**EMBRACING AND CONNECTING THE COMMUNITY**

**Introduction**

School to community relations are an extremely important factor in student achievement and fostering a positive learning environment. In an era of change, it is important to review the basic needs of producing a school that embraces all community members, while simultaneously viewing change agents, trends, and needed tools that are necessary for positive innovation. Too often, schools do not embrace societal change or attempt to incorporate all stakeholders. An immense barrier is that parents often feel inferior to their child’s principals and teachers due to socioeconomic status (SES). This SES stigma hinders parents from being actively involved in their child’s education and creates an unnecessary barrier between school to community function. Another school to community barrier is how social media is often misused in school districts with strict policies and rules against cell phone use and school administration not embracing it as a positive network. With school to community relations, communication with parents and the community are essential to create positive relationships. A popular innovation that focuses on involving the community with student learning is place-based learning (PBL). Place-based learning allows students and teachers to be more engaged in their learning and for the students to invest an interest in their community. PBL allows children to make connections between their community and what they are learning. The community becomes the classroom for students and teachers, which allows the community stakeholders to be involved with the learning that is taking place. Embracing and connecting the community must be a key duty for school district leaders, administrators, and teachers. This duty will encompass the ability to communicate and consistently facilitate positivity, productivity, service-learning, and project-based learning with a focus on place-based learning.

**Subchapter 1: School-Community Relations in a Community in which the Socio-Economic Demographics and Education of the Teachers is Considerably Different from those of the Parents, Brandy Bruce**

Parents/guardians play a vital role in their child’s educational journey. During the school year a child spends approximately one-thousand waking hours at school and about five-thousand waking hours at home or in the community. It is imperative for teachers to have a good relationship with the families of their students in order to help the students succeed. However, this can sometimes be challenging when the socioeconomic status (SES) of the teacher and family vastly differ. This can cause tension between the school and family and even affect a family’s participation in their child’s education. Busser stated, “Just seven percent of teachers believe parents aren’t given the opportunity to offer input into and participate in school events and activities, a higher percentage of parents–nearly one-quarter–say they feel shut out of the collaborative process” (Busser, 2012).

There is a stigma attached to being from a low socioeconomic background. As sad as it is, people generally look down on those who have less than they do. Typically, families have little money because they are uneducated or undereducated and do not possess high-paying jobs. Thus, these parents/families work more for less pay. “Low SES families are often working all of the time to take care of their families, and they have no time to participate in their child’s education on campus. Based on a study involving low SES mothers, mothers want to be involved in their child’s education, but the other problem is that they are less comfortable around teachers, and so they do not get involved” (Ankrum, 2016, p. 168). Not only do these parents not feel welcomed in their child’s school, but they just don’t have the spare time to spend at the school.

Teachers are typically well-educated; with at least a bachelor’s degree or possibly even a master’s or doctorate degree. Whereas families from a lower SES are typically uneducated or under-educated, some may not have even graduated high school and they work a part-time or minimum wage job; if they work at all. “Parents may view teachers are rich upper-middle class people who judge them and don’t understand what they go through” (Hong, 2011, p. 99). Families from lower SES backgrounds typically feel inferior to school personnel and will therefore avoid the school or participating in school activities or functions. The family’s views of the teacher directly affect the child’s view of the teacher and their education. If a child hears a parent talking negatively toward their teachers or the school, then they will also take on a negative mindset towards school which can hinder their education.

As educators we need to make an effort to bridge the gap and make parents feel more welcome and want to be involved in their child’s education. When teachers and families work together a child is more likely to succeed. We can help parents be a bigger part of their child’s education by simply communicating with them. Just calling a parent to say their child had a good day or got a good grade can help make parents feel more involved and establish a relationship with you. Once you have established a positive relationship with the family by simply communicating and making them feel like an important part of their child’s education, they are more likely to be involved hands-on. According to Ankrum’s research, “It was determined that if schools took on parental involvement as a serious part of the organization and ensure that all parents have opportunities for involvement, then social class and parents’ level of education decrease or disappear as important factors” (Ankrum, 2016, p. 167-168).

Once you have established a good foundation with these families you can then begin to help them help their child without making them feel inferior to you. “The most significant type of involvement is what parents do at home. By monitoring, supporting and advocating, parents can be engaged in ways that ensure that their children have every opportunity for success” (Garcia & Thornton, 2015). Once you have established a relationship with the child’s family you have an open line of communication and can express the expectations of the parents in their child’s education. Parents will be most likely be more willing to accept advice when you already have a good relationship with the family, and they feel that they are not being judged.

The socioeconomic status of the families we work with can be a huge barrier, but only if you let it. Some families will resist no matter how hard you try, but if you make the effort and let these families know how important they are to their child’s education then they should want to do what is best for their child; which is to have a strong relationship with the teachers and the school. Regardless of socioeconomic status. Having more money should not mean that you or your child get a better education.

**Subchapter 2: School-Community Relations in the Era of Social Media, Dakota Taylor**

Social media is often misused in school districts with strict rules against cell phone use and school administration not embracing it as a positive network to connect groups and community members. School and community relations can be improved and enhanced through sharing positive function within the school walls and allowing stakeholders to feel involved on the outside. Administrative use of social media as a communication liaison for the community to view and see consistency can strengthen school and community relations. Embracing and utilizing social media rather than denying it to students, allowing stakeholders to only hear about negativity on social media, and not sharing school events and continuous improvement can be detrimental to student learning and school to community relations.

**Literature Summary**

The corner stone of this research is based on improving community relations in order to increase student success, achievement, and sense of belonging. Student, community, and all other success is predicated on the ability to communicate knowledge effectively and efficiently. It takes a village or community to raise a child is the perfect cliché for known research answers to school-community relations. According to an Australian social work study, *Building School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Developing a Theoretical Framework*,

Parent engagement and partnerships through activities and processes— which entail better communication about children’s progress, volunteering in school programs, and involvement in school decision-making committees—enable parents to be more involved in their children’s education and provide supportive learning environments. This in turn, has a positive impact on the child’s performance. (Frederico, 2016, p.52)

Engagement and partnerships must be the response to school-community relations. Educators and school leaders must understand that utilizing community members through collaboration and/or partnerships can foster a social learning environment for the entire school district and community. Embracing and giving parents, guardians, community members, and professionals a meaningful voice while simultaneously utilizing a social media platform that facilitates everyone’s engagement in group discussion boards, mentorships, virtual lessons, as well as the viewing of positive events and learning experiences happening inside the school and in the community. Allowing all community members to partake in student learning will impact school districts and make a difference in our young adolescent’s lives and their view of community.

Furthermore, social media provides our society (students, parents, stakeholders, and school staff) the possibility of obtaining instantaneous and fast-moving information. The Social Learning Theory, “posits that people learn from one another, via observation, imitation, and modeling. The theory has often been called a bridge between behaviorist and cognitive learning theories because it encompasses attention, memory, and motivation” (theorized by Albert Bandura). In the scholarly journal, *Computers in Human Behavior*, Yen reiterates that “social learning allows learners to receive timely information and… this type of learning pursues the idea of sharing… special interests, news, entertainments, monitoring, reviews, etc., and introduces a new type of material for learning (Yen, 2019, p. 15). Cultural and textual knowledge and development is vital to our ability to infer meaning and acquire tacit knowledge.

With that in mind, it is important to note that “tacit knowledge is also regarded as being the most valuable source of knowledge, and the most likely to lead to breakthroughs in the organization and the lack of focus on tacit knowledge directly [leads] to the reduced capability for innovation and sustained competitiveness” (Patel, 2012, p. 135). Essentially, tacit knowledge is individualized knowledge through personal/lived experiences and individual perceptions of socialization.

Moreover, meaningful social, cultural, and communal exchanges are irreplaceable. Group engagement can be extremely effective and timely through crowdsourcing: grouping experts together to collaborate on a task or to facilitate useful information. In the *Journal of Business Perspective*, Saxena states…

Since Facebook is the biggest platform among all social media, it seems to be

great opportunity to promote marketers’ business and market products on

Facebook. In the meantime, advertisers make use of the opportunity to create

more business profits on account of the huge rate of page views on Facebook.

Therefore, the reasons for using Facebook on digital advertising are worth

analyzing (Saxena, 2013, p.20).

Because of Facebook’s widely used network and marketability, there is no doubt that allowing stakeholders to be a part of the school’s social media platform will lead to increased school to community support. If used properly and effectively by school leaders, administrators, and teachers, social media and Facebook groups can promote positive school to community knowledge management, parent involvement, and most importantly increase student academic achievement, which leads to a higher level of organizational and community knowledge quality.

**Analysis of the Literature Summary**

All school districts should be proactive toward the improvement of school to community relations. Communication is vital to social learning, and network/media platforms create endless opportunities to obtain cultural and social knowledge. Positivity and involvement should radiate from the school to the community. Blending school and community professionals with motivated students into a social media group or mentor program that includes modeling, supportive teacher-student and principal-community relations, as well as family support and mental health and wellness assistance can be utilized to facilitate and develop a safer school and community environment. This facilitation will need administration, teacher, and staff buy-in in order to forge caring relationships, align the school district’s mission and vision, and developing strategies to maintain appropriate social behavior.

Largely, a 2019-2020 social media school improvement plan must focus on proper social media use by staff, students, and stakeholders. The community needs school personnel to be proactive with them through sending out daily school information and positivity, building social/cultural/tacit knowledge through groups/teams, and deflecting negative social media feeds about the school and educating everyone about cyberbullying. The first step is for school districts to be less reactive toward cell phones by retaining strict policies and rules. Reactive is not the best policy, although contrarians to cell phone and social media implementation believe there is no place for social media in schools and that it is a distraction. However, it is extremely important to be positive and proactive rather than to go against social change and the advancements of technology. Hand-held electronic devices add an entirely new dimension to social and cultural learning.

**Application of Social Media to the Operation of a School**

How should we use social media to foster positive school to community relations, school improvement, and a shared vision? School district leadership and administrators must be proactive instead of reactive toward social media because it can be the first step toward the work that needs to be done on the reciprocal relationships between the two sectors (school and community). District and building level school administration must utilize social media as a communication liaison for the community. Teacher and stakeholder buy-in will be critical during the promotion stage in case there is a decision made to fund the schools directly for a full-time or part-time communication liaison or project coordinator. Administration must take-the-lead on the implementation of school based social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) through a servant, transformational, and an open/social system that blends positive change, service to others, communication, and openness. Lastly and of most importance, students (as well as stakeholders) can provide a powerful perspective if given the platform or group forum necessary to collaborate and gain community knowledge. Social media can be the bridge that allows our students and community members (mentors, professionals) to witness the value of schools.

The implementation plan will begin by meeting with the leadership team members to develop the outline of the SIP. Next, we must make teachers and staff aware of the implementation and give expectations. For example, the yearbook teacher will need to begin formulating a school year book via Facebook and Instagram. Teacher expectations for this will be to promote positive events and learning that is happening within our school walls. The more positive information going out, then the more positive feedback and perception we will receive. Eventually, we will implement private Facebook groups that students will have access to. These groups will need community members and professionals to buy-in and volunteer their time to discuss. They would be expected to become mentors and/or answer questions about their profession and duty to the community. For example, the extracurricular club (Student Council) will follow a group that will seek to include the city mayor, county commissioner, and other important decision-makers in our community. Another example would be for the Common Pleas Juvenile Court to answer student questions regarding local and state laws. We will promote Facebook groups for mentors to put information and duties for motivated or interested students.

This proposed plan will be designed to link extracurricular clubs, academic teachers, athletic/academic teams, and eventually be a building block of building a more engaged community. Group mentors can also assist by becoming available for hands-on field trips or projects specific to their profession or coming in to speak. These professionals include but is not limited to careers in financing, managing, electrician, history, engineering, art, chemical plant, service, sewer plant, water treatment plant, public health, nursing, innovation, energy, mayor, greenhouse and farming, lawyers, and local common pleas juvenile court.

**Subchapter 3: Relations that occur when Learning is based upon and Integrated with a sense of Place (i.e., placed-based learning), Samantha Howell**

Place-Based Education is the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in Language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and other subjects across the curriculum (Sobel, pg.6). This allows students to learn through an integrated instructional approach and it links classroom learning with authentic, meaningful applications. Place-based education also allows the schools and communities to connect and work together.

After researching several articles, place-based learning is starting to have a great impact on schools. This idea is challenging the way teachers and students think. In David Sobel’s quote, “Place-based education is taking root in urban and rural, northern and southern, well-to-do and rough-around-the-edges schools and communities across the country.” Place-based learning can happen in all schools and can be incorporated from Pre-K all the way to 12th grade. Teachers and administrators fear change in moving from the traditional paper and pencil approach to a more hands-on approach to learning. They are afraid that the standards will not be met and that the students will not perform well on the state tests if place-based education is taking place. The truth is that standards can still be addressed through place-based learning. This learning is more meaningful to the students and when they are able to connect their learning to real-life situations, they become more engaged and the learning sticks with them. There were so many examples in the articles that I found to incorporate place-based learning in all grade levels.

One example that I found to be really interesting was from an article from David Sobel. It took place at Littleton High School. The students at Littleton High School were in need of a marketing classroom but they did not have the funding to provide one. There was a general store named Chutter’s General Store and they were having a problem in keeping up with their Internet sales and being able to pay workers to run this department for them. The teachers and the general store came up with a solution to their problem. They decided to work together to solve their problems. The general store had an empty basement that the marketing class could host their class in. In return, the marketing students ran the Internet sales for the general store. The students got to have a space for their class and in return they helped out the general store all the while getting actual marketing experiences. This made the students really be a part of their community and learn important skills about marketing that could help then with their future careers. Through a balanced focus on economic development and environmental preservation, the community gets revitalized and the state curriculum standards are still met. This was just one example of how place-based learning can be incorporated into everyday school lives (Sobel, pg. 2).

A speaker, Shannon Hanks, summarized the Place-based approach as the “Sesame Street Approach”. I really liked this approach and it refers to place-based education as learning about yourself, your family, and your neighborhood. It is also referred to as using your location as a lab to help make meaning to children and help them engage in their learning with the things around them (2017, pg.2).

The three main goals of Place-Based Learning are to impact communities, increase student and teacher engagement, and boost academic outcomes for students (2017, pg.4). PBL can happen anytime and anywhere. With place-based learning, it enables personalized learning. It gives students a voice and a choice in determining what, how, when, and where they learn. The learning can tailor to each student’s individual strengths, needs, and interests. The mastery if high-academic standards can still be met with using PBL.

There are so many benefits of place-based education to students and teachers. The learning experiences are student-centered and personalized. It allows the students to connect with their local communities. Lessons can be inquiry-based, and design-thinking can be encouraged for all students. Students can still meet the learning standards with a connection to meet the deeper learning outcomes and have a deeper understanding of what they are learning. With Place-Based Education, you can also incorporate project-based learning and incorporate instruction through all subject areas such as: Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Science, and Writing.

One of the main benefits is that students can gain a better appreciation and understanding of the world around them. Inquiry-Based learning is grounded in students making observations and learning to ask questions. Students are expected to make predictions and collect their own data to help them understand the economic, ecological, and socio-political world. Another important factor about PBL is the community serves as a classroom. Communities serve as a learning ecosystem for schools. This allows local and regional experts to be a part of the learning. In teaching, teachers are expected to make the learning relevant to real-life experiences. PBL allows the curriculum to match real-life experiences and incorporate all disciplines throughout their learning experiences.

The role of the principal in place-based learning is extremely important. The principal has to be willing to say “YES”. They have to be supportive of the teachers when transitioning to this new way of learning. The principal would be an advocate for the community and to get the superintendent on board with Place-Based Education. The principal would also be a voice to try and get funding for different projects. The community members would be more willing to get involved if the information is coming from the leader of the school. The school schedule and flexibility of the schedule would also be an important job of the principal to help allow these meaningful experiences to take place. The leadership roles from the principal will include servant leadership, instructional leadership, and also being a transformational leader and allowing change in the school. The principal would also need to provide training about PBL to the staff so that they can gain a higher understanding of the concept. In order to do this, the principal needs to be educated as well.

Place-Based Education would have a positive impact on the school in all areas. The teachers and students would be more engaged in their learning. It would allow the students to learn about the world around them and to be invested in their community. PBL would also make communities be more invested in their schools and the students. This would help to create a successful partnership between the school and the community. The principal and teachers would need to communicate to parents about PBL and the meaningful experiences that their children are going to be having. The parents and community would need to be encouraged to be involved as much as they can. Social media could also come into play with communicating these experiences with the parents and the community.

**Conclusion**

“It takes a village to raise a child”. We’ve all heard it, but as cliché as it sounds; it’s true. According to the National Educational Association research proves that when there is a strong relationship between the family, school, and community children are more likely to succeed. These children are less likely to drop out and more likely to go on to receive a higher education. This positive relationship can help not only the children from middle and high class families, but it can also help children from low SES families “beat the statistic” and do better for themselves and their own future families. The foundation to building these strong relationships is through communication; whether that be a simple call home, positive encouragement on social media, or through the community relations of Place Based Learning.

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