, or the manner in which the research findings were compiled.

In recognizing that I hold these beliefs, and in an attempt to conduct research that is valuable to the local community and the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, I looked for ways to minimize the impact of my beliefs on my interpretation of the results. One of these ways was to structure the questions in a manner in which the participants would feel comfortable expressing any views, without feeling that they should support the program. Although I sought out people who had a meaningful experience, I stated at the outset of the interviews that I was looking to understand their experience of the program, whatever that might have been. In analyzing the data I deliberately looked for information that would extend my understanding of the community involvement experience. I looked at what was being said as well as considering what might not be said. In verifying the information, I asked for information that might assist in enhancing the program as well as allowing for openness for input of any type that might have questioned the value of the program.
Data Analysis

Once I had selectively transcribed the taped interviews, I read the content of the interviews several times. I read first to gain a general overview of stakeholder perspectives and then read the transcripts again several times in order that I might find common elements across the transcripts which could be coded and sorted into categories. These categories were determined through looking for meaningful themes or "recurring patterns" that cut across the data in the interviews (Merriam, 1998, p. 179). In choosing categories, the research questions were used as a guide, in keeping with Merriam's (1998, p. 179) statement that devising categories should be systematic, and informed by the study's purpose. The categories were designed to address each of the research questions and to ultimately answer the question of what made for a meaningful community involvement experience. The themes that occurred most frequently were those chosen for description, as a means of understanding the stakeholders' perspectives on the program. I was also looking for the unexpected, information that went beyond what the literature had suggested or others had found in their research.

Merriam (1998) wrote that "making sense of the data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of meaning making" (p. 178). In consolidating and interpreting, I need to take into account several important issues. The first is authenticity. Mertens (2005) suggests that one ask the question of whether the researcher has been fair in presenting the stakeholders' views. As a researcher I have had this goal, as I have condensed the data and have given the stakeholders the
opportunity to redirect my interpretations if they feel they are inaccurate in any way. Second, I need to consider the dependability of the results. Mertens suggests that dependability can be confirmed through tracking the conclusions back to the raw data, along with the researcher providing an explicit explanation of the logic used to reach the conclusions based on the data.

Once the data were analyzed, the findings were related back to the studies of Brown, Pancer, et al. (2007), Livingstone (2006), the Ontario Network–Canada Volunteerism Initiative (OCVI, 2006a) and to findings from the literature on service-learning programs in the United States.

**Ethical Considerations**

Brock University’s ethics committee granted approval for me to conduct the research as designed. The permission form is included as Appendix D. Prior to the interview the participants were sent a letter of invitation, inviting them to be a part of this study and giving them an overview of the purpose of the study. Participants were advised that their contribution would be kept anonymous and that only the researcher and her supervisor would have access to the raw data. They were advised that they would have the ability to withdraw from the research at any time and would not have to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable. Participants, or their parents/guardians if they were under 18 years of age, signed to give their consent. The interview transcripts were e-mailed to participants. Participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts of the interview to determine the accuracy of the information. They could provide further depth to their answers, clarify points, or withdraw any information that made them feel compromised in any way.
Participants were contacted by phone or e-mail to set up the interview. In an attempt to have them feel comfortable, I asked them where they would like the interview to take place. I stressed the need for a location that would be private, comfortable, and where we would be undisturbed for the duration of the interview. I advised the participants of the general process that would be followed for the interview and that they would have an opportunity to review the content of the interview to ensure their comfort with its accuracy and level of sensitivity. I answered any questions that they had regarding the logistics or content of the research process. I again emphasized that they would have the right to withdraw from the research at any time, even after reviewing the transcript of their interview, and that the content of the interviews would be written up using pseudonyms and in a manner that assured their anonymity.

**Limitations**

Miles and Huberman (1994) note that “what you find in any quest depends mostly on what you set out to find, and where you choose to look for it” (p. 155). The research questions chosen for this study influenced the results that were found. I deliberately chose to focus only on those people who had had a meaningful community involvement experience, as I sought to understand what makes for a meaningful experience. By choosing the categories of stakeholders that I included in this study, I influenced the type of information that I would collect; however, I did attempt to present a balanced view by including the stakeholders that were included in the literature as being the key types of people involved in the community involvement or service-learning experience.
This study is limited by its sample size. In interviewing only 2 people from each of the stakeholder groups, the findings of this study are based on a small representation of each of the stakeholder populations. In addition the method of selecting the participants is a limitation in that the snowball method used relied heavily on the participants leading the researcher to the participants who would be suited to this research. For example, the type of student chosen for the research and their particular experiences would heavily influence the material incorporated into this research. Before including the participant in the study I provided an overview of the study and ensured that they had found the community involvement program to be a meaningful experience.

This study incorporates the experiences of 10 stakeholders. The number of participants poses a limitation to the reporting of rich, descriptive data in that one has to balance depth with breadth. It is a difficult balancing act in that each participant has so much valuable information to share.

In using interviewing as the sole method of data collection, which in itself is a limitation of this study, the substance for this research was based on participant self-report. This method is best where participants are expressive in nature and have had a rich experience in order to give the research the substance that it requires in order to be valuable. Self-report is heavily influenced by the person’s view of the world in a context. This social and historical context influences the interpretation of the results (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In addition, Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 10) write of participants engaging in “impression management,” being the managing of how others, including the
researcher, see them. The meaning that the participants attributed to their experiences is “subjective, personal and socially constructed” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 31). In this way a potential limitation of this research is that it could lack authenticity if the participants are presenting the researcher with a view of their experience that is aimed at impressing the researcher or providing information that they perceive the researcher might be looking for. To minimize this potential limitation, I stressed that all opinions and experiences would be very valuable to this research and that I wasn’t looking for any information in particular but rather was seeking to understand their experience and what had made it meaningful. I made sure that my nonverbal behaviour did not endorse any particular point of view and that I did not lead the interviews in a way that would solicit a particular response. I was aware that as an interviewer I could potentially bias the responses (Mertens, 2005).

As Allmendinger (2006) and Brown, Pancer, et al. (2007) stated in their research, boards of education implement the community involvement program differently, and this research captures only the experiences of stakeholders in two boards of education. As a result this study is limited in its suitability to be generalized to other school boards. The community involvement program is a province-wide program. This study does give indications of what makes for a meaningful community involvement experience and could be used as the basis for further research in other boards.

A potential limitation of this research is that it relies heavily on service-learning research from the United States, due to the relative lack of published information currently available on the Ontario community involvement process. While the two
programs are significantly different, the findings from the former are seen to be very valuable in evaluating the experiences of the latter and could be the source of recommendations for the future of the Ontario program.

Summary and Restatement of Research

This qualitative study seeks to explore the perspectives of multiple stakeholders—students, parents, school principals, guidance counsellors, and community organization representatives—who have had meaningful experiences with the Ontario community involvement program. In particular this research is interested in questions concerning the nature of the program, what it does, and what makes it work best. This research builds on existing literature on the Ontario program as well as relating the findings back to research on the service-learning programs in the United States. It is intended that the results of this research will be valuable to the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training and to local school boards as input on what is seen to be meaningful in the current program as well as providing some direction for future enhancements of the program.

In this chapter I have reviewed the methods used in this study, and how the data were analyzed. I have considered the limitations of the study and taken efforts to minimize the impact of those limitations. In the next chapter I will describe the themes found in this study along with the data to support these themes. I will consider the themes from the perspective of each of the stakeholder groups in an attempt to understand the experience of the community involvement program from each of their perspectives.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of the primary stakeholders--parents, guidance counsellors, school principals, community organization representatives, and high school students--in the mandatory 40-hour community involvement program in Ontario. This chapter will capture those experiences as they relate to themes that emerged from the data.

The types of community service engaged in by the 2 students in this study or reported on by the other stakeholders, included

- helping with swimming programs
- children’s programs such as summer camps or dance programs
- helping in senior citizens’ homes or day programs
- participating in the Town Christmas parade
- picking up litter
- helping with sporting events
- helping out at charity fundraising events
- assisting on a crisis centre’s helpline
- helping with church activities
- helping with community groups.

In addition many of the service opportunities happened within the school, before or after school hours. These school-related activities included helping operate media and technical equipment for plays or parent events, helping to set up for school events, helping with events to foster grade 9 integration into high school, participating in school fundraising events, and assisting with school clubs.
The level of commitment required by each of the community service activities was found to vary. Some community organizations asked for a time commitment; for example, when helping with a program such as a summer day camp, the student was asked to commit to the whole camp, which may have been a full-time commitment of a week to 2 weeks. Other commitments involved a couple of hours a week over a few months or over a school year. In addition some commitments required an orientation and training program, while others involved very little training and the emphasis was placed on the time commitment only. The latter was found to be more often the case. Typically students in this study participated in several events that cumulatively totaled 40 hours or many more.

In gathering information that related to the community involvement program, the themes that emerged from the interviews included:

- The meaningfulness of the program
- Stakeholder commitment to the program
- Perceived roles
- Communication
- Gains from service to the community
- Recommended enhancements to the program

**Meaningfulness of the Program**

Overall, the stakeholders interviewed felt that this was a meaningful program, but the extent to which they embraced the program differed in degree. In describing what made it meaningful they focused on what was gained from completing the community service hours.
Peter, a high school guidance counsellor, summed up his views by saying:

I think it’s a meaningful program. I think it’s a great opportunity for students to experience what it means to be a positive contributing citizen. It encourages empathy and compassion in kids. For students...there is a lot of meaning. We hear that in feedback from the clients, we hear it in feedback from the students, and we see the evidence in the number of hours. (Peter, 2007)

He also added

I would be very disappointed, if there’s a change of government, if the initiative were to fall by the wayside, because it wasn’t one particular government’s idea. I hope it’s something that is a standard that will be in place regardless of who’s driving the bus at the Ministry of Education. (Peter, 2007)

Liz, a parent of two high school graduates and a person responsible for facilitating programs that involve high school volunteers, felt that “from our perspective it’s certainly an enhancement to our programs and services, which has been great” (Liz, 2007).

The 2 students interviewed for this study, Jill and Tara, had more contradictory feelings in that they initially were lukewarm when speaking about the program, but the more they spoke of it the stronger their endorsement of the program became.

Tara said

I think it’s good in some ways because it makes you volunteer, but I know a lot of people do it because it’s required, so they don’t really get anything from it. They just go do it and stop when they get 40. (Tara, 2007)
However in talking about her own experiences she said, “I didn’t mind it at all, and I’m happy I got to do it” (Tara, 2007).

It was frequently mentioned that for students to find the placements beneficial, and to be involved in the service placement rather than just “putting in the hours,” the placements had to be interesting to them, or have some personal significance.

Tara, a grade 12 student, expressed it this way:

I think they have to have stuff that kids are going to find interesting to do. Like I know my friend from another school went to an office and filed...and that doesn’t sound interesting. I wouldn’t want to do that. But I think the Parks & Recreation program is a good system because there are different things that you can be involved in, that you like to do, so it doesn’t seem to put on you that you have to do it. (Tara, 2007)

Peter, a guidance counsellor, commented that

a lot of our students will volunteer with other schools in the community. We have a huge feeder group...and kids quite enjoy going back to their home school where they came from, sharing their successes, and contributing to it. And again it’s part of that cycle of commitment to the community that a lot of the students feel. I don’t think they’re pursuing greater than the 40 hours because of how it reflects on them. I won’t for a minute negate the fact that that exists and that students will do it, and I have no problem with that quite frankly. I think if students know it shows them in a positive light, I would encourage anyone to pursue that. But I don’t think that’s a driver for students going beyond their 40. I
think they do it because they enjoy it. They recognize that there’s a lot of learning for them to be had. (Peter, 2007)

Liz, reflecting on the impact that these experiences had on her children, felt that all of a sudden they were looked at as more of an adult than just a kid. It was sort of a taste of what it’s like in a workplace setting or kind of a more “unschool” setting I guess, where they really had to prove themselves. And there wasn’t a curriculum. There wasn’t a set syllabus to follow, and there wasn’t someone saying “don’t forget tonight to do.” I think that kind of teaching experience that they got was very different than the school teaching. (Liz, 2007)

While the two principals interviewed for this study were both overall in favour of the program, Roy was unequivocally positive about the program and its potential; Ken was more in favour of the spirit of the program than how it actually worked in practice. Ken felt

ambivalent about it because it just seems that it’s a good idea in principle but...we’ve got students coming down now asking if they can set up chairs in the gym for volunteer hours. We’ll let them do it and give them a couple of hours, but it’s not really promoting service to the community. (Ken, 2007)

Commitment

It seems evident from the data that stakeholders have varying degrees of commitment to this program. This commitment could somewhat relate to their level of endorsement of the program and also to the role they perceived for themselves within the program. It should be noted that the principals and guidance counsellors included in this study do not work at the schools attended by the students in this
study; the comments made by the students or school personnel do not relate to each other in a causal manner.

It appears from the data that some schools are actively endorsing this program, encouraging students to get involved in community activities, and see value in the program itself. Others seem to be focusing primarily on the monitoring of the program, leaving the students to fulfill the requirements of the program and involving students in school service opportunities where appropriate.

**Principals**

As a high school principal, Roy felt that the key to success in the community involvement program is in starting with students when they first enter high school. He said that it is important that schools start with the kids coming into grade 9. That you attach some value and importance to it. That’s the message from the school. That the message isn’t “sorry guys, you’ve got to do 40 hours of community service and you need to get that in, so here’s a list of agencies or places you can go to try and arrange it.” I think you have to stress it. The same as you stress academic excellence or participation. (Roy, 2007)

He continued by saying,

we try and get kids to be involved in their community. We try and make every opportunity available to them, so we encourage our community to send in information about where they could use volunteers and we advertise that in our school newsletter. We’ll put it on our website every summer, and occasionally for a period of time we’ll also advertise it on our outdoor sign. We really try and
encourage kids to do it outside [the school] and in their community. There are opportunities to do it after school. So we catch the kids who are reluctant to go out into their communities to do the in-school component. We don’t chase them until they are in their graduating year, but we do really try and encourage them to get in 10 hours a year. (Roy, 2007)

When asked to what extent the school incorporates gains from the service program back into the school, Ken, the other school principal in the study, expressed that there really isn’t a connection between the school and the results of the service hours, primarily due to the time span over which students do their service hours and the fact that they are in different placements. He did see a connection in grade 10 in that “Civics teachers talk specifically about the significance of volunteer service and your civic responsibility” (Ken, 2007).

Roy’s school, on the other hand, incorporates the service program into their school recognition program. Students who contribute well above the mandatory 40 hours are recognized in school assemblies and are often invited to the invitation-only “principal’s breakfast,” where they are treated to breakfast with the principal along with athletes and students with high academic success or other achievements that are recognized in this way.

Pam, a guidance counsellor, noted that her principal did not get involved in this program at all.

Guidance Counsellors

When asked how the guidance department can assist in making this program work well, Peter suggested that the level of commitment of guidance counsellors has a
definite effect on the implementation of the community involvement program. He said,

I think you need to have a counselling team that sees the value in the program. If they don’t take to it and see themselves as stakeholders in its success and value, I think you’re going to have trouble. I like to think you need counsellors who are active in their community. Just that sense of purpose that we’re helping raise other people’s children here. That stake I think is important for success. (Peter, 2007)

Peter saw a link between the results of service placements and the school, in that the school has a vested interest in the students’ success. He expressed this by saying:

Our kids are our ambassadors. We also want to make sure that the kids as they go out are successful and putting our school in the best light possible, because if we send one and it doesn’t work out, there’s a very good chance the community group is going to say “you know what, it just didn’t work out and I’m not going through this again.” So we have a huge stake in making sure the students are successful as well, so we try to make sure the students are adequately prepared before they go out. That’s it’s not just “you need 40 hours, go and get it,” but we’re actually putting something in place for them. (Peter, 2007)

Peter’s school teaches students with special education needs in a modified program as well as being the “English as a Second Language” centre for the region. He stated that his school looked for ways to make this program successful for both of these groups. It appears that the school is endorsing the spirit and aims of the community involvement program requirements by finding a way to involve all students, even if technically this requirement does not apply to them, as is the case for
students in a modified “life skills program,” or it is difficult for them to fulfill due to language barriers.

There are some students where it’s not feasible for them to go outside and work. Many of the life skills students technically never earn high school credits...so technically they’re never going to graduate, so there’s no community involvement requirement, but having said that, we’re strongly in favour of the spirit of the program...and so we try to avoid those issues where some are getting the extra accommodations and maybe looked upon differently, and at the same time with the life skills students so many of them are so obviously different in appearance anyway that we want to remove any opportunities for students to view them differently again, so we try to include them in the program. We try to make extra opportunities for them to complete it within the school community. (Peter, 2007)

Students

Peter, in his role of guidance counsellor, commented that students generally become committed to this program. He said that once they know about it, if they aren’t already involved in it, they will take to it naturally. There are some students that don’t take to it, and they’re the ones that need the poking and prodding and if, despite our best efforts of communicating the value, then eventually it comes down to “if you’d like to leave here then you need to complete it,” and unfortunately that happens, but it’s a small part. (Peter, 2007)
Ken, a high school principal, made a comment that questioned the commitment of some students to the spirit of the program. He mentioned that the program can have a negative impact in that students could become focused on gaining hours rather than purely "volunteering." He gave an example of the kids that did the fashion show--they come down to get hours--well there’s been fashion shows going on for 20 years in schools. Kids never came looking for hours before. Now they’re looking for hours. There can be a negative impact as well. (Ken, 2007)

Community Organizations

The two community organizations represented in this study were both committed to the community involvement program and its success. Both of the community organizations represented in this study, the town and the after-school community group, had developed a somewhat structured process for the fulfillment of community involvement hours to maximize the placement. Liz described the town’s process by saying,

We have a whole screening process. We do a training piece for them because...we want to make sure that everyone coming in has at least that set level or base level of the procedural, the safety pieces...the child management pieces, because we are dealing with little people. Which surprises people. They say, "can’t we just come and do the camp thing?” No, they have to do a bit of a training piece here. If they’re willing to make that kind of commitment, and we do give them information that says they’ve completed this, so we feel it helps them. So we’ve really tried to put some standards in and around it. Some steps if
you will...At least we feel it's really clear in terms of the expectations. (Liz, 2007)

Gail explained how the community group had worked to enhance their program for students. She said,

We would first of all find out from them what their particular interests were, if there were anything... we learned to try to engage them in telling us about what their knowledge, skills, interests, that kind of thing are, so that we can let them know, together, what we’re thinking about doing and inviting them to participate in thinking about where they think they would be a good fit and where they might be able to learn from it. So to try to make it something where they can gain from it rather than putting in their hours. (Gail, 2007)

It is unknown how typical these two community placements are of other placements. Both organizations appear to have put thought and effort into the students’ community service placement and continue to work with high school students on an ongoing basis.

Roles

The level of commitment by the stakeholders could be seen to relate somewhat to their perception of their role in this mandatory program.

Principals

Roy, a school principal, saw his and the school’s role as one of actively endorsing the value of this program. Ken, the other school principal in the study, had a differing perspective on the school’s role. He said,
Most high schools aren’t really structuring the programs at all. It’s up to the kids to do the 40 hours… where our structure kind of kicks in is we need kids to do stuff, and we will offer them volunteer hours for that—registration at the beginning of the year, particularly for the grade 9 kids--our students have to come in in August to help the grade 9 kids, so we give them volunteer hours for that. I don’t know of any schools that actually have a structure for kids to earn their 40 hours. The expectation is they go and earn them in the community. (Ken, 2007)

While guidance counsellors generally take charge of administration of the program, Ken mentioned that he gets involved when students appear not to have done their hours and they are in the last few months of grade 12, putting them in danger of not graduating. Ken has found, however, that most of these students have their service requirements under control. He stated:

Student Services…lets us know of kids who are coming up for graduation who are short hours. We’ll call those kids in and say, “do you have a plan, because you won’t get your diploma otherwise.” Almost all of them either have a plan or they’ve actually done the 40 hours but haven’t submitted it. (Ken, 2007)

Guidance Counsellors

Pam’s view of the guidance counsellor’s role was administrative in nature. Her focus in dealing with students on this program requirement is to make information available on placements and to advise them to get their hours done early. Pam stated: “What I’ve always said to the students is “get it done by the end of grade 10 because by grade 11 you’ll want a paid part-time job” (Pam, 2007). She saw parents as being
primarily responsible for working with students on the fulfillment of this program.

She commented that

I know when it first came out the government said we [guidance people] are not
the gatekeepers of this. I think perhaps it was more that the parents are helping
their kids, assisting them with this whole endeavor, and therefore we were not to
really “yea” or “nay” their volunteer experiences. (Pam, 2007)

Peter, another guidance counsellor, was more active in promoting the program.

He commented that he goes out to the school’s feeder schools and mentions the
service program to grade 7 and 8 students as part of their information on going to
high school. Once students are in high school, he stated that each guidance counsellor
monitors the service fulfillment of a group of students in the school and if necessary
follows up with those students who do not appear to be completing their hours in
advance of the last months before graduation. He explained the role of guidance
counsellors with grade 12 students by saying

by the time they get to grade 12, quite frankly the role for counsellors is a
housekeeping role. For the most part their pathway is set. Our role for community
involvement for grade 12s is essentially making sure they’ve either completed it
or there’s an action plan to complete it, and where necessary we’ll try and
facilitate that as well by making some calls. Sometimes, depending on the
student, it means giving them a ride to meet somebody and see if there’s a good
fit there. (Peter, 2007)
Parents

The parents in this study appeared to be committed to this program, although they didn’t necessarily know much detail about it. Both students in this study mentioned that their mothers had been instrumental in helping them find at least one of their placements, and Jill felt that the fact that her mother was a high school teacher, and therefore had knowledge of the program, had been helpful.

When asked if he felt that parents get involved with their children in the fulfillment of this requirement, Peter replied:

My experience has been that parents tend not to be involved unless there is a problem and I think there’s something that doesn’t go well, or they’re the student that’s pushing the time when they should be graduating and they haven’t got it done. For the most part they’re very hands-off from our perspective. There could be a lot of conversation and consultation going on in the home, and I hope there is, but in terms of parent involvement through us or with us, I don’t see that. I know that all students aren’t hopping on the bus to get to the placement, so I’m sure there’s some Mom and Dad involvement getting them to the placement. I’m pretty sure the parents are making sure the students are safe in choosing ones…and I like to think that parents are taking a strong role, as we are, in making sure that students aren’t overextending and putting themselves in a position where they’re not going to be successful, because there’s no value in that. I think they are involved, but we don’t really see it, and we’re not going out of our way to confirm it. (Peter, 2007)
Students

When the students were asked to what extent the school promoted or assisted students with this program, both students downplayed the role of the school. Jill responded:

I think in grade 12, maybe in semester one, they’re like, “oh yes, you guys need your 40 hours of volunteering.” I think maybe in grade 9 we might have had a presentation, but you’re kind of fresh and wide-eyed in grade 9. I don’t think they did a really good job of instilling that…but other than that, nobody mentioned it.

(Jill, 2007)

Jill, a grade 12 student, had somewhat contradictory feelings on the subject of mandatory community involvement hours in that sometimes she would praise the program as an initiative that got youth “volunteering,” and at other times she’d note the drawbacks of requiring volunteering in the community as a graduation requirement. She shared her thoughts by saying,

I kinda find volunteering a bit funny in that you’re being rewarded with your high school graduation or you can put it on a resume so people think you look better, when the whole point of volunteering is to be doing it for other people. (Jill, 2007)

However, her overall experience with the 40 hours was positive, as it acted as a catalyst for future volunteering. She noted,

When I started doing community involvement it was because I had to, because I had to complete my 40 hours, but after I really started to get more involved and I
volunteered a lot more just for me and for people, and I started to recognize that I appreciated volunteering more than I thought initially. (Jill, 2007)

Tara, a grade 12 student, explained her experience this way:

I think it’s good that they required it because I know some kids wouldn’t do it. I know I probably wouldn’t have done it, just because I was so busy and it wouldn’t have been on my list of things to do, but I’m glad it forced me to, because I got out there and I got to try different things, so I think it’s a good thing. (Tara, 2007)

Gail saw her daughter get very involved and felt that the required hours were motivational. She commented that

she was interested in accruing more hours than the 40. Not necessarily in the same thing...she seemed to get a little competitive or interested...but really gaining some hours was a really big thing ...she got very enthusiastic about it, and then she got about 40 hours just for the camps...She started to do some other things that were more with her peers than with younger kids...volunteering at the school, doing administrative things...so she tried a few different things as a result of it, so it was good to see her do it...I’m not sure she would have done it without the inspiration of gaining some more hours...It was a motivator. (Gail, 2007)

Both of the students in this study organized their own community service placements without the assistance of their school. When asked if it was problematic finding placement opportunities, they both felt that it was not difficult at all. Local resources such as the community centre, local newspaper, parental resources, and the town’s programs provided sources of service opportunities.

Jill’s perspective was that
it didn’t seem to be much of a problem at all; everyone got volunteering. Generally with their families too, they hooked it up for them. Our school is right next to a community centre so they have lots of postings, and people would go over. (Jill, 2007)

Communication

Communication was a theme that emerged from the data. While schools feel they are communicating about this program, other stakeholders did not necessarily feel informed. It appears that the communication is either too minimal or not necessarily effective.

Students

The principals and guidance counsellors in this study stated that posting community involvement placements on a bulletin board was a primary method of communicating with students regarding opportunities for the fulfillment of this program. This resource was not used by either of the students in this study, although they both mentioned the existence of the bulletin board. Tara seemed vague on what type of information the school bulletin board might contain. Jill felt that there was a stigma attached to going into the guidance office. She said

there’s always the [guidance office], but lots of people are embarrassed to go in there. They don’t want to really be seen. I don’t think there’s many volunteer opportunities listed in the school or posted, so I think if our school had a bigger bulletin school board or a place where people could go kind of casually, so they didn’t feel they were looking uncool or whatever, it would be better. (Jill, 2007)
When asked if students ever talked to each other about their community service placements or experiences, both students replied that this is not generally a topic of conversation.

*Parents*

Communicating with parents regarding this program seems to be somewhat problematic. Peter, a guidance counsellor, felt that often, despite attempts to communicate with parents about this program and how it works, parents remained uninformed about the logistics. He said:

> We talk till we’re blue in the face about the process, and we still hear from parents “so where is the form? I can’t find the form.” There is no form. Students are simply to bring in a letter, dated and signed by the person who supervised them, explaining the role, what their duties were. There is no standardized form. That’s the position that our school board has taken. (Peter, 2007)

Unless the parents had knowledge of the program through their jobs, such as Pam and Liz did, generally the parents in this study felt fairly uninformed. Ann, a parent, stated,

> I didn’t really know what the input from the school was. I knew it was a requirement. I’d heard through the grapevine that they do this, and I thought it was a great idea but no, if I’d never known about it, from a parent’s point of view, I was never at a meeting where it was talked about. (Ann, 2007)

Chuck, who was a volunteer lacrosse coach who had his son assist him as part of his service hours, commented that he knew
very little. I know you have to get 40 hours before you graduate. I’ve seen the form, because I signed it. Other than that I really don’t know how enforceable it is or if they’ve ever held anybody back for not having their 40 hours. (Chuck, 2007)

Chuck’s comment about signing the form illustrates an inconsistency and source of some confusion in this program; his son’s school required forms to be filled out. Other schools had no forms.

*Community Organizations*

There appears to be little communication between schools and community organizations. The general consensus, when talking to principals and guidance counsellors, was that community organizations tended to approach the school if they needed student help, but that was generally the only communication between the two parties. Peter summed it up this way:

For the most part if things are working out we don’t hear anything. For the 15-20% of the time where we do hear something, it will be where there wasn’t a good fit, and there will always be a few of the kids who are just all-stars …and they were just overwhelmed by how wonderful they are, and they wonder if they can have a few more students like that. We take the feedback as they keep calling us looking for students; they keep sending in their flyers…if it wasn’t working out they wouldn’t be sending their information. (Peter, 2007)

Gail, a parent and community leader, reported that she’d never had any involvement with the school regarding this program and had received no input from them on their requirements or guidelines for the placement. She knew only that
students had to complete 40 hours before the end of grade 12 and that she had a form to document the community service hours. Girls who did their community hours with her organization usually came to her as they had previously been participants in her community program and she therefore knew them already.

Liz, who works for a town in southern Ontario that actively incorporates students fulfilling their community involvement hours, felt that the town was involved in communication with the schools. It appears that the town initiates the contact, and the communication is focused on making the placement opportunities known to schools. She said:

I know that our co-ordinator is pretty proactive in reaching out. This information is available to all the schools, so the schools are aware that we’re here and what we do offer. Some of it’s been word of mouth, but some of it’s been very much making inroads that way. We’re not so stand alone anymore. (Liz, 2007)

**Gains From the Service Experience**

Despite the challenges and inconsistencies in the application of this program, it appears that it is beneficial for many students. It certainly appears to have been an asset for the stakeholders represented in this study, as they attributed specific gains that were seen to have resulted from the community involvement experiences.

When discussing these gains from this program, the following themes were found in participants’ responses:

- Provided experiences outside the students’ comfort zone
- Personal growth and skill development
- Recognition
• Acted as a first job experience, or something for the resume
• Provided input that related to career choices

New Experiences

One of the most often mentioned benefits of the program was that it provided opportunities that took students outside their comfort zone. Students had experiences working with people or groups that they might not otherwise have been involved with and were often placed in situations that were totally new to them.

Peter, a high school guidance counsellor, felt that in some cases it allows students to gain exposure to other people in this world who sometimes are completely out of their socioeconomic catchment. A lot of the students when they’re volunteering are confronted with people sometimes in extreme hardship. They’re not used to seeing it and therefore it creates that uncomfortable feeling in the stomach and in the mind. I think their behaviour often tends to change as a result of it as well. (Peter, 2007)

Tara’s experience as a student doing her community involvement hours would support Peter’s point. In talking about her time spent with seniors in a day program she commented that

at first I found it kinda hard because I don’t spend a lot of time with old people. Like I think my grandparents are pretty young; they act young anyway, and I had a great grandpa who was actually 101 who passed away this year, …but he was still very active and would talk to you, so it was hard at first to talk to someone who wasn’t really there, but you got used to it and you learned how to interact with them. It was fun; it was good. (Tara, 2007)
New Skills

All of the stakeholders saw the experience of providing service to the community as a means to gaining new skills or building character traits. Most often the skills gained, that were attributed directly or indirectly to this program and subsequent volunteering, were leadership skills, enhanced communication skills, better time management, ability to work with different types of people and accommodate to their needs, and flexibility. Of the gains noted, the most often mentioned was increased self-confidence.

Tara, a student, felt that she learned how to adapt to different groups of people. She related that having to deal with old people who are like slower and nothing like exciting, and then kids where you have to be excited; you can’t just talk to them like you would a normal person or they’d like zone out. There was a girl in one of the classes who had Down’s syndrome, and I was like in charge of her for that one class. It was hard at first because she wouldn’t listen to you, but after awhile, once she like gained your trust she would start to listen to you. I’d never had to deal with that before, so that was hard. I think it just got me more like a people person, dealing with people. (Tara, 2007)

As a high school guidance counsellor, Pam saw the gains as follows: I think that they get their interpersonal skills definitely, because many times they’re working with other people, for instance if they were helping out with a team or at a mosque, you’re usually working with someone else. Also their time management and organization or leadership skills. I know some people have done
some computer work, so they might be building those sorts of skills. In our school they can help with the audiovisual and technical aspects of things for productions or for parents’ nights so they do develop many skills through their volunteering. (Pam, 2007)

In addition to gaining specific skills, there were other gains noted, such as personal satisfaction or using the service hours as a means of advancing oneself.

In the process of providing service to the community, students were able to learn something about themselves. Jill, a student, expressed this by saying,

Personally I think I recognized that receiving appreciation as opposed to money...is a lot more satisfying. You feel a lot better, and you know either way you’re working your hardest, and you almost want to work harder because you know it’s not a schedule you have to make money. You’re just doing it for the sake of it. (Jill, 2007)

Recognition

Peter, a guidance counsellor, noted that for graduating students, the program and subsequent volunteering could be used to gain entrance into university programs or secure scholarships. He stated that

in Grade 12 we also emphasize the significance of it for scholarship applications as well as for programs like teacher education, where there’s supplemental applications. We highlight the importance and value of that, as a way of showing the balanced and well-rounded candidate rather than someone who is strong in the books but not so strong in the people skills. (Peter, 2007)
Students may also gain recognition through this program for doing a good job in their service placement. Gail, a community organization leader, “tried very hard when we had the volunteers to give them a lot of credit for the things they did well, and they might or might not have been getting that anywhere else” (Gail, 2007). Jill’s comment about “receiving appreciation” also supports the notion that students can feel recognized in this program.

In addition to gaining recognition, specific skills, and other gains, the stakeholders frequently mentioned that for students these service experiences act rather like a job experience, as students tend to complete their hours before being old enough to work in a paid position.

Something for the Resume

Tara, a student, said:

I liked it because it was my first experience going out...I guess you can call it working, you just don’t get paid... I’d never worked before I’d volunteered, so it was kinda like my first job experiences....And I also could use that on resumes, because I never had anything prior to that work wise, so I ended up using that...volunteer experience is like job experience. That’s kinda like what helped me get me my first job. (Tara, 2007)

Ann, a parent, also saw a connection to job experiences and commented

...I think kids get a lot of connections through volunteering. It’s a great way for them to network without even realizing that they’re doing it. With my daughter it led to a job. And selling the cards at the UNICEF table gave her that whole idea
with money, and now she works in a retail store. I don’t think that they realize that they’re networking for their future. (Ann, 2007)

**Career Exploration**

In addition to feeling like a job, the service experiences gave students the opportunity to try out work settings and duties that might relate to future career choices.

Gail, a parent and community organization leader, felt that it might give them a little bit of an idea of some of the things they might be good at or things to avoid in terms of their further education and career development kinds of things. So I think they learn a little bit of something about themselves that they can use in their future development. (Gail, 2007)

Roy, a school principal, noted this too, and commented that students were exposed to areas that they would have never thought of, and that they’ve now developed an interest in, or realize that “hey, maybe that’s something I like to do. I like to work with people. (Roy, 2007)

**Problems with the Community Involvement Program, and Suggestions for Improvement**

Although it seemed clear that the stakeholders saw significant benefits from this program, there were also factors that they felt impede the success of the program; they addressed these within a framework of enhancing the current community involvement program. Their suggestions fell into three main categories that largely related to the loose structure of this program: the hours required, administration issues, and the need for stronger partnerships.
Changes to the Number of Hours

It was uniformly mentioned that the 40 hours required by this program is too low. Several participants noted that these hours tend to be completed by the end of grade 10. From the guidance counsellor’s perspective, Peter commented “quite frankly 40 hours is a minimal amount of time for community service” (Peter, 2007). Tara, a student, added: “I haven’t talked to anyone who has said I can’t finish it: Especially if you break it up every year. Its 10 hours a year. That’s nothing” (Tara, 2007). From a parent and community organization’s perspective, Liz said: “I think 40 hours…that’s a day for each year you’re in high school. I would really like to see it go 40/40/10/10 or something, so they come away with a minimum of 100 hours” (Liz, 2007).

Another recurring suggestion was that the service program should start at a younger age, which may also increase the number of hours involved. The reason for this suggestion, from both school principals and students, was that young people are ready at a younger age and the program should take advantage of that.

Jill, a high school student felt that they should start at a younger age. Grade 5. I remember grade 5. That was definitely a turning point in the social scene for kids. You get to be a volunteer crossroad person. You get to help out and help people cross the street, and you get to show lots of leadership. I think at that age it’s a really great age to get kids involved. (Jill, 2007)

Peter, a guidance counsellor, saw no reason why it can’t be a part of middle school. If we can create that culture of contribution and community involvement in grades 6, 7, 8 it would make
our lives easier in grades 9 through 12, but again I think it would serve the public good if we could start it earlier. (Peter, 2007)

Peter also suggested that the service program should not stop at the end of high school, so that youth are encouraged to keep volunteering in their community. He said

I’d also like to see it extended somehow into postsecondary. I’d like to see it essentially as a continuum in place. It’s one thing to build it with young people so that hopefully they keep it up through adulthood, but I would also ask what groups are doing to try and draw in adults in our community. If we’re trying to model best practices for kids, I think that would be a good thing to do. (Peter, 2007)

Administrative Issues

Another theme that arose concerning the current structure of the program is the onerous administration process involved. This theme was explored primarily by the educators in this study. From the educators’ perspective, administrative issues were seen to somewhat stem from the loose structure of the community involvement program, and insufficient communication from the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training or the local school board on aspects of the program. Ken, a school principal, explained the need for more structure by saying,

Well I think they should come with stricter criteria on how you get your 40 hours. Right now it’s all over the place …I think there needs to be tighter criteria and a structure put in place that is not quite as loose as it is now. Or maybe something like 20 hours the kids can do that kind of thing, but 20 hours are fixed--“here’s
what you have to do to get the other 20--volunteer in a food bank or something.”
(Ken, 2007)

He added that the program structure should give students and educators more
direction. He said:

I’ve thought about this. It’s the ad hoc nature of it. I know there was a list
furnished to all of us of what’s acceptable and not acceptable and so on but a lot
of them just go out and do whatever, and we’re not sure what they’re doing, or
how legitimate it is, and do you really need volunteer hours to set up chairs or to
do something along those lines. (Ken, 2007)

Peter, a guidance counsellor, also felt that more structure would be beneficial.
I’d like to see some standardization, even if it was from the perspective of
communication and promotion. Too often, because there’s that lack of
standardization, students coming to us from other schools…have totally different
takes on it. (Peter, 2007)

Peter also mentioned that the schools need support in administering this program.
He said:

I believe the best way to accomplish that though is for the Ministry to provide
some directives or direction to the school board, but allow the school boards
to decide what works for them within the greater context but have some
consistency within the system, within the school board. Make things a little
tighter; that would be a real positive. (Peter, 2007)
Reduce Administrative Burden

From the school’s perspective, administration is one of the most time consuming aspects of this program. The guidance counsellors both mentioned that students tend to bring in proof of their hours as they complete them, which means multiple pieces of paper that have to be approved and recorded. Not only does this process take time, it also means that the guidance office has to have storage space for the paper, which the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training mandates them not to destroy. Peter felt that record keeping is one of the most onerous pieces. That belongs to our guidance secretary. Record keeping can be quite challenging, because it’s a Ministry mandate, obviously there has to be proper accountability and transparency. So what we find is that students want to bring in documentation 2 hours at a time and we’re a high school that will be pushing 2,000 students. So we’re talking 80,000 community hours, and they want to bring them in 3 and 4 hours at a time. (Peter, 2007)

When asked if schools should have a greater role in the community service program, Pam, a guidance counsellor responded:

No. Because I think that’s a huge, huge job, and then we would spend all our time monitoring community involvement. It’s a learning experience, it’s educational, and it’s certainly valuable, but to monitor it and monitor it properly, and to make sure organizations are nonprofit and all those sorts of things, that they’re not taking a job away from somebody else, I mean that would be a job in itself for people. I just think that we’re there for educational purposes in terms of courses.
Although volunteerism is a valuable learning experience, I don’t think it’s one that’s for us to monitor. (Pam, 2007)

It seems very clear from Pam’s response that, while she saw value in the community service program, she didn’t see more of a role for guidance. It appears that the program already takes a lot of their time.

*Curb opportunities for cheating*

Guidance teachers also have to deal with another administrative issue related to this program: dealing with cheating or attempts to circumvent the requirements or spirit of the program. These issues may stem from a lack of understanding of the requirements of the community involvement program or from deliberate abuse of the program. There are differences among schools in how they deal with suspected abuse of the program; however, all of the guidance counsellors and principals in this study acknowledged that some students cheat on fulfilling the requirements of this program, usually by handing in false documents about community service that didn’t take place. Although schools record the hours spent on community service activities and keep copies of the forms or letters that document these, they do not generally follow up to determine the validity of the documents presented as evidence of hours spent. This is mostly due to time constraints but could also be due to the school’s perception of their role in administering this program. As Pam, a guidance counsellor, and Ken, a principal, were quoted earlier as saying; sometimes the schools see this program as being something to be left to the students to fulfill or to the parents to monitor. Pam explained the difficulty in school monitoring by saying
I know that validation is very difficult. But you know that some of them are not volunteering in nonprofit organizations, but it becomes a nightmare in terms of trying to monitor it from a guidance perspective or from a school perspective. And to stop the cheating. (Pam, 2007)

Peter’s comments reinforced Pam’s point when he said that it would be easy to point out where students are trying to abuse it, where they’re taking the short cut or trying to perform or earn their 40 hours in a manner that violates the spirit of that. It would be easy to point to that, but I would say that when you look at the scope and the number of hours done it’s very few. I’ll have two to three conversations in a year with a student that they’ll bring in letters, they won’t have been placements facilitated by us, it’s something that they did, and we’ll have to have a conversation about how this really doesn’t meet the objectives of the program as we’ve explained to you time and again. That’s often where the parents will call, and they won’t be happy about that. (Peter, 2007)

He continued by saying quite often we’ll find that where we’re having those problems it’s where the students are trying to perform a service with their parent’s business. And there will always be that small percentage that deliberately have their ear muffs on when we explain the program. (Peter, 2007)

There is an inconsistency among schools on this point, in that some guidance counsellors will question a document that they suspect is not valid, and may phone the community agency to verify the nature of the placement, as Peter, a guidance
counsellor, and Ken, a principal, do, but other guidance counsellors accept documents at face value. Although she knows that the documentation is not valid, Pam accepts it. As she explained: “What am I supposed to say? That’s the odd case, but those kinds of things happen.” (Pam, 2007)

Pam has occasionally questioned the nature of the student placement and related the result by commenting that the few times that I’ve questioned a student on it, because one time a student just downloaded a bunch of sheets from like an organization’s website for example, a child gym program, and it gave a description of the program and “I did this,” but there was no validation that she had done the particular number of hours. No-one signed off on it, and when I handed it back and told her she needed those things, then the parent got involved and came in yelling and screaming and called me a cheater and a liar and all sorts of things. Some parents just want their kids to be done with it and that’s it. Then the woman said, “well, she helps wash hair at my hair salon,” and then I said “that’s not a nonprofit organization,” and then she said “everything’s for profit.” She’s not the only parent that I have been yelled at about community service. (Pam, 2007)

She also gave an example of where parents aid in the falsification of documents. We’ve had parents get really upset: “What do you mean my child’s not going to get their diploma because of community service?” And then it’s funny how all of a sudden they bring in their community service. How did they do that in x number of hours? (Pam, 2007)
Each school board has its own requirements for documentation on service hours. In suggesting how this abuse could somewhat be combated, Pam suggested that students should be required to gather letters on letterhead from organizations, giving the details of the service placement and number of hours, rather than requiring only the completion of a standardized form that was more open to forgery.

Community organizations can also be participants in undermining the intent of this program. Tara, a student, gave an example of where her dance school had offered students service hours based on the rationale that they were frequently at dance classes and possibly didn’t have time to complete their service requirements. “My dance school said “don’t worry, you can come just ask us for hours. We’ll give you hours because you’re here all the time.” (Tara, 2007) And apparently many students did ask for the letter, although she did not.

Communication

More clarification from the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training on what constitutes an eligible place for completing service hours would be helpful to school administrators and other stakeholders. Currently, many guidance counsellors feel that the program requires that the community hours be contributed to a nonprofit organization and this raises some issues in judging the eligibility of hours spent. Pam, a guidance counsellor, noted that

some of the places kids volunteer, for example at a babysitting service at the mall. Is that nonprofit? I don’t really know. That’s another thing. What is the real sense of “nonprofit”? Some of the others are a bit grey. For example, the YMCA. I couldn’t tell you 100% if it’s nonprofit or not. Then there’s other kids who have
an interest in dance. Well they give hours to assist teachers in dance classes, and isn’t that valuable...A dance studio is definitely for profit, but the kids are giving up some of their time. The government have to regulate how that’s going to work and figure out how you’re going to decide what organization is a credible participant in the program. (Pam, 2007)

More clarification would assist educators in the administration of the program as well as provide guidance to students seeking community placements. It would also potentially decrease the negative interactions between educators and parents, as stakeholders would be better informed on the elements of this program.

Another aspect to the need for more communication and stakeholder education on this program is a perceived need for more promotion and support of this program by the Ontario provincial government and the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training. From his perspective in guidance, Peter commented:

I think the community involvement one is a huge piece, that if the Ministry and government were to make a little more of it would make our jobs a whole lot easier because it wouldn’t just be a high school graduation requirement, it would be a provincial initiative to promote citizenship, and I think there would be a lot of value in seeing that coming from one centralized body. (Peter, 2007)

Roy felt that more endorsement and promotion by the Ontario Ministry would help parents to place a greater value on this program in that the Ministry should say to parents in the community, “we feel this is valuable and this is why we believe it is valuable. That we’re asking for your support to have your youngster do the volunteer hours.” I think a lot of parents would buy into it.
I think they see the value. They just need to know what’s happening and why they’re doing it....I think we see a lot of stuff out of all ministries that don’t provide a rationale for why we would do that ...and that way pretty quickly subscribe to the theory that it’s good politics and it never really gets beyond that stage, and the 40 hours was one of those initiatives that initially looked like it was good politics...” we’re going make kids be involved in their community” and then the other piece seemed to have got dropped or left with school boards or educators to sell to their community, or persuade their community is a better word I guess, that this was a valuable activity to be involved in. Well maybe the Ministry needs to take more of a forefront. (Roy, 2007)

From a parent’s perspective, Chuck said: “I don’t think there’s enough information about the program, and I think there has to be a way to promote it to the kids better” (Chuck, 2007).

In Need of Stronger Partnerships

In addition to modifying the structure of the program, the stakeholders felt that stronger partnerships would enhance the administration and benefits of the program. As mentioned earlier, there is currently very little communication between schools and community groups on the topic of the community involvement program, other than for groups to make schools aware of placement opportunities. Several stakeholders mentioned that developing closer relationships between groups and schools would strengthen the program. Ken, a school principal, stressed the value of communities working with schools to educate children.
Currently they're not really partnerships; they're arrangements more than partnerships. I don't know how we would get to that point, but we need to get to that because we are all educating the kids, not just the schools. (Ken, 2007)

Peter, a guidance counsellor, pointed to the need for community agencies to see the value of working with students in this program. He said:

I think communication is important. The ability of the school to communicate to the community that you have essentially an army of 2,000 volunteers here. Please help us to tap into it. You need businesses, charities, organization groups that are receptive to having young people come in. Quite often there are many that are not. They think, “I don’t want a teenager. That’s going to make more work.” They don’t realize how wonderful these young people are. (Peter, 2007)

These community partnerships could also encompass a stronger link between parents and schools in this program, which could enhance their understanding of the program and potentially increase the parental support of the program.

Peter felt that parents are important. We need parents that are more active. We need parents that are involved in their kids’ education, whether it’s as simple as coming to parent interview night so you have that opportunity to make that personal connection, but also to build the bridges of partnership between the parents of students and the staff and to make sure that the messages are consistent. That’s so important I believe. (Peter, 2007)

Stronger partnerships could exist between schools and community agencies, between parents and the school, and between the Ontario provincial government and
the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training in supporting schools as they administer this program. Through partnerships, communication could be improved, stakeholders could become more educated on the program, and endorsement of the program by all stakeholder groups could increase.

**Overall Stakeholder Perspective on the Community Involvement Program**

As part of this study, the stakeholders were asked if this program was a valuable addition to the education system and in fact should remain as a graduation requirement, in their opinion. They were asked if they thought there would be any negative impact to students or the high school education system if this community service graduation requirement were removed. Ken, a principal, saw the value in the program, although he thought it needed restructuring. He mentioned that, if removed, perhaps it would have a negative impact, in that I think even if it’s not working as well as it should work, I think it’s changed the way that many kids think. That maybe public service is a good thing. I think it would have a negative impact on our psyche. It wouldn’t be a good thing. And I think it’s important that governments lead and governments say “this is good for society,” and kids can see that and try to model that behaviour. I think the problem is in the way that it’s structured, not the notion behind it. (Ken, 2007)

Jill and Tara, both students, thought that this program had been very meaningful, and both had completed over 80 hours service, going far beyond what was mandated. The parents in this study (Ann, Chuck, Pam, Gail and Liz) also felt that this program had been very beneficial to their children and saw the value in the program. The two
community organization representatives, Gail and Liz, saw the value of the program both to their children and their organizations.

Although all of the participants in this study were in favour of the community service program, 2 of the participants expressed some doubts overall. Pam, a guidance counsellor and parent, summed her feelings by saying

I think it’s valuable, but I’m not sure that it belongs in the education system. I’m not 100% convinced; but then where would it go? I can see why they thought education would be a good thing. (Pam, 2007)

Ken, a principal, felt that the program was valuable but needed to be updated. He said,

I think there needs to be reassessment and a reinvigoration of the program. I think it’s stale now. Like I said, when it first came out I was kind of opposed to it. But it came out at a time where there was a politically charged environment in education. And there was a visceral opposition to it, and not a lot of thought. But reflecting on it, thinking about it, I go, well, it’s a good idea because part of our job is to introduce adolescents to behaviours that we would like to see all citizens do at some point, and whether that’s coaching a hockey team, or running a drama program, or cutting the senior citizen’s grass, as simple as that, it promoted an idea and a notion that’s good for civic society. (Ken, 2007)

**Conclusion**

This chapter captured the experiences of a group of stakeholders involved with the compulsory community involvement program in Ontario. Although the stakeholders were all in favour of the spirit of the program, there were several key
suggestions made to enhance the current format of the community service component to the graduation requirements. In the next chapter I will discuss the significance of these perspectives as they relate back to the literature on volunteering, community service, and service-learning as well as isolating areas for further research and making recommendations.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study I have primarily been interested in what makes for a quality experience for stakeholders involved with the 40 hours of mandatory community involvement program in Ontario. In investigating what makes this program work, I have also had an interest in what detracts from the program and therefore impacts its ability to work best. In Chapter Four, I summarized the experiences and recommendations of the stakeholders involved in this study. In this chapter I will explore the significance of the stakeholder feedback as it relates to other studies in this area. I end this chapter with my suggestions and thoughts on how to incorporate the stakeholder recommendations and take the community involvement program to the next level.

I have been most interested in whether this program has been a worthwhile one and a valuable addition to the secondary school graduation requirements, from the perspective of the major stakeholder groups. The findings in this study have supported the findings of other Ontario studies (such as Brown, Pancer, et al., 2007; Henderson et al., 2007; OCVI, 2006a) in determining that the community involvement program can be overall a positive and meaningful experience for students; however, there are qualifying factors, which will be discussed in this chapter.

Surprisingly, researchers in Ontario (Allmendinger, 2006; Brown, Pancer, et al., 2007; Meinhard et al., 2006; OCVI, 2006a) have found that no formal or informal evaluation of the community involvement program has been undertaken by the
Ontario Ministry of Education and Training. None of the educators or community organization representatives in this study had heard of any evaluation either. For a program that is a requirement for graduation, and one that could potentially have a significant impact on youth and their communities, it seems negligent that it has not been investigated to ensure that it is working at an optimal level.

Peter, a guidance counselor in the most proactively engaged school featured in this study, commented that “we’re strongly in favour of the spirit of the program” (Peter, 2007). I think that quote sums it up for many stakeholders. The program is seen to be in need of some core changes in order to enhance it, but the people involved in this study believe in the essence of what it is about.

Motivation

Motivation is one of the key themes that emerged from the data. The program itself has been left fairly unstructured by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, with room for interpretation, and it appears from the data that the quality of the experience substantially depends on the extent to which the stakeholders are motivated to make the most of this program. The program’s success could be said to rely on the stakeholders’ motivation and commitment.

In this study, Gail, a community organization representative and a parent, raised a concern that students could tend to take easy placements. Ken, a principal, gave examples of students looking for quick ways to get their hours, such as asking if they could stack chairs in the gym in preparation for a school function, rather than finding a placement in the community. Ken expressed concern that students sometimes did not understand the intent of this program or were now looking for hours where they
would previously have assisted without looking for anything in compensation. As it is currently structured, the community involvement program emphasizes the number of hours and acceptable activities. It does not incorporate elements that would guide students toward a meaningful placement. According to Meinhard et al. (2006), educators worried that meaningful placements were not the norm. The stakeholders in this study generally relayed stories of students in meaningful placements, benefiting in the process, and these experiences perhaps relate to the motivation and commitment of the students and the types of placements chosen by them.

Some schools are more proactively involved in the administration of this program by promoting the program and its possibilities and sometimes even driving students to a placement, while most schools seem to focus more on reminding the students of the requirements and then doing the housekeeping to make sure the hours have been done (Brown, Meinhard, et al., 2007). For many schools the emphasis seems to be on the fact that this is a graduation requirement, something that needs to be checked off on the list to graduate. Brown, Meinhard, et al., (p. 3) commented that “the zeal with which individual schools apply themselves to programming of this kind becomes a function of staff willingness to take on these extraordinary responsibilities.” Students are therefore receiving different amounts of support depending on the school that they attend and the extent to which they access the support that is available to them. Brown, Meinhard, et al. commented that schools that had involved teachers and guidance counsellors who acted as liaisons with community organizations positively impacted the quality of the student experience with this program. Comparing the
process and results of students in an involved school with those of students in a less involved school would make for an interesting study.

Students generally have to search out the community service opportunity, although some school and family connections can be helpful in this regard. In their study, Brown, Pancer, et al., (2007) found that mothers are particularly influential in assisting their children in finding placements, or in acting as the liaison between the placement and the student. This study found that one parent in each family tended to be involved in assisting with locating placements, which in this case was 3 mothers and 1 father. The nature of the assistance varied from using personal networks to uncover opportunities to having their child "volunteer" along with them.

Parental motivation was also apparent in the experiences related by the 2 guidance counsellors in this study. Both guidance counsellors told of situations where the parents had seemingly been involved in circumventing the spirit of this program by representing that their child had completed hours that had not in fact been completed. To these parents it seems that meeting the graduation requirement was the only criterion.

Both community organizations profiled in this study were committed enough to create their own structure and expectations to maximize the community involvement experience. This may or may not be unusual. None of the research that I was able to locate specifically focused on the experience of community organizations working with mandated youth in Ontario, and this would be an area for future research. Meinhard et al. (2006) questioned whether the community organizations are benefiting from having student assistance. The data provided by the community
organization representatives in this study suggest that they are. As one of the community organizations expressed it, “it’s a lot of time and effort, and sometimes you measure it out and think oh my gosh type of thing. Is this good value?” (Liz, 2007). Liz continued on by saying that it in the final analysis it is. There is research from the United States that explores the perspective of the community organizations (for example Basinger & Bartholomew, 2006; Sandy & Holland, 2006), and it suggests that community organizations do benefit from these experiences, but more research is needed (Sandy & Holland).

It seems probable that if community organizations are motivated to support and guide students, the result will be a more meaningful experience. It was noted by Meinhard et al. (2006) that dissatisfied students were likely to have been left to devise the nature of their participation in the community program themselves.

Motivation was also a theme regarding the ability of this experience to encourage, or motivate, youth to continue volunteering, which is one of the broader aims of the program.

The mandatory nature of this and other programs in the United States and Canada has been a source of discussion in the literature (for example Brock, 2001; Brown, Pancer, et al., 2007; Livingstone, 2006; Meinhard et al., 2006; Metz & Youniss, 2003, 2005; OCVI, 2006a, 2006b). The concern has been whether making “volunteering” mandatory discourages youth from future volunteering. The researchers question whether it is in fact possible to mandate volunteering when the essence of being a volunteer is that one freely gives of one’s time and skills.
This study supported several studies that have found that the mandatory nature of a program does not seem to negate the positive outcomes of the experience (Brown, Pancer, et al., 2007; Henderson et al., 2007; Metz & Youniss, 2003, 2005; Meinhard et al., 2006). At least one representative of each of the stakeholder groups raised the point that it seemed incongruous to mandate "volunteering," but they still thought the program was worthwhile despite that. This study found, as Brown, Pancer, et al., Henderson et al., and Padanyi et al. (2003) found, that students reported that this program had them or their friends "volunteer" where they might not otherwise have done or had them "volunteer" more hours than they might have. The parents in this study all had students who had gone beyond their 40 hours of service, although one of the boys had done so only because a group he belonged to was involved in volunteer activities.

Several stakeholders in this study wondered if the students would have volunteered anyway if this program had not been in place. This question was in the context of whether the mandatory program was of benefit to students in that the students would have had the experience of volunteering regardless. For many of the stakeholders, volunteering appeared to be a core family value. Ken, a principal, mentioned that students had always volunteered in some form or another through school-related activities even before it became mandatory, and he wondered to what extent the program had added to that. Peter, a guidance counselor, noted:

I think that the students that would volunteer anyway are going to volunteer. They're going to do a great job; but I believe that if it weren't for this program as a graduation requirement, you would have 90% of the student body on the outside
looking in, or not even looking at all....You would have a massive amount of
students, although they have that inherent good in them, without this program it
wouldn’t flick the switch in them to contribute in that way to society.

Brown, Pancer, et al. (2007) found that 20% of the students in their study would
not have volunteered but for the mandatory requirement, meaning that 80% would
have been inclined to volunteer of their own accord. The authors acknowledge that
their participants were university-bound students and therefore may have had more
reason to volunteer as a way of improving their chances of gaining acceptance into
university programs. The data from this study suggest that even if students would
have volunteered, this mandatory program had them contribute more hours than they
would otherwise have done, and for some of the stakeholders or their children, this
program served as a catalyst for involvement in community service.

Ann, a parent in this study, summed up her somewhat ambivalent feelings about
this mandatory “volunteering” program by saying:

I really like the program, but it really goes back to whether your child would have
done this anyway. I think it is a good learning program, so I think it does belong
in the education system. I had a child who was willing to do it and had the time to
do it, but I was thinking about the whole point of volunteerism is to volunteer.
Like to connect it to something that is required, I think there would be people who
would argue that that’s not really the idea. But again, it’s like what comes first--
the chicken or the egg? If you don’t put that idea in their head, would they come
up with it? Just like we’re teaching all the other subjects, I think this is a really
good learning experience. I’m all for it, but I’m not sure if everyone thinks there
should be that requirement. I don’t think it’s an overabundant amount of hours. When you work it out, it’s 10 hours a school year. If they were like having to do hundreds of hours, I’d probably have an issue with it. (Ann, 2007)

As with Ann’s comment about the number of hours, in Brown, Pancer, et al.’s (2007) study, students sometimes commented that the 40-hour requirement wasn’t onerous and that the program should require more hours. Every participant in this study mentioned the same thing. Meinhard et al. (2006) had stated that the number of hours required might be onerous for some in view of other outside commitments or family circumstances, but this was not found to be true for the stakeholders in this study. In fact, both students found it easy to find service placements and found the time to complete more than their required hours. There was also a tendency for students to complete their hours by the end of grade 10, which indicated that they had enough time to do the hours within 2 years of high school. Although this program requires only 40 hours, the data in this study suggest that students often go well beyond that number of hours, which could be seen to be an indicator of the success of this service experience as well as a sign of the motivation of the students involved.

**Structure**

One of the most often mentioned stakeholder critiques of this mandatory program is that the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training has left it too unstructured, with too much room for individual board and school interpretation, leading to a lack of consistency, differences in understanding, and gaps (Allmendinger, 2006; Brown, Meinhard, et al., 2007; Meinhard et al., 2006; OCVI, 2006a). It also appears that there
is minimal documentation on this program, which accentuates the potential for different interpretations among school boards and among schools.

The Ontario Ministry of Education and Training outlined the objectives for the program, and some of the stakeholder responsibilities, in both the official document that outlines secondary school graduation requirements and in Memorandum 124a (1999a, 1999b). In accordance with these guidelines, school boards have further defined eligible and ineligible activities, parental responsibilities, and how the hours will be documented. Allmendinger (2006) surveyed 10 boards in Ontario and found that not one of them fully complied with the document requirements in the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training’s (1999b) outline. She also found vast differences in implementation between school boards and between schools, as did Brown, Meinhard, et al. (2007).

Based on a letter from a representative of the Ontario Ministry of Education, it seems that the Ministry values the lack of structure, in that it states that the “Ministry of Education’s guidelines provide for considerable flexibility for students to meet this diploma requirement in a variety of settings” (personal correspondence from Kirsten Parker, Director of Student Success/Learning to 18 Implementation, February 16, 2007). While the flexibility allows for students having a wide range of choice, it has been a consistent recommendation in Ontario studies that the program would benefit from more structure (Brown, Pancer, et al., 2007; Livingstone, 2006; Meinhard et al., 2006; OCVI, 2006a) to create greater consistency. In this study, structural issues were mentioned by principals, guidance counsellors, and community organizations as challenges in the program. Students did not comment on structural issues, but it
seemed clear from the students in this study that they found service placements that satisfied the requirements of their school.

**Educators**

The data in this study suggest that there are differences in the interpretation of the role of educators in administering this program. The lack of structure in this program and the minimal official communication are likely contributing to these discrepancies. A secondary student changing from one high school to another encounters different interpretations on the fulfillment of service hours. Peter, a guidance counselor, mentioned how this causes confusion and a sense that there are different standards among schools.

Some of the misunderstanding of the role of educators could date back to the initial implementation of the program by the Ontario Ministry of and Education and Training, when educators were told by the Ministry representative that it was to be "self-directed," with students taking responsibility for this part of their high school education (McLeod & Nicolson, 1998). Ian McKercher, a teacher, is quoted as saying "teachers are not supposed to--and the word the government uses is--interfere....We’re not intended to offer direction and the ministry doesn’t want this to be a cost item" (McLeod & Nicolson, p. 1). Yet the Ministry guidelines put much of the onus for the administration of the program onto local school boards and school principals (Ontario Ministry of Education & Training, 1999a, 1999b), who then tend to delegate the responsibility to the guidance department. In essence, based on the educator feedback in this study, schools have become more involved in this program than was perhaps first envisaged, with some schools being more actively involved
than others. This misunderstanding regarding roles and responsibilities has led to some guidance counsellors, such as Pam in this study, feeling that it is not up to them to determine if a placement is valid. Her principal does not get involved with this program, although the Ontario Ministry has stated that principals have the final say on what placements are eligible (Ontario Ministry of Education & Training, 1999a).

The schools profiled in this study appear to have taken the interpretation that service placements must take place in a nonprofit environment. While it appears that the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1999a, 1999b) does allow placements in a for-profit business, the Ministry did state that where there was doubt of the eligibility of a placement it is up to the school principal to make that decision. According to the Ontario Secondary School, Grade 9-12 Program and Diploma Requirements (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1999a, p. 9), “community involvement activities may take place in a variety of settings, including businesses, not-for-profit organizations, public sector institutions (including hospitals), and informal settings.” By including businesses, the Ministry has allowed the option of students completing their hours in a for-profit environment, although later in the outline it is stated that these hours may not be paid hours or be hours that would replace the work of a paid employee.

In Memorandum 124a (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1999b), this outline is further divided into general categories of eligible and ineligible activities, although it is stated that it is up to the individual school boards to develop their own list of “approved activities.” In cases where the student would like to engage in an activity that is not listed, it is stated that the principal would determine whether that activity is
acceptable. In the Memorandum, businesses are mentioned only where it is prohibited that students perform certain activities, such as conduct banking activities or handle jewellery, or where they may not be in those environments under a certain age, for example the student may not be in a factory setting under the age of 15. When I read the community involvement program outline on a local board’s website, I noticed that the board had used the Ontario Ministry’s (1999b) wording to explain the community service program and eligible and ineligible activities. There were a few additions to the list of eligible activities, namely that the activity could not provide direct financial benefit to not only the student but also their immediate family. In addition the outline stated that club membership (in a school or community club) would not be eligible, nor would a community activity that would take place at the school during school hours.

Meinhard et al. (2006) reported that educators are concerned about students completing their hours in a for-profit environment as it is “contrary to the spirit of the requirement” (p. 16), and the educators in this study appear to have taken the same approach. Brown, Meinhard, et al. (2007, p. 5) found that “all schools will accept not-for-profit agency placements, but there is less consensus on placements at for-profit organizations and on placements involving informal helping.”

School counsellors are often in a position where they have to defend the community involvement process and how it works. As mentioned in Chapter Four, counsellors sometimes find themselves in a conflict position with parents regarding eligibility of completed service activities. Parents are often unclear on what constitutes an eligible service placement. A major source of this disagreement has
been where students have gained hours through working in their parent’s business (as stated by Paul and Pam, 2007) or where students are working for a company that is clearly a for-profit business, such as a bank (mentioned by Ken, 2007) or a hairdressing salon (mentioned by Pam, 2007). It appears that the Ontario Ministry and boards’ guidelines are not clear enough.

I was surprised to read that the Ministry had allowed for-profit businesses as eligible placements, in that it seems puzzling as to how this would not be replacing the work of a paid worker in some sense as well as how it would be in keeping with the broader objectives of the program. As a matter of clarity and more effective communication, it would be useful for the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training or local boards to define better whether placements in for-profit businesses are acceptable and therefore remove a point of potential conflict or misunderstanding from this program.

Parents

According to the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1999a) outline, parents were envisaged to be a major part of the community involvement process. “Students, in collaboration with their parents, will decide how they will complete the community involvement requirement” (p. 9). Yet the parents in this study acknowledged that they don’t know much about this program or its requirements.

In the same document (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1999a), the Ministry outlines the responsibility of the local school boards, which includes preparing a document for parents on the program requirement and the parent’s role and responsibility. As a parent I don’t remember ever receiving such a document, and
neither did any of the parents in this study although it is possible that it came with other school documents and was missed. In the Ontario Ministry outline there is also mention of the parents signing the form acknowledging the service placement. As seems clear from this study, and is supported by the findings of Allmendinger’s (2006) study, individual boards have different requirements for how service hours are to be recorded, and this leads to confusion on the part of students and parents as to what paperwork is required. Some boards have forms, others do not, for example.

I retrieved our local school board’s document on the community involvement program on-line. I hadn’t realized it was there until I thought to do a search. I found that it outlines the nature of the parents’ responsibility. It suggests that parents should investigate the location, age appropriateness of the placement, health and safety issues, need for a police check, and the nature of the workforce in the proposed placement. While it seems fair that the boards cannot investigate every placement opportunity, they need to better communicate this responsibility to parents who might not otherwise be aware or have thought of all the factors for consideration. Schools may assume that parents are fulfilling their role as outlined in the documents, but parents aren’t necessarily aware of, or perhaps committed to, their role. Students, in taking care of finding their own placements, especially those who do so without school assistance, may be left in a vulnerable position as a result.

As a parent reflecting on her daughters’ experiences with this program, Liz commented:

Sometimes I was a little concerned, not in terms of safety risk but in terms of responsibility risk. I think at times they were a little over their head and maybe
didn’t have that supervision. In some cases they were out in the public, and I’m thinking “nobody is checking on this.” It’s not that you’d want someone right over the shoulder, but I think some people when they provided that volunteer opportunity I think didn’t realize that the kids may not have that full skill set and....sometimes I think the private sector and sometimes the public sector were thinking more of the individual as an employee versus a volunteer. And they’re two different beasts. I mean that volunteer could certainly be an employee, but there’s just a little spin there that you just maybe need more guidance. I think they made some assumptions that the child or the student had more skills. (Liz, 2007)

Until my daughter was in grade 12, I don’t remember the 40-hour program ever being discussed at a parent meeting that I attended, although it is possible that it was discussed at a meeting that I did not attend. In grade 12, the program was mentioned, but only in the sense that it was a requirement that had to be filled if your child wanted to graduate. The head of guidance, when reviewing the graduation requirements, emphasized that some students don’t graduate due to not having completed this requirement and that forms should be in by mid-October, but that was it. It seems unfortunate that this program can become merely a requirement that is emphasized as something that might prevent your child from graduating. Of course, by grade 12, the guidance counsellors are doing housekeeping, and it is possibly too late for the program to be much more; however, schools are sometimes missing the opportunity to make the most of this program by introducing it to parents of grade 9
students in a way that would encourage people (parents and students) to see potential and opportunity within this graduation requirement.

Although there is still room for improvement in how many schools administer and promote this program, Liz, a parent and community organization representative, felt that the administration of the program by schools and the commitment to it by parents and students has evolved over the 8 years.

I think initially it was “let’s just do the 40 hours,” and I think the school didn’t have a good definition of what a volunteer was and I don’t think families had a good idea of what a volunteer was, and I think …collectively, it’s become a bit more entrenched as a requirement in the curriculum. I think because the teachers are talking and able to offer opportunities. The first couple of years I’m sure like a lot of people were pulling their hair out, saying “well, where do I go to volunteer?” and people were saying “we’ve never used volunteers” or “we don’t want volunteers.” (Liz, 2007)

Community Organizations

The community organization representatives in this study did not receive information from the schools or the Ministry of Education and Training regarding the requirements of this program or how to make it effective. There also appears to be very little communication between community agencies and schools regarding this program. Based on the community agencies profiled in this study, in the absence of communication and direction, agencies appear to be developing their own structure for this program. The agencies’ structure has involved time, effort, and financial resources on their part.
It appears that many students complete their service hours by the end of grade 10 (Allmendinger, 2006; Livingstone, 2006; OCVI, 2006a), which would make many of them too young for a formal job, and they are therefore even more in need of supervision and training. The two community organizations included in this study included formal or informal training, supervision and feedback, in their structure, although these are not requirements of the community involvement program and have been developed on the initiative of the organizations themselves.

**Stakeholder Gains**

From this study and other Ontario studies (Brown, Pancer, et al., 2007; Henderson et al., 2007; T. Taylor and Pancer, 2007) it would appear that students are gaining from their community involvement experiences. Most of the stakeholders in this study mentioned that the service placements took students out of their comfort zones by placing them in unfamiliar surroundings, working with people they wouldn’t otherwise interact with, and by youth being called upon to develop new skills. They listed student growth in the areas of leadership, communication, time management, and self-confidence. Parents and students noted that these experiences had acted somewhat as a first job experience, and had provided feedback on potential career options for the future. The interviews did not explore how the stakeholders felt that these areas had been enhanced by involvement in the community, but all but one stakeholder noted that gains in these areas had taken place and attributed them in part to this program. These gains are very much in keeping with gains found in other studies on volunteer involvement (Kuperminc et al., 2001; Pancer & Pratt, 1999; T. Taylor & Pancer, 2007). The noted research found that the quality of the volunteer
experience impacts the longevity of volunteering as well as feelings of satisfaction, belonging, competency, identity, caring, and understanding. T. Taylor and Pancer also found that volunteer experiences gave participants a better idea of career possibilities. These studies found that it is not just exposure to volunteering that causes positive outcomes but rather that the quality of the experience is essential.

All of the stakeholder groups in this study noted that this program was beneficial to students. In addition it appears to be potentially beneficial to community agencies and, based on comments made by Roy, a school principal, and Peter, a guidance teacher, it benefits the schools too. Liz commented that the community organization for which she works had benefited from having students do their service placements there. She mentioned immediate and more long-term benefits. She said:

It’s been 8 years now. It’s interesting to see the ones that have volunteered with us in some of our programs that come now and apply for a job; the base level of knowledge has gone up. They’ve really got a leg up in terms of our operation and doing this. It’s almost like it’s been a really good mentoring, and now they come in. So their level is up here [shows high level with hand] compared with that kid who came in 8 years ago. I think that it is a win:win on both the parents’ side and the students’, and also the agencies’. (Liz, 2007)

In light of the fact that this study and others have shown that community involvement results in very significant outcomes for the students and other stakeholders, it raises the question of why this mandatory program has received so little attention from the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training since its
implementation. This program appears to be a source of learning in addition to potentially introducing students to community involvement.

**Limiting Factors**

Another theme consistently raised by the stakeholders in this study was that there are known elements that detract from this program. These elements have been mentioned in other Ontario research (Allmendinger, 2006; Brown, Pancer, et al., 2007; Meinhard et al. 2006; OCVI, 2006a, 2006b), but they continue to exist due to the current design or implementation of the community involvement program. The stakeholder perspectives on factors that detract from this program were isolated in Chapter Four. Most often mentioned was the fact that some students cheat by fabricating their service placements. As schools generally do not follow up with community agencies, it seems like most students who cheat get away with it, whichundermines the program and upsets students, educators, and parents who are committed to the program. All of the educators in this study commented that they do not routinely follow up to check the validity of paperwork submitted as a record of service hours, primarily due to time restraints. Ken, a principal, and Peter, a guidance counselor, mentioned following up where they were suspicious or felt that the service placement had not filled the requirements of the program. Pam commented that she rarely questions the nature of service placements, even if she believes that they are not valid, as she understands this to be the parents’ responsibility. It is not clear if the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training intended that follow-up be done, or by whom. School boards need to find consistent ways to curb cheating, without it being an onerous administrative burden for schools.
There have been many recommendations in the literature to deal with the
detracting factors. The OCVI (2006a) report has the most comprehensive list of these
recommendations, from the perspective of the same stakeholder groups that were
included in this study. The recommendations include:

- more consistent administration
- clearer communication among all stakeholders
- more parent education on the program
- more resources for parents and students
- presenting the program in a more positive light
- linking the program to curriculum
- more school involvement
- increased hours
- incentives for those who exceed their mandatory hours
- cancellation of the mandatory requirement
- transportation assistance
- preparation of the students for volunteering

This study confirmed the need for many of the same changes. If these
recommendations, and those embedded in the reports of Allmendinger (2006),
(2007), Meinhard et al. (2006), and T. Taylor and Pancer (2007) were adopted, they
would address the major shortcomings of the current community involvement
program, as well as enhance the effectiveness of the program.
In addition to the recommendations listed above, there are two areas that could potentially be detracting from the gains of this program that seem to deserve attention from educators.

**Gender Differences**

As part of this study, a few of the stakeholders commented on the differences between how boys and girls respond to the community involvement program. Pam, a guidance counselor, mentioned that boys tend to leave their service hours to the end of high school, which she attributed to procrastination or a lack of interest in volunteering. She also mentioned that boys needed to be “badgered” in order to get their hours done. While this study did not attempt to investigate the potential differences between how boys and girls approach this program, the fact that there may be differences between how the two genders approach and benefit from the program would be worthy of further study. It is possible that the current design of the community involvement program is better suited to girls than it is to boys. Kuperminc et al. and Allen (2001) and Metz and Youniss (2005) found in their research that adolescent girls are more likely than boys to volunteer. Miller (1994) found that girls are more predisposed to a mandatory community service requirement than are boys. Sutherland, Doerkson, Hanslip, Roberts and Stewart et al. (2006, p. 15) noted that “females had more social awareness, a stronger sense of duty to the community, and greater perceived ability to perform volunteer duties than did their male counterparts.” There appears to be support for the fact that boys may need more school intervention or support than do girls or that the program needs to be tailored in some ways to encourage boys to become more involved as volunteers, particularly if
one of the aims of the program is to encourage future civic involvement. A potential gender difference is significant if it affects the outcomes of this program.

*Loading the hours upfront*

It has been well documented in Canadian studies (such as Allmendinger, 2006; Livingstone, 2006; OCVI, 2006a) that students tend to complete their service hours in the first 2 years of high school. Both of the guidance counsellors in this study mentioned that they encourage students to finish their hours by the end of grade 10, citing the reason that it will then be out of the way before the students are old enough to gain part-time employment. Finishing the hours early also allows 2 more years of high school in which students could continue volunteering, which would be an advantage. However, there is a potential downside to completing the hours at a younger age in that research has found that there is a difference in cognitive development between lower and upper grades and that critical thinking skills develop with maturity (Miller, 1994). In addition, older students are more concerned with social issues (Metz et al., 2003) and therefore would potentially learn more from the community involvement process. By encouraging students to finish their hours early, it is possible that they are missing out on some of the potential gains from community involvement. Further studies comparing the experiences and gains of younger and older students involved in community service would be illuminating.

**Recommendations**

The Ontario mandatory community involvement program is a valuable addition to the secondary school education system. It has been found by researchers (including Brown, Pancer et. al, 2007; Henderson et al., 2007; Meinhard et. al, 2006; OCVI,
to be a meaningful program that enhances student skills as well as introducing them to volunteering. However, the program would benefit from being strengthened. By adding more structure, finding ways to increase consistency between schools and between boards, building partnerships between the stakeholders, and incorporating stakeholder recommendations, the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training could make an already effective program that much more effective. The literature that is currently available on the Ontario community involvement program contains much overlap; researchers are finding similar strengths and weaknesses in the current program. It would be a loss to the education system if this program is discontinued at some point, or is not examined or modified by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training.

In the Fall of 2006, Ontario’s Premier, Dalton McGuinty, announced a $2 million investment to “support character development as an integral part of learning” (noted in Announcement from the Office of the Premier of Ontario, February 5, 2007), and the following year students, educators, and parents were invited to take part in province-wide forums on the topic. In the February 5, 2007 announcement, Ontario’s Minister of Education was quoted as saying, “Character education is about treating students as citizens who can make a difference...by doing this, we can create a school environment where civic responsibility and academic achievement thrive” (Kathleen Wynne). In the same announcement, Dalton McGuinty is quoted as saying “character education can’t be taught in a single lesson or learned overnight....It needs to be lived out, developed through our daily actions, observed in other people and deepened
through discussion and dialogue.” It seems to me that an enhanced community involvement program would be an ideal format for character education.

A full discussion of character education, its aims, and merits is beyond the scope of this thesis. As a brief overview, character education can be described as being “dedicated to developing young people of good character who become responsible and caring citizens” (Schwartz, 2006, p. 3) It is often seen to be tied in with moral education (Bolotin Joseph & Efron, 2005). Bolotin Joseph and Efron write that educators in moral worlds believe that they must create a process through which young people can learn to recognize values that represent prosocial behaviours, engage in actions that bring about a better life for others, and appreciate ethical and compassionate conduct. (p. 525)

According to the Josephson Institute of Ethics, there are six pillars of character, namely “trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship” (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2007). Character education and community service appear to have a lot in common in terms of underlying values and aims. I believe that there is a format to achieve both the aims of character education and the aims of the community involvement program. That format could involve the transformation of the current community involvement program into a service-learning program. The transformation would be a means to build on what we have making it sustainable, and making it more effective.

Service-Learning

The value of service-learning was discussed in the review of the literature in Chapter Two. Service-learning is often a curriculum-based process that combines
service to the community with learning. It can be a mandatory or optional course. A service-learning format would address many of the limitations of the current community involvement program in that it would be a structured course, led by a teacher, and would incorporate the elements of an academic course as well as having a community service focus. The service placement becomes the experiential format for the learning to take place: a means to cover the instructional content (Billig, 2007). Within the classroom setting students would have time to reflect, discuss, and absorb what they have seen and done, and what it means to them. Studies have shown that for service-learning to be most effective it needs to be integrated into curriculum, involve opportunities to reflect on experiences, give youth a voice or a say in what happens, build a respect for diversity, be meaningful, involve reciprocal partnerships with community agencies, last at least a semester or a minimum of 70 hours, and involve monitoring of the process and student progress (Billig).

Furco (2007) writes that “in many ways, service-learning engages the whole child and creates the kinds of learning environments and conditions that facilitate and support students’ academic achievement and overall school success” (p. 9). According to Furco, service-learning programs have the capability of offering an academic curriculum in a way that works for more students; it is authentic learning that potentially turns indifferent students back to learning. He notes that it can also be academically challenging in that it can have students use higher order thinking to work with complex problems. Furco lists several studies that show that the more experiential approach to teaching that is used in service-learning courses results in higher student engagement in learning. (Furco).
Service-learning also has the potential to appeal to different learning styles, some of which may not be well served within a traditional classroom environment. Howard Gardner (1983) pioneered work on learning that suggests that we learn differently according to our style of learning. He refers to these ways of learning as multiple intelligences. Neal and Holland (2005) outline how service-learning courses can support Howard Gardner’s work on multiple intelligences and in the process impact the effectiveness of student learning. They state that:

Service-learning creates a rich context for learning, being multidisciplinary; capable of incorporating multiple intelligences, learning styles, opportunities for reflection and youth voice; and involving more people who function as “teachers” offering constructive feedback. (p. 29)

Service-learning is not the “cure-all,” and academic studies on the topic have found mixed results in terms of its effectiveness (Billig, 2000; Furco, 2007). However, there is much literature on its positive effect on student achievement, decreasing at-risk behaviour, enhancing students’ sense of identity, increasing civic engagement, increasing social responsibility and enhancing youth awareness and appreciation of social issues (Billig; Furco; Klute & Billig, 2002; Metz & Youniss, 2005; Scales et al, 2000; Youniss et al., 1999).

Service-learning programs continue to grow in popularity in the United States (Weah, 2007). Weah attributes this growth to an increased public awareness of service-learning and its value. It is also perhaps due to federal funding being available for such programs, a national education focus, and possibly due to endorsement by high profile people such as George Bush and Bill Clinton. For example, according to
the Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation for National and Community Service, $828.6 million is the 2008 budget amount that has been requested from George Bush's administration to cover the work of national service foundations such as AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve America: both organizations that involve college and high school students in service-learning projects (E-mail announcement from David Eisner, February 5, 2007).

Canada, from what I have found, seems far behind on this. We lack funding and a national focus on service-learning. In fact, when I mentioned the term "service-learning" to school principals they had not heard of it before. Thanks to funding from a family foundation, there are now service-learning programs happening at 10 Canadian universities (National Community Service-Learning Program, 2007), but so far service-learning programs do not appear to be happening at the secondary school level in public education (Brown, Meinhard, et al., 2007). In fact, the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training has specifically stated that community involvement take place outside of school hours, which in effect has eliminated any possibility of having a service-learning program in place (Brown, Meinhard, et al.). In effect the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training has therefore eliminated many of the very factors that studies show make service-learning effective.

Furco (2007) writes that

it appears that when done well, service-learning is a powerful strategy for preparing students for academic success, school engagement, and global leadership. By focusing on the whole child, incorporating a pedagogy of engagement, and providing opportunities for students to expand their horizons,
service-learning offers a way to help students become more engaged in learning and to see the relevance of what they are learning to their lives outside of school. (p. 11)

If the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training revamped the community involvement program into a service-learning course, I believe that they would build on the benefits of the current community involvement program, and in the new format they would have a viable process for incorporating character education. It seems to me that character would be built through the experience of service.

**Implications for Theory**

As mentioned in Chapter One, community involvement and service-learning ideals and foundations can be traced back to the work of several key theorists. For the purpose of this thesis, 2 of these people stand out as being particularly significant; John Dewey and Erik Erikson.

John Dewey’s philosophy of education incorporated a view of learning that went beyond the classroom walls. He felt that experience and experiential learning were authentic methods of learning that would resonate with youth (Dewey, 1916/2005). He also wrote of being of service to others as a key component of education. The community involvement program could be seen as working within Dewey’s vision of education, through introducing youth to ways that they can give back to their community and thereby become contributing members of society.

Students in Ontario are engaging in community involvement placements at a time when they are adolescents and, according to Erikson (1968), during adolescence youth are dealing with a potential identity crisis. This is a time when youth can be
preoccupied with what others think of them, as compared with who they think they are (Erikson). At the early part of this stage, Erikson felt that youth were looking to trust themselves and others and looking to find others in whom they can have faith and whom they should follow. It is also a time when adolescents are trying to find their way through many choices in society and are deciding what activities they will engage in and what occupations they will pursue. (Erikson) Adolescents can potentially experience hopelessness and identity confusion. Several studies, such as that of Pancer and Pratt (1999), Youniss et al. (1997), and Youniss et al. (1999), have made the link between volunteering or service-learning opportunities and identity development. Youniss et al. (1999) write that

youth learn about society and the various orientations they may take toward it. They may seek to support, reject, or revise the traditions they find. But in order for identity to develop, youth need to have social substance on which to reflect and build, (p. 250)

Service-learning and community involvement placements give youth the opportunity to mix with people they might not ordinarily meet, to work with adults in a way that they might not otherwise have done, and to view a world that takes them beyond their own family and school environment and perhaps causes them to evaluate or even question formerly held views. According to Youniss et al. (1999), “youth benefit from meaningful exposure to adult society because it gives them the opportunity to reflect on its ideological traditions as they construct a future with which they can identify” (p. 251). This process of constructing their future, and a
sense of their identity within it, is crucial in the pathway to adulthood (Erikson, 1968).

My Personal Journey

As I conclude this study I am left thinking about what I have gained from my journey. I have realized several things about myself at the same time as I have learnt more about the community involvement program and its effect. I have come to the realization that a key part of my identity and fulfillment has come from my involvement in volunteer causes. Volunteering has been an integral part of my life, so much so that until now I did not really think about how much it has affected me. I have had experiences that I would not otherwise have had, and my skills and who I am as a person have been enhanced as a result. As a volunteer I have had the opportunity to start and administer a nonprofit organization, I have sat on boards of directors, and I have raised money for several good causes, all of which have assisted me in developing as a person. I have learned much from those who I have volunteered with and those whom I have served. I have had the intense satisfaction of seeing that I can make a difference to others, and feel good knowing that their lives are richer as a result. I have realized that one can make an impact if one is committed and resourceful. It is my hope that my daughters and, by extension, all students will have rich, character-shaping experiences while being involved in their communities.

Polls suggest that church attendance is decreasing (Robinson, 2007) and volunteer levels are falling (Brock, 2001). According to Hall et al. (2006), 25% of volunteers account for 77% of volunteer hours, meaning that relatively few people are responsible for most of the volunteering in Canada. Hall et al. note that the top
volunteers tend to be those who are "religiously active" or have university degrees (p. 35). With the noted changes in society, school programs such as the community involvement program become even more important as a way to introduce youth to volunteering, and to encourage them to become engaged in society.

I am left with several questions as I reflect on this study. I wonder if the community involvement program is having an impact on youth civic involvement beyond volunteering. I’m wondering if we do know enough about what inspires youth to become lifelong volunteers, and how volunteering can be made more inviting to youth. I’m also wondering what causes some youth to become “super volunteers,” where they go above and beyond others in terms of how much they volunteer and what they accomplish.

Overall I realize that I have a deep interest in service, and what we as citizens can contribute to our communities, our countries and globally.

**Conclusion**

Pam, a secondary school guidance counselor and parent, summed up her opinion of the Ontario community involvement program in this way:

I think the spirit of it is excellent, and maybe just as a community, as a province, as a world that we have to instill that we are our brothers’ and sisters’ keeper and we have to look after one another, we have to help as much as we can in our community. I just think there are too many things to make it a component of the diploma. Yes, there’s learning, there’s education in it, and I can see maybe that’s the connection to the diploma, however there’s [sic] too many loopholes. (Pam, 2007)
On reflection, I agree with Pam’s first point but disagree with Pam’s overall view, although I can certainly see that the administration and structure of the current community involvement program need work. I do think that community service is a vital part of a secondary school, and elementary and postsecondary, education. I believe that through community service, youth have the possibility of learning about things that they would not otherwise have covered in the classroom. They also have the opportunity to give to others and make an impact on their community, their country, and perhaps the world.

My children, now aged 17 and 19, went to an elementary school where service in the community was very much part of the school culture. I was struck, in contrast, by how little was made of the 40 hours of community service in the public high school attended by one of them. Not that the high school wasn’t involved in good work. There were concerts to raise funds for good causes, the “30 Hour Famine,” involvement in local fundraisers such as those for the Canadian Cancer Society, but the 40 hour program wasn’t highlighted in any visible way. These events seem to run parallel to the 40-hour program. What does this suggest? Maybe nothing. It could be that these events are run primarily by the students and don’t involve the administration that the 40-hour program requires. Or maybe the program isn’t seen by some schools to have substance? Maybe because they don’t monitor the results they don’t realize what students are gaining from it? Maybe it’s a “feel good” type program that is suspected to do some good, and hopefully no bad, and is left to basically run itself, as long as the necessary documents are submitted to the guidance...
office before completion of grade 12. I wonder if many educators are overlooking this program in terms of its learning and social potential.

It appears that to date there has been minimal comparison of the nature of community service programs in school boards across Canada, and Brown, Meinhard, et al.’s (2007) research is positioned as a first attempt in doing so. Brown, Meinhard, et al. note that each Canadian province and territory oversees its own education system, and this partly explains the lack of coordinated knowledge, and results in variations from province to province. They found that almost all of the provinces and territories have service programs of some sort, and that 6 of the 13 governments have introduced community service as a requirement for graduation. Brown, Meinhard, et al. comment that Ministries of Education in general appear to have done little to invest in these programs to maximize their potential. Based on the research available on volunteering and community service, as well as service-learning, I hope that Ministries of Education will start to see the value of these programs, both as a learning tool and a way to effectively foster civic development in youth. There is an organization called the “Canadian Alliance for Community Service Learning” (for further information go to www.communityservicelearning.ca/en/) which is currently focused at the university level. It could potentially co-ordinate a national focus for service-learning in the schools; working with the provinces and territories to create a consistent vision across Canada. The Ontario Ministry of Education and Training could be at the forefront of the new focus.

I have been struck by the apparent lack of research on the community involvement program by scholars in Ontario education faculties. There appears to be
very little research on this program and its outcomes, and that which has been done has mostly been conducted by researchers in departments such as policy studies. This contrasts to the United States, where the research on service-learning is plentiful, and graduates in education faculties appear to be heavily invested in studying factors that relate to service-learning and related topics. For example, a recent publication of abstracts from masters’ and doctoral dissertations on service-learning and related areas states that 75% of the publications are from the field of education (Smith & Martin, 2007, p. 9). Community involvement and service-learning in Canada are areas that are rich for further study.

Service-learning has been a force in education in the United States for over 20 years. Service-learning has also been implemented in other countries, including Botswana, Nigeria, Columbia, Trinidad and Tobago, China, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Cuba (Brown, Meinhard, et al., 2007). I am puzzled as to why it is still so relatively unknown in Canada. Other than budgetary concerns, I wonder why the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training hasn’t followed the lead of countries such as the United States in implementing this powerful process. I noticed that service-learning has been suggested as being complementary to character education by the people hired to present forums on character education on behalf of the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (Berkowitz, 2006; Schwartz, 2006). It has also been recommended as a logical extension of the community involvement program by Brown, Meinhard, et al. (2007).

After President Bill Clinton left the White House he established the Clinton Foundation in order to use his “time, experience and contacts to help in saving lives,
solving problems, and empowering more people to achieve their goals.” (Clinton, 2007, p. 5) His recently published book on giving, which focuses on how everyone can give of their time and/or money, possessions, or skills to help others, was written to encourage people to give and thereby change the world. His view is that:

The modern world, for all its blessings, is unequal, unstable, and unsustainable. And so the great mission of the early twenty-first century is to move our neighborhoods, our nation, and the world toward integrated communities of shared opportunities, shared responsibilities, and a shared sense of genuine belonging, based on the essence of every successful community: that our common humanity is more important than our interesting differences. (p. 4)

I believe that our community involvement program, with significant enhancement, is a possible vehicle to propel Ontario youth into volunteering and civic engagement, hopefully for life. I believe that young people are well disposed to involvement in good causes. They have the idealism, the passion, and enthusiasm to make a real difference. It is also a time of identity development, and service opportunities could have a positive impact on their identity and their character. I think again of Craig Keilburger, as an extreme example. At the age of 12 Craig became an activist devoted to ending child labor. Craig’s organization has reportedly involved over 100,000 youth in more than 35 countries (Jacobs, 2005). It is an organization which engages children in helping children, with youth leadership and a global focus being key. Children can indeed change the world.

The Community Involvement Program is a program that is currently motivating students to go beyond what they might otherwise do. The results are having a positive
impact on the students and their communities, and I’m left wondering how much more could be achieved if this program were to be enhanced by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training. With refinement, and by incorporating the recommendations made by these stakeholders and those represented in other Ontario research, this program could become a very powerful means of both learning and serving, of shaping character, and a means of engaging students in making a difference to our communities and our world.
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Appendix A

The Service-Learning Cycle

Service-learning is best thought of as a cycle, where each step in the process leads to the next. As the diagram of the Service-Learning Cycle illustrates, the process doesn't end with the completion of the service activity. A project may be completed, but service-learning is a transformational process, where young people, practitioners, and communities continue to grow.

Every part of the cycle is rich with learning and growth opportunities, many of them happening as young people are guided through the process of identifying, planning, and carrying out service activities. It's important for practitioners to recognize the learning potential in each phase of the process and get students reflecting so that real learning takes place.

With each step in a service-learning project, discussing three deceptively simple questions with the participants helps everyone understand what they've accomplished, learned, and need to do next:

What
What has happened? Take stock of what participants did, saw, and felt. Get their initial observations of what has happened.

So What?
What's the importance of all this? Discuss what participants are thinking and feeling about the experience. Ask them what they've learned and how things have changed.

Now What?
What should we do next? It's time to decide how best to channel this new understanding into continued action and transformation.

See next page for a detailed explanation of the cycle.

Service-Learning Cycle (continued)

Pre-Service

Reflection
Students get the most out of the service experience when they carefully examine their prior knowledge of and opinions on issues raised by the project.

Student & Community Ownership
The project belongs to the participants. Young people and community members should work together to identify community needs, plan service activities, and evaluate the impact of the project.

Identifying a Genuine Need
A “genuine need” is one that’s important to the young people and the community. To identify the need, young people must recognize relevant issues, assess resources, and seek out the thoughts and concerns of those being served.

Establishing Learning Objectives
Clear learning objectives distinguish service-learning from community service. When students make the connections between their service activities and studies, it deepens their understanding of the curricular material, how it’s used, and why it’s important.

Planning & Preparation
No project succeeds without careful planning and preparation, and service-learning projects are no exception. Be sure to assess needs, collect all relevant information, engage in the necessary training, build vital partnerships, and develop an action plan.

During Service

Reflection
This is a chance to discover where young people are in the learning process, and give them a chance to voice concerns and share feelings.

Meaningful Service Experience
By investing themselves fully in service activities that address genuine community needs, young people find meaning in the project and grow to understand its value.

Observation
To truly understand the impact of the service, young people should take time to observe the impact of the project on different participants. This process may involve exchanging ideas with peers and community partners, looking at the implications of cultural and diversity issues, or viewing the project in civic or political terms.

Analysis
As young people use their observations to recognize the significance of the service experience, they assess their own learning and the impact of the project on the community being served.

Post-Service

Reflection
Young people take time to assess the meaning of the service experience; integrate their new understanding; and propose further action, projects, or enhancements to the current project.

Evaluation & New Understanding
Evaluating their learning and the results of the project allows young people to discover new and different perceptions of themselves and the world around them.

Celebration
All involved should enjoy the fruits of their labor and respect the accomplishments of other participants. This reinforces the positive achievements, sense of accomplishment, and personal growth attained through the service-learning experience.

New Applications
The project may be completed, but participants continue to use their new knowledge and skills to make decisions, solve problems, and grow as caring, contributing members of their communities.
Appendix B

8 Principles of Effective Practice for K-12 Service-Learning

The 8 Principles of Effective Practice for K-12 Service-Learning, which are currently in the process of being refined as the starting point for service-learning standards (Billig, 2007; Weah, 2007), are as follows.

Curriculum Integration: Service-learning is curriculum based. Billig (2007) defines curriculum integration as “using service-learning as an instructional method to help students master content standards” (p. 19). By integrating service-learning into curriculum it becomes a way of learning, as well as service. If conducted well, this form of learning positively affects academic outcomes (Billig).

Ongoing, Cognitively Challenging, Reflection Activities: Research has shown that reflection is a key component in enhancing the outcomes of service-learning. Through reflection before, during and after service activities, students develop higher order thinking skills and absorb the impact of their service experiences at a higher level (Billig, 2007). In addition, if the learning activities in the course are kept at a challenging level, research has found that students are more academically engaged, and acquire a higher level of academic and civic knowledge and skills (Billig, Root & Jesse, 2005a).

Youth Voice: When youth feel that they have a say during the phases of a service-learning project it has been found that higher academic scores and increased civic engagement result (Billig, Root & Jesse, 2005a). Through meaningful participation, youth get involved in decision-making, planning, goal-setting and in helping others (Billig, 2007).
Respect for Diversity: Diversity can involve dealing with people of different races or backgrounds, dealing with the physically or mentally challenged, or dealing with different age groups. Service-learning projects expose youth to some element of diversity, which along with associated teaching on respect and diversity has been shown to result in civic and character outcomes (Billig, Root & Jesse, 2005a). If service-learning opportunities are well planned there is a mutual benefit to students and those being served, which avoids the possible pitfall of reinforcing previously held stereotypes (Billig, 2007).

Meaningful Service: If service opportunities are seen to be meaningful, useful, relevant, and interesting, “young people become both more engaged and acquire more knowledge and skills” (Billig, Root & Jesse, 2005, cited in Billig, 2007, p. 24). In service-learning planning it is emphasized that the service opportunity has to meet a genuine need (National Youth Leadership Council, 1999, Billig, 2007).

Progress and Process-Monitoring: In high quality service-learning projects, the students’ progress as well as the project’s progress are monitored and assessed (Billig, 2007).

Duration: Service-learning research has shown that for projects to have a real impact they need to last for at least a semester or 70 hours (Billig, Root & Jesse, 2005a, 2005b). The 70 hours include preparation, action, reflection, and demonstration of results. Billig (2007) comments that:

Fewer hours simply do not give the students enough time to grapple with difficult issues or to have a deep enough experience to make the learning endure. This is not to say that community service can not or should not be performed in single or
multiple events; rather, it is to point out that if the intended academic, civic or character development outcomes are to be developed through the service-learning process, more time is needed. (p. 26)

Reciprocal Partnerships: Billig (2007) describes reciprocal partnerships as those in which “both sides benefit through the activities, and usually involves having a shared vision, regular two-way communication, interdependent tasks, and common goals” (p. 27). Community partnerships provide an ongoing location for service placements, as well as a commitment of time and resources from their staff.
Appendix C

Interview Questions

Reflections on the mandated 40 hours of community involvement (Students)

Background Information

Name: ____________________________ Male Female

What grade are you in? ____________________________

What school do you attend? ____________________________

How many hours of mandated community involvement have you completed? ________ hours

Had you volunteered before doing your 40 hours of community involvement? Yes No (please circle one)

If yes, approximately how many hours of volunteering had you done? ________ hours

What volunteering had you done?

Do your parents volunteer? Yes No

If yes, describe what volunteering they do and approximately how many hours they spend on volunteering per week:

What is it? (Details on the community involvement activities)

Details of the 40 hours of community involvement

1. What community involvement activities did you do to complete your 40 hours?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization name</th>
<th>What did you do there?</th>
<th>Number of hours</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Please list tasks)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. In what grade (or grades) did you complete the above hours?

_________ hours in Grade 9

_________ hours in Grade 10

_________ hours in Grade 11

_________ hours in Grade 12

3. How did you find out about your community involvement placements?

☐ school organized placement

☐ contacted agencies myself

☐ through friend, family, or acquaintance

☐ through town/city volunteer services office

☐ through church or other religious organization

☐ through another means (please describe below)
4. How much involvement did your parents have in choosing your placements, or organizing them?

☐ No involvement

☐ Made suggestions for placements

☐ Contacted placements on my behalf

5. How likely are you to volunteer in the future, after completing your 40 hours of community involvement? (What will you do?)

2. What does it do?

6. How do you feel that you benefited from your participation in the community involvement program?

7. Of the community involvement activities, which was the most meaningful to you? Describe the activity and why it was most meaningful.

8. Describe what you learned from doing the 40 hours of community involvement:

9. What skills have you developed as a result of the 40 hours?

What makes it work best?

10. What was the best part of doing the 40 hours? (Describe)

11. What was the worst part of doing the 40 hours? (Describe)

12. If you were to do your 40 hours of community involvement again, is there anything you would do differently? (Please detail what and why.)

13. What do you think it takes for the community involvement program to work well?

14. Any other comments about your experiences?
Reflections on the mandated 40 hours of community involvement (Other stakeholders)

Interview Question Guide. These questions will guide the one-on-one interview.

The terms “community involvement program” and “40 hour program” will be used to refer to the mandated 40 hours of community involvement (community service) required for secondary school graduation.

Parents, Principals, Guidance Counselors and Community organization representatives:

Name: ___________________ Male Female

Parent Principal Guidance Counselor Community Representative

1. What is the community involvement program?

   Could you tell me about your participation in the community involvement program and how it has been executed in this environment? (For parents: Could you tell me about how you were involved in your child’s community involvement or community service program?)

2. What does the community involvement program do?

   i. Do you feel that the community involvement program is a meaningful program?

   ii. What made the program meaningful for you/your school/your child/your organization?

   iii. How do you feel that your child/your students have benefited from their participation in the community involvement program? (How has your school/organization benefited?)
iv. Of the community involvement activities, what activities were the most meaningful to your child/your students? Describe the activity and why it was most meaningful.

v. What skills have your students/your child developed as a result of the 40 hours?

vi. Do you notice any other positive outcomes of the program?

3. What makes it work best?

1. What have you found to be the worst aspect of the community involvement or 40-hour program? (Describe please – what, how, why)

2. Is there anything you would change about the community involvement program to make it work better for students, parents and their community? (or for the school or organization?) OR “if you were designing the 40 hour community involvement program, how would it be different?”

3. What do you think it takes to make the community involvement program work best? Why is that? How is that beneficial?

4. Any other comments about your experiences with the community involvement (40 hour) program?