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Fostering Students' Sense of Belonging and Inclusion Through Community Involvement

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Fostering Students' Sense of Belonging and Inclusion Through Community Involvement

by

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"For a community to be whole and healthy, it must be based on people's love and concern for each other."

- Millard Fuller

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

An Observation

Through my work in education, I've heard the phrase "it takes a village to raise a child" toted as a rallying cry for communities of educators. As this most often occurs within the context of school staff meetings or professional development opportunities, I gather that the 'village' is meant to include everyone from classroom teachers and reading specialists to cafeteria staff and secretaries - all of the resources contained in a school unit. This phrase is used to make sure that the entirety of our internal staff are considered when developing support systems that will encourage the well-being of students. However, I often feel as though efforts are focused on too narrow of a 'village' when using this phrase. I would like to consider the impact of expanding our understanding of the 'village' and mobilizing the wealth of resources that exist just outside of our schoolhouse gate. To be more definite, I am asking, *how does community involvement in the classroom, specifically through the use of community-based learning practices, impact a student's sense of belonging and inclusion?*

The purpose of this question is to justify and develop a more comprehensive repertoire of resources available to the education community. The justification of this project is built on research-based evidence of the benefits that students, educators, and community members receive when the community is more involved in classroom learning. This collaboration benefits educators, many of whom are overwhelmed by their overall workload and face burnout. Community inclusion can provide a layer of work distribution and resource sharing that alleviates a part of this pressure (Shelton, 2016;

Wang et al., 2016). By comparing the historic and modern objectives of schooling, a similar purpose develops - preparing students for engagement in society. Schools stand to benefit from this work as collaboration between educators, students, and community members contributes to organizational growth and movement toward these objectives. Through this network, individual community members stand to gain a sense of positive impact and pride, as well as an increased opportunity for community involvement (Wang, et al., 2016). For students, they must feel a certain sense of belonging and inclusion within that community in order to effectively engage in the community as adults (Flores & Benmayor, 1997, as cited in Mangual Figueroa et al., 2014). If students are provided with the opportunity to have repeated exposure to and interaction with community members, they can begin to examine their role within the community and begin to build a network of support. By forming relationships among educators, community members, and students, there is the potential to enhance the well-being of all involved.

In the following chapter, I will explore the personal and professional experiences I have had and how they contribute to my research question. I will begin by examining the interactions I have had with members of my community as an educator. Next, I will detail stories and experiences from my time as a student, as well as personal observations I've made regarding community involvement as a result of those experiences. After comparing my personal and professional experiences, I will tie the two together and form a plan for moving forward and addressing my findings.

A Development of Interest

The professional experiences I have had after earning my initial teaching degree and licenses have slowly guided me toward a fascination with the school-community

relationship. At the beginning of my career, I observed this relationship while teaching seventh-grade science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) at a public K-8 charter school. My curiosity was ignited and I sought deeper and more meaningful participation in community collaboration. In following this curiosity, I was able to professionally contribute to this school-community relationship through my work at the Science Museum of Minnesota. This inspired me to pursue higher education at Hamline University in a program that I believed to provide the tools to strengthen the school-community relationship: Natural Sciences and Environmental Education. This coalescence of inspiration, investigation, and guidance has refined my questioning to where I can specifically focus on the importance of community interaction within the classroom experience.

While working as a seventh-grade STEM teacher, I had my first opportunities to collaborate with community members as resources for students' learning. I began by using the common channels that were already established within our school repertoire. The best example of this was collaborating with the staff from our local nature center to plan excursions for our students. The staff was extremely knowledgeable both in their content and in their ability to work with students. As I started to prioritize getting my students out into the community, this was a resource that I frequently utilized in my first year of teaching.

During my second year in the classroom, I found a curriculum that would engage my students in the complexities of sustainable farming practices. While I was doing my own research into the concepts of this curriculum, I found that our town was home to a leading manufacturer of conservation tillage and nutrient management equipment. We

decided to implement this curriculum in May and, as an incentive for our students to finish the year on a strong note, invited staff from this local company to join our students and speak with them about what they had learned. As part of their learning, students prepared a demonstration of their findings, as well as questions for our guests. On the day of our visit, our guests joined us for a whole day of collaborative learning. I watched as our students were able to make tangible connections between their studies and the firsthand accounts of our visitors. This was the experience that solidified my need to bridge the gap between educators and their greater communities.

To continue my work toward strengthening the school-community relationship, I began working for the Science Museum of Minnesota. I was a curriculum writer and instructor for Design Team, the first installment of a three-level program developed to bring experiential STEM Justice content into local middle schools and spark curiosity among students. After engaging in Design Team learning experiences, students would graduate to the high school program, where they could apply for paid positions within the Science Museum of Minnesota Kadets. They would focus on one of four important STEM Justice fields: engineering and design; environmental science; biology and health; or media and technology. From there, 18- to 25-year-old graduates could apply for the Career & Community Connections program which provided career-focused internships. It focused on helping Saint Paul students learn about STEM topics and then provided a direct career path to begin working within these fields.

My experiences at the Science Museum of Minnesota modeled community-based learning practices before I was aware of the term. The directness of this program, which included real-world experiences and networking opportunities, did an exemplary job of

preparing students for the community that they were going to enter as adults. At this point, I had a passion for connecting schools to their communities. However, I felt a need to continue learning and developing my professional skills to engage with this passion in a way that could carry it forward in my own community.

I applied to Hamline University in the spring of 2020, intent on joining their Master's program in natural sciences and environmental education. To gain admission, I wrote a letter about my professional philosophy and what I hoped to learn through my time in the program. In that letter, I defined my philosophy as a belief that a student's education should be relevant to the world we are preparing them to enter. I believe that for education to have relevance, we must encourage students to be lifelong learners, active citizens, and compassionate individuals. All of these practices prepare students to navigate and contribute to their communities.

Rationale for Questioning

Asking how to better acknowledge and then mobilize the greater community in classroom learning is an endeavor that stands to benefit students, educators, and members of the greater community alike. Students stand to gain the sense of making a difference in their community and accept greater responsibility for the well-being of their communities (Shelton, 2016). Educators who are given the tools and opportunities to collaborate with members of the community benefit from increased knowledge sharing and professional networking. At the same time, members of the community who work with classroom educators often feel the positive impact of working with students and will continue to seek out collaboration opportunities (Shelton, 2016; Wang et al., 2016). These results contribute to the justification of following research and development efforts.

This project attempts to broaden these implications from the individual level and identify the benefits of the work to the collective teaching community. To accomplish this, it is important to understand the foundational components of a community. At its most basic, a community is a network of interactions between people created to share resources and accomplish common goals. In the teaching profession, this network contributes to resource sharing and collaborative learning opportunities. By using the information and resources included within this project, educators stand to strengthen the use of resources within the community, as well as contribute to public scholarship.

Summary

It is a worthy endeavor to question and redefine the boundaries of our educational 'village.' To address this broad wondering, I am intent on answering the more pointed question, *how does community involvement in the classroom, specifically through the use of community-based learning practices, impact a student's sense of belonging and inclusion?* By testing these limitations and expanding them, it is possible to provide useful resources to educators, students, and community members.

In the following chapters, I will build on these personal and professional experiences by providing a comprehensive review of the academic literature regarding the foundation of communities, the role of education within those communities, community-based learning practices, and their contribution to students' sense of belonging and inclusion. After reviewing the literature and developing informed observations, I will outline the project created to address the understanding and mobilization of an expanded 'village' for our classrooms. This includes a professional development workshop designed to help educators better recognize and utilize the

resources within their greater community. Lastly, I will summarize the benefits and

potential implications of this work. These measures will contribute to the overall

justification and development of community resources for classroom use.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

In order to examine the modern relationship between schools and their greater communities, it is important to first develop an understanding of these two factors individually. This is necessary to address the question, *how does community involvement in the classroom, specifically through the use of community-based learning practices, impact a student's sense of belonging and inclusion?* This chapter will start by defining the modern community, including its roles, functions, and benefits. Then, it will look at education, specifically as a branch within a community, and learn how its purpose serves as both a cause and effect of this unique, symbiotic relationship. Next, it will introduce community-based learning practices and examine the merits and limitations of the practice. Lastly, this chapter will examine the impact that an authentic and intentional relationship between school and community has on the experience of students.

Defining a Community

Participation in community structures will provide a distinctly personal experience to each person who engages as a member of that community. However, there are similar frameworks that contribute to the foundation of these unique communal structures. A community can be compared to a living organism in that it is made up of separate, yet interdependent, parts that operate and perform functions in relation to their larger system (McCloskey et al., 2011). These parts are formed by groups of people who live in proximity to one another and collaborate on the issues and ideas that affect their livelihood (McCloskey et al., 2011). The variation of means and methods by which

communities collaborate on their issues will define the overall health and longevity of the community.

What is Community

A community is a group of people that is formed by their geographic location or common interest ("What is Community Engagement?," n.d.). While this definition is broad, it provides the first boundary necessary to begin understanding the communities that people participate in and how they interact with one another. Through a complex web of relationships, members of a community develop shared histories, norms, and cultures that can be used to better define the group identity (Etzioni, 1996). Communities, to varying degrees, are conducive to the survival and expansion of groups of living organisms. Humans form communities to meet group needs through finding and utilizing resources, sharing knowledge, and interpreting threats and opportunities (McNamara et al., 2021). The groups that people form also provide us with psychological resources such as social support, which allow us to better cope with shared challenges (McNamara et al., 2021).

Communities are often defined by their geographic location. Based on the spaces they inhabit, a community can be characterized as a rural, urban, or suburban community. This classification is primarily determined by the density of a population and the development of commercial and residential infrastructures (Isserman, 2005). Once a community has been established as more rural or urban, it will be associated with a distinct combination of characteristics. Members of a rural community, with its undeveloped land and low population density, are more likely to know their neighbors and live in their community for over a decade (Parker et al., 2018). In contrast, members

of an urbanized community, which has more developed land and greater population density, are more likely to value diversity and pursue higher education (Parker et al., 2018). The demographics of a rural or urban community will contribute to the overall capacity of that community to address its needs.

Communities can also be formed formally or informally, based on the need they are addressing. Examples of formal communities include schools and universities, the military, churches, social action groups, and businesses. These communities are created deliberately and function through defined structures that include authority and objectives. In contrast, informal communities emerge naturally and mainly function as a space for connections and personal interactions. Informal communities can form among neighbors, coworkers who eat lunch together, workout groups, or fans of the same franchise. These communities can be formed to address needs including resource sharing and social support. The same community can also serve different purposes to the individuals that participate in them.

As communities develop over time, so will the language and conditions that are used to define them. One such development is the establishment of the virtual community. Virtual communities are not marked by a geographic location. Instead, they are formed through a digital network due to a common interest or social group (McCloskey et al., 2011). As the development and accessibility of computer-mediated communication strengthen, the virtual community becomes more important to the identity of an individual (McCloskey et al., 2011). The virtual community, while geographically scattered, is still characterized by connectivity and the potential for meaningful interaction (Burns et al., 2016).

The Individual in a Community

As communities are formed to address a spectrum of organizational and social needs, individuals will find themselves participating in multiple communities to meet multiple needs. Participation in multiple communities will oftentimes occur simultaneously. These webs of interaction are formed around a variety of interests, abilities, histories, events, and locations. Individuals may have different factors that lead them to participate in the same community, but as a part of the community, they will begin to develop a shared sense of experience and a shared history.

Individuals often participate in and identify as members of multiple communities at the same time. A person's interpretation of community membership will be uniquely formed based on the complex web of interactions that they have. This perspective is independent of the definitions of community that have been established by engagement leaders (McCloskey et al., 2011). Individual perspective is also formed, in part, as a result of personal values, histories, and cultural understandings that are acquired before entering a certain community (McCloskey et al., 2011). In this way, both the individual and group experiences within a community are diverse (McCloskey et al., 2011).

How an individual perceives their interaction with different communities will shape their vision of self. Philosopher and psychologist William James explains that there are two perspectives created through community interaction: the identity that a person forms for themself and the identity that forms based on how others see them (McCloskey et al., 2011). When these two identities agree, there is a shared understanding of individual identity (McCloskey et al., 2011). People define themselves within a complex combination of intersecting communities, such as familial, social,

religious, and professional groups (McCloskey et al., 2011). This combination can be heavily influenced by their sense of membership and engagement within each community.

Community Engagement

Community engagement is the structure through which individuals participate in their community. The needs of a community cannot be appropriately addressed without collaborative engagement opportunities. The means of collaboration will look different based on the location, formality, organization, and needs of the community. Successful engagement will focus on the rights of community members to be educated, consulted, and empowered as they work toward sustainable outcomes and relationships ("What is Community Engagement?," n.d.).

To build a community of effective engagement, there must be a commitment to fostering and maintaining mutual trust among individuals (Minoi et al., 2019; "What is Community Engagement?," n.d.). This means that the context of the community must be well understood in order for engagement strategies to be effective ("What is Community Engagement?," n.d.). The principles of collaborative community engagement are grounded in fairness, empowerment, and justice (McCloskey et al., 2011). Building upon these principles, a community can coordinate and focus efforts to effectively meet their complex needs (McCloskey et al., 2011). Tools used to accomplish these goals can include developing a shared vision, committing to openness and new learning, promoting transparency, and sustaining a culture of participation ("What is Community Engagement?," n.d.).

Community Balance

To authentically meet the needs of community members, a balance is required between group order and individual autonomy (Etzioni, 1996). A group order is necessary for the forward movement of the organization, just as autonomy is a necessary right of the individual. The natural friction between these contradictory forces can lead to dissent between the group identity and the individual identity. To reduce friction, a community must develop clear responsiveness as a tool for communication and collaboration (Etzioni, 1996). Without this collaborative tool in place, a community risks the oppression of members or groups of members. Responsiveness is essential when navigating between order and autonomy to authentically address group needs (Etzioni, 1996).

Leadership and representation within a community must also be rooted in authenticity. Members of a community who are most empowered often develop into community leaders, regardless of whether or not they are most representative of their peers (Geiger, 1984, as cited in McCloskey et al., 2011). Community organization must be led and facilitated in a way that empowers the larger community (CARE: Community Alliance for Research and Engagement, 2009, as cited in McCloskey et al., 2011). Authentic leadership will lean into community engagement principles such as empowerment and active participation as it works to meet community needs (Minkler, 2005, as cited in McCloskey et al., 2011). Without the dedication to authenticity, leaders in a community risk generating irrelevancy, helplessness, and deviation within the community (McCloskey et al., 2011).

There is also a balance required between the communities that overlap and interact with one another. As a community develops its group identity, the boundary between members and nonmembers will stiffen (Etzioni, 1996). To build a network that thrives on collaboration, layered loyalties must be a shared value of the overall culture (Etzioni, 1996). A "community of communities," akin to the interdependent systems within an organism, will encourage resource sharing and reduce conflict. This is necessary in order to meet the complex and varied needs of the individual.

Conclusion

In order to examine the impact of community involvement on students' sense of belonging and inclusion, it is necessary to define the functions and features of a community. A community is formed around a geographic location or common interest to meet the needs of individuals. The members of a community often participate in multiple communities and form a personal identity around a unique combination of the communities they participate in. Community engagement, the structure through which members participate, must be founded on the education and empowerment of the individual. Without proper engagement strategies, an imbalance can develop within a community or a system of communities. The next section will look at the role of the education system, one of many communities contributing to a greater society.

Education in a Communal Context

The health and livelihood of a community is, in part, determined by the health and livelihood of its interdependent parts. The education system is an important part of a community that must perform its duty in relation to the greater whole. As a result, the purpose of communal education serves as both a cause and an effect of the community.

Collaboration between the educational branch of a community and its interdependent cohorts will contribute to the overall health of the community (Shelton, 2016; Wang et al., 2016). This relationship will be examined by finding how education both contributes to and benefits from communal structures.

The development of human capital, a necessary skill for community engagement, begins within the classroom (Alexander & Khabanyane, 2013). To learn how to participate in a community, students must be allowed to practice as participants in their school community (Melaville et al., 2006). The education system must connect the content matter with the places and events that impact their students' lives to allow for this practice (Melaville et al., 2006). Schools must emulate the same principles of community that are utilized outside of the classroom walls: empowerment, responsiveness, and representation. These objectives, which serve communal purpose, are rooted in and supported by educational theory. Developing these skills within students will not only provide deeper learning to the student, but will also enrich the experiences of educators and community members who serve as guides.

The following section will begin by summarizing the objectives and functions of constructivism, an educational theory that supports and justifies communal interaction in schools. Following this summary will be an examination of the benefits offered to educators and community members as a result of this school-community interaction. This will serve as our foundation of understanding for the school-community relationship. Student benefits will be explored in greater detail in following sections wherein it is described how belonging and inclusion is developed from community practices.

Constructivism

Constructivism is the educational theory that an individual makes their own knowledge through personal experiences (Wang et al., 2016). In constructivism, the combination of a learner's readiness, prior knowledge, and firsthand experiences form new insights (Airasian & Walsh, 1997; D'Angelo et al., 2009, as cited in Wang et al., 2016). Empowering learners to engage in activities is necessary for the development and organization of new learning. Experiential learning, a foundational component of constructivism, has the learner participating directly with their material rather than simply thinking about a hypothetical interaction or analysis (Borzak, 1981, as cited in Shelton, 2016).

When providing experiential learning opportunities, a vital component of the methodology is social interaction for the learners (Wang et al., 2016). When learning takes place through a social process, which involves forming relationships and collaborating, it feels more authentic and natural (Burns et al., 2016). Through this method, there is an emphasis placed on the context and application of knowledge rather than the memorization of isolated facts (Burns et al., 2016). As learners are encouraged to engage with their peers and the greater community, they are able to continually test and organize their experiences to form new knowledge (Alexander & Khabanyane, 2013). Belonging to a community is not simply helpful, but integral, to the development and exchange of knowledge (Wenger, 2000, as cited in Burns et al., 2016).

Learners are given the opportunity to contextualize the world around them when the greater community is included in the experiential learning process (Ramsden, 2003, as cited in Wang et al., 2016). Collaboration between children, educators, and their

greater community members can contribute to a deeper understanding of learning materials (Gestwicki, 2013, as cited in Wang et al., 2016). A deeper understanding that is supported by community interaction extends beyond writing and computation skills, placing these abilities within the context of modern life (Partnership for Twenty-First Century Skills, n.d., as cited in Melaville et al., 2006). An interactive model of learning supports students in their cognitive development. This model has additional benefits for the educators and great communities that support them in their learning.

Benefits for Schools

Schools are in a position to benefit from community interaction within their classrooms. To maintain relevance between the school community and its larger system of communities, it is important to bridge the gap between the lives of our students in and out of school ("Partnership for Twenty-First Century Skills," n.d., as cited in Melaville et al., 2006). Students' real-life experiences can be built upon with related content and resources entering the classroom (Wang et al., 2016). As a result of community involvement in the classroom, students are also provided the opportunity to refine their communal values and prepare to more deeply engage with their community after graduation (Shelton, 2016). These learning experiences might be difficult for educators to provide without external support.

Community engagement within schools invites a wealth of experience, labor, and resources to the classrooms for educator collaboration. When educators collaborate with members of the community, they receive necessary insight into the community (Shelton, 2016). This helps them to keep the curriculum relevant to the lives of their students by either reinforcing impactful material or shifting to a new focus as it becomes relevant to

the community. Community engagement within the classroom also provides educators with a wider professional network of support wherein they can share resources, gain knowledge, and amplify the impact of education within their community (Shelton, 2016; Wang et al., 2016). This provides educators with their own experiential learning opportunities at the professional level.

Educators and students alike feel increasingly motivated when encouraged to share experiences with others (Shulman, 1997 & Wells, 1999, both as cited in Wang et al., 2016). At the students' level, community interaction contributes to real-world learning opportunities and practical experiences in community engagement processes (Shelton, 2016; Wang et al., 2016). For educators, integrating community engagement into the learning experience shares the responsibility of the learning process and contributes to a network of professional growth and resource sharing. At the school level, community engagement keeps the curriculum responsive to the goals and objectives of the larger community. This process has equally impactful benefits for the community that embraces its educational branches.

Benefits for Community

Communities stand to gain a variety of benefits from active participation in schools. On the individual level, community members who work with students enjoy engaging with kids and watching them learn about new ideas (Wang et al., 2016). Volunteers are able to clearly see the impact they are making with students and feel a sense of pride in their contribution (Wang et al., 2016). Community members who interact with schools often grow and develop into lifelong volunteers (Shelton, 2016). Servitude within the community network can act as training for individuals, many of

whom will go on to seek out higher opportunities for community leadership (Brown, 2008, as cited in Shelton, 2016).

In terms of addressing the needs of the community, participation in schools can provide valuable insight and awareness. With new understanding, communities are better-informed when making decisions, aiding the identification and allocation of their resources and services (Shelton, 2016; Wang et al., 2016). Receiving student feedback also supports the authenticity and responsiveness of the community, assuring that needs are properly identified and addressed (Shelton, 2016). Connecting students to their community can strengthen a sense of civic engagement in all participants (Bee & Guerrina, 2014, as cited in Shelton, 2016). Civic engagement, a sense of responsibility to one's communities, ensures the health and preservation of the community as a whole (Jacoby, 2009, as cited in Shelton, 2016).

Conclusion

Schools and greater communities have duties to fulfill in relation to one another to successfully meet individuals' needs. Through constructivism, a focus on collaboration and real-world application has schools looking outward to their community network for additional resources. This relationship between schools and peripheral communities proves to be mutually beneficial. Understanding how schools fit within the greater context of the community gives the insight necessary to understand the impact of community involvement on a student's sense of belonging and inclusion. The next section will look at the components of community-based learning practices and how they are used as a means of community involvement.

Community-Based Learning as a Tool

Community involvement within the classroom has been shown to be a mutually beneficial relationship. Students, educators, and community members each gain unique experiences and understanding based on the depth and quality of community participation. Community-based learning practices are a compilation of tools and strategies used to successfully plan and host community engagement opportunities. These methods will be used as a foundation of understanding in order to identify the methods of community engagement that will best benefit those involved.

Defining Community-Based Learning

Community-based learning refers to instructional methods and programs that are used to build connections between what educators are teaching in classrooms and the educational assets of their larger communities (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). Community-based learning exists at the intersection of multiple educational theories including civic education, environmental education, place-based learning, service-learning, and work-based learning. These educational theories support the idea that learning is most effective when the content builds on previous understanding and has personal meaning to the learner (Melaville et al., 2006). Additionally, giving learners the opportunity to apply their new knowledge to real-world situations contributes to the retention and transfer of knowledge (Melaville et al., 2006). Community-based learning aims to form critical relationships between students and their greater communities, moving beyond factual knowledge to form complex understandings and inform action (Lowenstein et al., 2010).

Community-based learning pulls from the belief that all communities develop and maintain intrinsic educational assets that can be used to expand the learning experience for students (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). Depending on the unique composition of communities and their assets, the means and methods of engagement can vary in different classrooms. Communal assets might include the history, literature, culture, institutions, and natural environments of an area (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). Schools and educators also provide complex experiences, contexts, and points of entry to this collaborative experience (Lowenstein et al., 2010). To best utilize community-based learning practices, it is important to understand these inherent behavioral and cultural dimensions that are intertwined with the academic ambitions of the practice (Minoi et al., 2019).

Rationale for Community-Based Learning

Communities are limited to the assets which they possess as they work toward meeting the needs of their members (Etzioni, 1996). These assets include the institutions, technologies, human capital, and natural resources that have been collected. Communities can strengthen and expand their ability to meet group needs by collaborating and consolidating resources across a communal network (McCloskey et al., 2011). Mobilizing community members in the learning process of its students allows for more optimal usage of social capital resources and, consequently, a better ability to meet group needs (Skinner, 2009). Through the diversity and expansion of social capital resources made available to classrooms, educators can better meet curriculum objectives surrounding social, physical, emotional, and intellectual development (Wang et al., 2016).

Community-based learning practices provide the structure needed for students to begin forming an identity within the context of their community. Forming an identity within a community is crucial to the survival and safety of the individual. Without a sense of communal belonging, individuals risk reinforcing their preexisting disadvantages by missing out on skill development and knowledge-sharing opportunities (Skinner, 2009). To form a communal identity, students should have the opportunity to actively contribute to their community, rather than simply learn about their opportunity to do so when they are adults (Moya, 2017). This real-world practice helps students to build confidence in their ability to participate and develop a sense of personal agency (Moya, 2017; Skinner, 2009).

Community-based learning practices also focus on igniting interest in community participation. Henderson and Thomas (2001) find that "the willingness to be involved may need sparking" (p. 106). This spark, formed from personal interest and need, is necessary to motivate students to participate within the community (Skinner, 2009). When the sense of personal interest is then combined with the confidence and ability to navigate community organizations, students are equipped with the necessary skills to fully participate and engage in their community (Moya, 2017; Skinner, 2009).

Community-Based Learning Strategies

The success of community-based learning practices is reliant on educators who are appropriately and thoroughly trained to use them. Developing educators' perspectives and understanding is crucial, as educators represent the content matter and its larger context in the eyes of their students (Lowenstein et al., 2010). Professional development efforts can be challenging, as they require a robust emphasis on translating modes of

inquiry and analysis into a real community context (Lowenstein et al., 2010). Successful

training of community-based learning strategies also needs to give educators the time and

resources to perceive their role in relation to their students, their subject matter, and the

complex communities that they exist within (Lowenstein et al., 2010). This change in

practice may prove to be difficult for educators, due to the current structures of

accountability encouraging a static form of content delivery (Lowenstein et al., 2010).

However, the skills and strategies of community-based learning practices provide useful

guidance to lead learning educators through the process of reframing and expanding upon

previously held assumptions.

The strategies used within community-based learning practices are collected from

a network of theoretical frameworks that complement and build on one another

(Melaville et al., 2006). The strategies included are individually valuable and, together,

form a more holistic perspective of student learning and engagement (Melaville et al.,

2006). The foundation of community-based learning that is used to integrate these

frameworks is that the building and retention of knowledge are constructed and

influenced by social interactions (Melaville et al., 2006). To learn effectively within an

environment, there needs to be an intentional connection made between the social

systems that have affected learners' lived experiences - home, school, and community

(Melaville et al., 2006).

Frameworks that support the shared vision of community-based learning practices

vary in execution, yet share unifying characteristics. The content within these

frameworks focuses on providing meaningful experiences where students have an active

role in their learning (Melaville et al., 2006). The content is also meant to contribute to a

public purpose and form connections with community resources (Melaville et al., 2006).

Important theoretical frameworks of community-based learning include

academically-based community service, civic education, environmental education,

place-based learning, service-learning, and work-based learning.

These practices vary in their particular angle used to accomplish these objectives.

Frameworks such as academically-based community service and place-based learning

prioritize a connection between academic learning targets and the unique history, culture,

and needs of the local community. Civic education and service-learning integrate

community engagement into the learning experience to emphasize democracy and civic

responsibility. Environmental education utilizes local settings to inspire the merging of

prior knowledge and curiosity to form a new understanding of students' surroundings.

Work-based learning provides explicit context to academic content by engaging students

in mentor and role model learning opportunities. The frameworks listed, among others,

contribute unique strategies and perspectives that can be utilized in tandem to elevate

community-based learning experiences.

Skills Acquisition

Within the greater perspective of what is set out to be achieved by

community-based learning practices, students stand to gain additional skills as a result of

their participation in the learning community (Melaville et al., 2006). In working towards

the learning objectives defined by community-based learning practices, a pattern emerges

among the foundational skills that participants utilize and refine. Skills commonly

developed through community-based learning strategies can be categorized into

academic, civic, and social capacities. These foundational skills are inherently folded into the curriculum throughout the learning process.

Students stand to improve overall academic skills through the use of community-based learning practices. Melaville et al. cite data collected from 48 schools since 1996, wherein 92% of students participating in the Environment as an Integrating Context for Learning program, which puts many community-based learning tools into practice, outperformed peers who were in traditional programming as measured by standardized testing (Melaville et al., 2006). Multiple studies show that the inclusion of work-based learning strategies promotes more consistent attendance and the selection of more challenging classes, while also reducing dropout rates (Melaville et al., 2006). In some cases, behavioral issues in the classroom were reduced by as much as 95 percent (Melaville et al., 2006). Students who enrolled in work-based learning programs were likely to earn a grade point average as high, if not higher than comparable peers (Melaville et al., 2006). These metrics, among others, point to overall academic growth and success for students who can participate in programs using community-based learning practices.

In learning spaces that use community-based learning practices, students can also develop their civic and moral competencies. As shown in a study of the Colorado Learn and Serve program, students who participated in service-learning showed significant improvement in measures of civic responsibility, connection to community, and connection to school over their peers who did not participate in service-learning (Melaville et al., 2006). Using community-based learning practices to promote critical civic identity development is found to promote commitment to activism and overall

greater civic engagement among students, particularly students of color (Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012; Mediratta et al., 2008, as cited in Moya, 2017). Among Latinx students, who are often experiencing substandard learning opportunities in comparison to their peers, access to learning spaces that foster critical civic identity can empower students to disrupt systems of inequality (Moya, 2017). Community-based learning practices provide integral support to a variety of programs aiming to develop civic and moral identity.

The utility of community-based learning practices is crucial for future community engagement. Community members can feel prevented from participating due to a perceived lack of awareness, confidence, or motivation (Dalziel et al., 2007; Fraser 2005, as cited in Skinner, 2009). At the same time, communities are oftent governed by insiders who are passionate and well-connected, which is off-putting to newcomers (Skidmore et al., 2006, as cited in Skinner, 2009). Through the use of community-based learning practices, participants stand to gain social skills that help overcome these perceived barriers. Students have been shown to develop a sense of increased competency, empowerment, and autonomy while involved in prevention programs that use community-based learning practices (Melaville et al., 2006). They also stand to increase self-esteem and acceptance of diversity, as well as decrease risky behavior through participation in such programs (Melaville et al., 2006). Authentic participation, rather than theoretical preparation, is necessary to encourage personal development and capacity building (Warburton, 1998, as cited in Skinner, 2009). Social skills development is deeply intertwined with community-based learning practices.

Conclusion

By involving the greater community in classroom learning opportunities, there is a unique benefit provided to the educators, students, and community members involved. A leading collaboration of skills that can connect educators and their students with the community is community-based learning practices. Community-based learning practices consist of assorted educational frameworks similarly founded on the theory that social interaction influences learning (Melaville et al., 2006). Mobilizing community members into the classroom also enhances overall resource and knowledge sharing, improving the ability of a community to meet needs (Skinner, 2009). Students stand to benefit from community-based learning practices and improve their academic, civic, and social capacities.

Belonging and Inclusion as a Result

Belonging and inclusion refer to "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment" (Hegarty et al., 1992, p. 172). For the purposes of this project, the prioritization of belonging and inclusion applies to both the part and the whole, the educational branch and the greater communal system. Fostering belonging and inclusion emerges as a crucial standard of health when looking at students' experiences in and out of the classroom. It is suggested by Maslow (1954) that the development of belonging is a fundamental, basic human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, as cited in Greenwood & Kelly, 2019). The following sections will determine how the collaborative efforts between education and community can impact belonging and inclusion for members of these systems.

Prioritizing Belonging and Inclusion

Thus far, it has been established that the priority of school systems to center around the development of human capital. When sufficiently addressed, this development contributes to more successful community engagement and, in turn, a community that is better equipped to meet the needs of its members. By prioritizing belonging and inclusion as a learning outcome for students, teachers emulate and practice principles that are central to this development. At the same time, McMurray et al. (2011, as cited in Greenwood & Kelly, 2019) find that students naturally seek out belonging and support within the school environment, making this endeavor beneficial to all three levels of participants: students, educators, and the greater community.

Students stand to gain innumerable personal benefits from an increased sense of belonging and inclusion. Individuals have a strong internal desire to relate to others and feel as though we belong among them. Ryan (1995) ascertains that relating to others is essential to human growth and development (Greenwood & Kelly, 2019). Relating to others and feeling as though we belong provides a sense of secure connection. It sends the message that one is worthy of love and respect (Osterman, 2000, as cited in Greenwood & Kelly, 2019). According to Haslam et al. (2016), identifying ourselves as part of a community also lends itself to greater meaning and purpose in peoples' lives and reduces loneliness (McNamara et al., 2021).

Within the school environment, belonging centers around the willingness and ability to participate in classroom activities. More specifically, students with a strong sense of belonging and inclusion will feel accepted, valued, and encouraged by peers and educators (Greenwood & Kelly, 2019). This feeling of belonging empowers students to

assert themselves and view themselves as contributing members of the community. With time, individual students' practiced engagement can form a conviction of shared identity and cultural citizenship (Flores & Benmayor, 1997, as cited in Mangual Figueroa et al., 2014).

At the community level, belonging and inclusion contribute to more efficient resource identification and allocation. As members of a community bolster their individual sense of belonging, common identity is strengthened across the community as a whole. Haslam et al. (2012) find that, as common identity is strengthened, resource sharing improves (McNamara et al., 2021). This is a result of increased trust and social support among individuals. As summarized by Wang et al. (2016), the emphasis on community values, particularly belonging and inclusion, help students to experience the world around them and learn how to better contribute to it as they grow.

Connecting Belonging and Inclusion to Community-Based Learning Practices

The tools and strategies commonly utilized within community-based learning practices lend themselves to the development of belonging and inclusion among students. Service-learning is one of many educational models that encompasses community-based learning practices. Through service-learning, empathy, respect, and care are emphasized as necessary skills for thoughtful participation in a community (Cress, 2013, as cited in Shelton, 2016). Participation in community through the classroom can also encourage personal reflection and critical thinking among students (Shelton, 2016). These tools, emphasized through varied community-based learning practices, can help students gain the sense of belonging and support they naturally seek out.

As students engage with programs that use community-based learning practices, their skill development will benefit peers as well. Kacker-Cam and Schmidt (2014) cite multiple researchers showing that service-learning positively impacts students' behavioral and psychological functioning. This can include gains in self-esteem, social competence, moral reasoning, and a more helpful orientation toward others (Billig, 2000; Eyler, 2000; Raskoff & Sundeen 1999; Yates & Youniss 1998, as cited in Kacker-Cam & Schmidt, 2014). An increase in social competency among a large group of students can create a school community wherein social responsibility and contribution are the norms. Students raised in an environment of service are more likely to have both the skill development and desire to contribute to community well into adulthood (Kacker-Cam & Schmidt, 2014). These studies suggest a continuum of belonging that will follow students as they grow and enter more complex communities later in life.

Conclusion

For educators to improve students' sense of belonging and inclusion in the classroom, they need to understand the importance of this concept in the lives of students. Rather than subsidiary content in relation to academic ventures, feeling a sense of belonging is a standard of health and wellbeing that is crucial to proper development and community integration for students. Educators are in a position to develop this skill in students, both within the classroom unit and as it translates into students' daily lives. Community-based learning practices provide specific tools and opportunities for students to develop their sense of belonging and inclusion, preparing them for successful integration within communities.

Summary

This chapter provided a collection of academic research necessary to understand and begin to answer the question, *how does community involvement in the classroom, specifically through the use of community-based learning practices, impact a student's sense of belonging and inclusion?* To fully understand what is being asked, it was crucial to break down the content into four distinct categories of information. First, it provided an overview of communities, including the functions, benefits, and modern variations. Then, it discussed the role of education within a community and how individuals benefit from this system. Next, this chapter examined community-based learning practices and the strategies that contribute to this endeavor. Lastly, there is a connection formed between community-based learning practices and an improved sense of belonging and inclusion in students, as well as rationale for the prioritization of this outcome. The following chapter will outline a professional development workshop intended to improve educator practice by folding community-based learning practices into the current curriculum.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to summarize the methodology of a project that addresses the question, *how does community involvement in the classroom, specifically through the use of community-based learning practices, impact a student's sense of belonging and inclusion?* To accomplish this, the following chapter will present a detailed description of the components that are most important to the success of this project, as well as a justification for their inclusion.

This chapter begins with a general overview of the project, a professional development workshop intended for practicing educators that focuses on developing community-based learning practices for classroom use. After providing an overview of the workshop, this chapter will discuss the rationale for incorporating specific practices as supported by scientific literature. Lastly, it will take a deeper look at the intended setting, audience, timeframe, and assessments. By examining the metrics for proper implementation, there will be a better understanding of the overall intention and standards for the success of this professional development opportunity.

Project Description

This chapter will detail a professional development opportunity meant to encourage and equip practicing educators to better utilize community-based learning practices in their own classrooms. There are two distinct goals included in this professional development workshop. First, to provide a thorough overview of community-based learning practices and their merit to the educators, community

members, and especially the students within a community setting. Second, to provide the opportunity to workshop a current piece of curriculum and identify actionable steps that will incorporate community-based learning practices into the curriculum. To accomplish these goals, there will be clearly established guidelines for the professional development setting and audience, timeline, and assessment that are based on best practices for adult learning opportunities.

The central focus of this professional development workshop, defining and utilizing community-based learning practices within academic settings, is integral to the success of schools within their larger communities. By educating teaching professionals about the benefits of community-based learning practices and giving them the proper tools needed to implement them within their own classrooms, this workshop will help bolster a professional community of connection and knowledge sharing. Educators will have the language and skill to better seek out and contribute to a network of capable teaching professionals. Concurrently, the communities in which these schools exist will be better utilized as a viable resource for student learning. This bridge of collaboration will strengthen the overall use of community resources and contribute to public scholarship.

Project Setting and Audience

The intended participants for this professional development workshop are current educators in K-12 classrooms who are the lead teacher either in a whole classroom or a specific content area. This workshop is meant to be introduced as a school-wide initiative for better understanding and pursuing community networks. Educators who develop and deliver their curriculum are the target audience due to their direct impact on the

curriculum students are taught and the channels through which students practice new learning. Administrators, including curriculum specialists and directors with a hand in resource management, will also be important participants. This is to ensure that as educators are building up the curriculum to include community-based learning practices, they have the support and resource allocation needed to properly implement their plans.

As this program is designed to help educators restructure and expand their curriculum, it is best suited as a workshop presented at the end of the school year. This way, educators can pull curriculum that they have already used and will plan to use again in the following years. To complete the professional development sessions, schools will need to set aside two, four-hour blocks of time. Throughout the workshop, they will be prompted to update their curriculum with community-based learning practices, many of which might require seeking out and forming partnerships with community members. Educators and their administrators will be better able to prepare materials, connect with outside resources, and time their curriculum if they are introduced to these concepts while not in the mid-school year.

Project Structure

The implementation of this workshop is structured into two four-hour professional development sessions that will be held sequentially near the end of the school year. Each session has distinct objectives that are integral to effectively utilizing community-based learning practices in the classroom. It is important that each of these two sessions takes place on a different day, to allow time for individuals to reflect on new learning and gather materials for the next session.

Session One is focused on developing a basic understanding of community-based learning practices and the benefits of incorporating them into current educational practices. To begin forming a community of collaboration among participants, Session One will open with a warm up challenge that gives participants the opportunity to question their previous understandings of community. After this opening activity and a quick writing prompt, participants will receive a proper definition of community. Then, they will discuss the role of education in a community in small groups, eventually sharing with the whole group. This forms a foundation of understanding for participants and prepares them to learn about community-based learning practices.

During the second half of Session One, participants will learn about community-based learning practices. A basic understanding of community-based learning practices includes an introduction to the theoretical frameworks, historical uses, and important terms associated with the practice. While examining the benefits that community-based learning practices offer, educators will learn about the benefits for educators, members of the community, and students. It is important to include the potential benefits during day one of this workshop to develop buy-in among educators and administrators. At the close of Session One, participants will reflect on their learning for the day and begin brainstorming about curriculum that could be workshopped during Session Two.

Session Two builds on the general understanding of community-based learning practices introduced in Session One and begins to connect the concept to educators' individual practices. To accomplish this, Session Two asks participants to bring along a unit of curriculum that they currently use and would like to modify for the following

school year. To open for the day, participants will be asked to reflect on their most impactful takeaways from the previous day. Then, they will be guided through a reworking of their curriculum where they identify and plan meaningful inclusion of community-based learning components. Three principles of community-based learning that will be practiced are identifying viable community partners, connecting resources to current curriculum, and folding in opportunities for student voice. Depending on the size and complexity of the group, participants will be placed into smaller cohorts. These cohorts will provide informal feedback to one another as they work their way through Session Two.

As Session Two comes to a close, it provides the space and resources needed to bring new learning into practices outside of this workshop. Session Two provides closure around the learning experience by focusing on a reflection of the process. Participants will be guided through the process of writing an action plan for how they will continue modifying curriculum to include community-based learning practices. To conclude this workshop, participants will reflect on their learning as a large group and complete an exit survey that will allow facilitators to improve the impact of the workshop.

Project Materials

Throughout the course of this workshop, a variety of materials will be required for the facilitator(s) and participants to successfully meet the learning objectives listed previously. The materials needed for this workshop are divided into three components: the Facilitator Guidebook, the Participant Guidebook, and the Digital Presentation. These three components work cohesively together in order for facilitators to guide participants as they complete learning prompts, collaborate with one another, and workshop their

curriculum to include new strategies. These components are numbered independently of one another in the project section in order for each resource to be printed and used separately. Below, each project component is outlined by its objectives and functions.

The Facilitator Guidebook is the first resource found in the capstone project. In this resource, readers will find an overview of how to guide participants through the professional development workshop. After a brief introduction, the Facilitator Guidebook is sectioned into two grid tables, one for each day of the workshop. Each table contains four columns: Digital Presentation, Facilitator Notes, Participant Page, and Time. The slides are numbered out in the Digital Presentation column, accompanied by instructions in the Facilitator Notes column on how to present the material. The Participant Page column will note any corresponding paperwork for learners to use as is applicable. Lastly, the Time column will provide an estimated time to allot to each slide in order to stay on pace during each four-hour session. Each session is paced allow for 15 minutes to be spent in an area that needs additional time and attention.

The Participant Guidebook is the second resource included for this project. Here, readers will find a packet that can be printed and should be provided to each attendant of the professional development workshop. Participants will find a brief introduction in their packet, followed by a table of contents that names each resource and its page number. The resources included will be used for varying functions throughout the two-day workshop. There are many spaces for note taking during content-heavy portions of the workshop. Another section of space is set aside for either prompted reflections or free writing reflections. Readers will also have space to plan out their post-workshop goals.

The final sheet of the Participant Guidebook is an exit survey that is meant to be removed and turned in after completing.

The third resource included in this project is the Digital Presentation. This section is a catalog of all slides needed to present the professional development workshop. The slides are separated into Session One and Session Two. Each slide deck is numbered independently of the other. These numbers correspond to those listed in the Facilitator Guidebook. These slides will need to be downloaded by the facilitator in order to be used during this workshop.

Project Assessment

To evaluate the success of the professional development workshop, it is important to conclude with formal and informal assessments. The assessments closely follow the objectives of the workshop. The primary objectives include participants gaining a basic understanding of community-based learning practices, identifying the benefits of these practices for themselves and others within their school and community, expanding an existing curriculum to include community-based learning practices, and connecting with a larger network of teaching professionals.

Informal assessments include repeated opportunities for self-reflection on the learning process. Some sections of self-reflection will be written independently and others will be shared openly with small groups. Formal assessments include peer feedback sessions and an action plan writing session. These forms of assessment are both guided carefully by the facilitator, while allowing participants to interpret material in ways that will be most impactful for their practice. These formal assessments both take place on the second day of the workshop.

Project Best Practices

This workshop utilizes adult learning practices including a focus on content, active learning, collaboration, and sustaining the duration of learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). These learning practices are specifically included in the professional development workshop due to their impact on adult learning. This workshop is content-focused in its use of the existing, educator-used curriculum. After receiving a brief background of important terms and concepts, participants are quickly involved in the learning process through a series of engaging activities that draw on their personal experiences. The workshop-style learning experience and assessment loops are included in the process as a means of continuous collaboration among participants and content experts.

Summary

This chapter outlined a professional development workshop that aims to encourage and equip practicing educators to better utilize community-based learning practices within their classrooms. This workshop is best introduced as a school-wide initiative to classroom educators, as well as their supporting administrators. Over a two-day workshop, participants focus on developing a basic understanding of community-based learning practices, forming connections to their existing curriculum, and building roadmaps for continued use of community-based learning practices. Learning is assessed through a combination of formal and informal reflection and coaching opportunities. The next chapter will summarize the final thoughts and implications of the information provided thus far.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

The previous chapters have examined the reasoning, supporting literature, and applicable work addressing the question, *how does community involvement in the classroom, specifically through the use of community-based learning practices, impact a student's sense of belonging and inclusion?* This chapter will attempt to summarize the final thoughts and implications developed through this work. To begin, this chapter will revisit some of the most impactful sources gathered for the literature review. It will then examine some of the impacts and limitations of this work. This includes personal and professional reflections, potential influences that this work might have on the field of education, and limitations of the work in its current form. This section will conclude with a summary of the main ideas and findings of this work.

Literature Review

The literature review, found in Chapter Two, provided the background information necessary to understand and apply the project that followed. The literature review included an important selection of sources and information that deeply influenced the work. On an individual level, the literature review also contributed to new connections and understandings that build on previous work and learning experiences. This section will look at some of the most important findings from this section of work.

The literature review is organized into four sections: Defining a Community, Education in a Communal Context, Community-Based Learning as a Tool, and Belonging and Inclusion as a Result. These sections are arranged in a logical order that

builds upon itself to create a reasonable understanding. By defining the term *community* and providing a historical context, readers can then look at the role that education plays in the larger community structure. From there, community-based learning can be defined as the collection of strategies that can be used to strengthen and encourage the relationship between schools and communities. Lastly, the research that connects these strategies to the benefits of their use are identified. It is, more specifically, shown that community interaction in the classroom can positively impact students' sense of belonging and inclusion.

Several resources contributed to the literature review as a whole. However, some resources proved to be especially useful and helped to define the main themes of this work. One such resource was the textbook *Principles of Community Engagement*, edited by McCloskey, Aguilar-Gaxiola, and Michener. This text develops an understanding of community, including means of engagement and organization. These main findings were especially useful in the first section of the literature review, Defining a Community. In this section, the textbook provided clarity on the means by which communities are formed, defined, and maintained.

Another resource that provided valuable insights was *Community-Based Learning: Engaging Students for Success and Citizenship*, written by Melaville, Berg, and Blank. This book provided community-based learning rationale, outcomes, and foundational approaches. It is a text that is heavily cited in Chapter Two, specifically within the third section, Community-Based Learning as a Tool. This book was a crucial resource due to its thoroughness and practicality. It provided the information necessary to

summarize core characteristics of community-based learning practices, as well as educational strategies that fundamentally engage in these practices.

As the writer, the literature review allowed me to deepen my understanding of concepts as they connected to the capstone project that was developed. There were a number of new connections made between personal and professional experiences that related to the literature gathered. Most notably, the section that examines the role of education within the greater community added to my professional understanding of an educator's position. It allowed me to reflect on my previous notions and challenge assumptions. In this, I have been able to reframe my understanding of an educator's position and the symbiotic relationship held within a community. The reader benefits from this reflective work, as the perspective that develops is important to the understanding of the capstone project that follows.

There are many elements of the literature review that are notable to the overall impact of this capstone paper and project. Chapter Two provides insight into the position and background work needed to move forward with the capstone project. The progression of topics, essential resources, and reflective nature all contribute to the culminating impact of this work. The following section will review other notable developments from this work and reflect on their relation to final themes.

Impact and Limitations

This work intends to make an impact on its three main subjects: students, educators, and members of the interrelated communities. This section will recognize the potential for impact, as well as reasonable limitations, of the work. To accomplish this, I will begin by reflecting on how I was influenced by the capstone process as a lifelong

learner. Next, it will expand on this idea by postulating the influence of this work on the field of education. Finally, this section will acknowledge the known limitations of this work. These thoughts will help to form a more comprehensive image of future potential.

Reflection as a Lifelong Learner

Through the process of completing a capstone paper and project, I have had ample opportunity to reflect on my own development as a learner. The self-reflection process has been one that I have thoroughly enjoyed and I feel contributes greatly to my journey as a lifelong learner. Through the capstone process, I have come to two main conclusions about how to organize and present information. The first conclusion examines how concepts are ordered and emphasized within a larger work, while the second considers how multiple works can function in relation to one another. Both of these ideas have the potential to significantly improve my work in the future.

The first reflection considers how concepts are ordered and emphasized within a larger piece of work and the weight of influence that has on the image that is created. This idea became apparent in writing Chapter Two, which contained the literature review. While attempting to break down complex ideas into smaller, more manageable concepts, there were a number of stylistic choices to be made. After gathering massive amounts of information that would be important for readers to digest, it became apparent that the reordering and emphasis of this information could drastically change the reader's comprehension. Thorough attention to this fact was essential in order for readers to achieve necessary milestones of understanding.

The second reflection examines the relationship between multiple pieces of work on the same topic and how they can be designed to complement each other. In order to

complete the capstone, it was required to include both a paper and a project component. These pieces are meant to exist in cohesion. Throughout the process of developing each part, it took continued attention to detail to ensure that they all worked in tandem with one another. It was important to repeatedly comb through for continuity whenever new information was added or revisions were made. This skill set has been greatly influenced by the process of creating a capstone paper and project.

Potential Influences

The paper and project that were developed through this capstone process have the potential to influence the field of education in a few different ways. In their current form, the capstone paper and project are both individually and collectively beneficial to students, educators, and their greater communities. The paper that has been written provides a comprehensive arc between the role of education within a community and the strategies used to foster community-based learning. Through this bridging of concepts, educators move from justification to implementation in minimal time. The accompanying capstone project provides the tools and training needed for a district to begin applying community-based learning practices in school policy.

The paper and project built through the capstone process can also be used as instruments for future research. There are a number of findings that are ideal for further use. One such piece of work is the professional development course written for the capstone project. This work could be expanded on in the future in a number of ways. The course could be extended to include a workbook that guides educators and administrators through the first year of implementation. Another recommendation would be to create an accompanying coaches guide with more thorough questioning and means of support.

A second piece of work that could be used for future research is the capstone paper, specifically the second chapter. This chapter summarizes information about the foundations of community and how the education system is situated within these systems. To further the impact of this work, informational graphics could be created that summarize the main connections between the ideas. These infographics could be distributed among schools and encourage educators to build connections between community systems. They could also be delivered from the student perspective and be used as classroom tools when implementing community-based learning practices.

Current Limitations

As important as it is to understand the potential for this capstone paper and project, it's equally important to understand the limitations of the work. A primary limitation of this work is the understanding of education in the traditional classroom. The sources selected are narrow in their definitions of learning environments. This makes it difficult for the work to apply to nontraditional learning environments in an effective manner. In future research, this is a section that could be expanded upon to allow for a greater range of application. Another limitation of this work considers the educational theories that form the network of community-based learning strategies. The capstone paper and project both include an overview of educational theories, but the information is condensed into a summary. In future research, this section could be expanded to include a more in-depth analysis of theories that include strategies for community interaction.

Summary

This chapter has summarized final thoughts related to the research question, *how does community involvement in the classroom, specifically through the use of*

community-based learning practices, impact a student's sense of belonging and inclusion? It first looks at some of the most influential sources of information included in the literature review. Then, this chapter reflects on the potential for this capstone work, beginning with personal development made through the researching and writing processes. Next, it examined the possibility for further research and how this information could be used within the field of education. Lastly, this chapter acknowledge the limitations of the work in its current form. The rallying cry continues to ring out to our 'villagers' who support our students and I consider this work, both in its current form and its future potential, the organization and strategy needed to answer that call.

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