

Preface

Did you know that the United Way was originally started by five people? Five well-intended people saw the need for citizens to get together to address their community needs. They collaborated around a common vision of health and education, and more than 125 years later, the United Way is present in more than 45 countries and territories around the world, growing and sustaining that work. Whether or not the United Way inspires you to action, the concept of starting off small and growing into something much bigger is a common story in our culture. This book asks readers to consider how their individual action could lead to a radical change in the way we approach education today.

Community-based learning is an educational strategy. Community-based learning calls educators to invite the community into their classroom, but not in the typical “guest lecture” fashion. Instead, educators are asked to involve the community member in the planning of the curriculum so that the educational experiences can be connected to the work that is happening in the community.

Imagine a math lesson that asks students to use fractions. Think of the businesses and organizations in your community that apply this knowledge every day! What if you brought in the owner of a small gift shop and asked her help in teaching fractions? Students might end up pricing various items and figuring out the tipping point for profit through markdowns. Not only would this be an engaging lesson for a variety of reasons, but in the end, the educator and the community business owner would have built a powerful connection.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

In this day and age, when curriculum needs to be more relevant and community support for schools is fragile, community-based learning offers educators a way to address both challenges with one solution. This book was written to help educators understand and ultimately be able to replicate the practice of community-based learning. Chapters 1 and 2 give an overview and rationale for the practice. Chapter 3 establishes the framework for systemic implementation of the practice. Chapter 4 goes in-depth with a case study of a school that implemented the practice on a moderate scale, with 75 high school students. Chapters 5 and 6 analyze important instructional and leadership practices, while Chapter 7 addresses common barriers to the implementation of the practice. Those in leadership positions will find helpful strategies in Chapter 8, and Chapter 9 gives educators ideas for taking that “first step.”

Each chapter includes examples from around the world where similar practices are taking place. The chapters also include questions for your reflection. For community-based learning to be successful, it must align to your mission, vision, and goals. These questions were designed to help you take the concepts presented and explore the possibilities within your own setting.

Many books on school-community relations will explain the importance of stakeholder involvement. Those types of books help the reader who is interested in understanding traditional school-community relationships. This book is intended to give readers a practical, how-to guide to an innovative approach for building a strong community bond while deepening learning experiences. For those needing to do both, community-based learning is a concept worth investigating.

“One” is a very powerful number. *Community-Based Learning: Awakening the Mission of Public Schools* gives you the tools to initiate change from a single classroom. You, as a single educator, have the ability to engage in an instructional strategy that can potentially positively impact the entire system, from your students to the community in which you educate. The changes in the education world grow with each year. How will you rise to the challenge and be that educator who finds innovative solutions to the increasing challenges? Community-based learning is a great place to start.