

BOOK REVIEW

Catherine M. Hands

*Pathways to community engagement in education.
Collaboration in diverse, urban neighborhood,
Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland,
2023, 267 pp., ISBN 978-3-031-33001-8 (eBook)*

Antonella Naudi Costa

University of Malta

This book is based on a research project in the city of Stirling in Ontario, Canada, focusing on four schools in underprivileged neighborhoods characterized by diverse cultures. As indicated in the title of this book, the author solidifies the meaning of collaboration within a community and provides an in-depth look at how collaboration between the schools and the community can serve as a catalyst for improving schools, enhancing educational attainment, and addressing the different learning needs of the students.

The author, who is a teacher by profession, is an educational researcher in Ontario. Her contribution is integrated into a wider study of collaboration, a concept that rose to prominence in the 1980s and has since experienced ongoing development. Hence, this research significance expands upon previous studies. Indeed, this book highlights the broader connection between communities and schools on a macro level, analyses the influences of processes and social environments on a micro level, and challenges the belief that schools can function autonomously from the community.

I was intrigued by the way that the author presents each chapter by using familiar comparisons to introduce new concepts. From the author's description of the mutually beneficial relationship among zebras, rhinos and woodpecker birds who exchange food and insect relief, she transitions into the interconnectedness of social systems, as exemplified by the transportation of the Sahara Desert Dust across ecosystems. In the

beginning of each chapter, those narratives provide the readers with a framework to comprehend the intricate field of community engagement in education. The author adeptly sets the stage for the upcoming chapter by introducing its primary theme, facilitating a smooth transition while maintaining a consistent focus on the significance of school community engagement.

This book is enhanced by rich literary sources to substantiate the researcher's findings. The author does not only rely on her own expertise in the field, but she also skillfully draws on renowned international experts. For readers who are still unfamiliar with the subject matter, some theoretical discussions might seem complex, however the author's writing style makes the book accessible to a broad audience. The author navigates through the theoretical underpinnings, policy implications and practical implementations within this educational sphere, captivating and involving the reader all the way. She takes a holistic approach to this study, drawing up both the sociological and ecological concepts as frameworks to understand the contextual elements that affect the collaboration process.

Case study methodology was adopted, which adds depth and credibility to the conclusions drawn, and enhances the understanding of community engagement across different urban contexts. In each chapter the author strategically incorporates first-hand accounts from interviews conducted with participants involved in this study; mainly professionals working in schools and community members from public and non-profit sectors, which serve to reinforce the significance of the results that emerged from this study. Out of the 95 interview subjects, there was only a representation of one community resident, also a parent of one of the students. A bigger representation of parents would have enriched the study even more, given that the parents or primary care givers can bring broader perspectives and insights about the students, thus their role in decision making processes is crucial. Indeed, this would prevent shifting the entire responsibility of the children's education solely on teachers.

The theme of connection and collaboration between various social environments resonates throughout this book. The author makes special reference to the partnership process between the school leaders and administrators, community members and students, highlighting the necessity to engage in and sustain collaboration and networking for fruitful results. The study also sheds light on how crucial it is for educators to go beyond their traditional role of academic instructors to cater for the unique strengths, challenges and backgrounds of each

student. In addition to this, when there is lack of motivation and interest to create opportunities for collaboration, community partnerships will encounter obstacles to commence new activities and to sustain them.

The author also considers the different diversities in the schools and through this research she gives evidence of how community collaboration had the capacity to address disparities in the provision of support to students who experience adverse life circumstances and who cannot reach their full potential academically. This study also makes a reference to mental health issues in students. The author shows that community engagement is needed to tackle the serious consequences of mental health illnesses in young students.

At the conclusion of each chapter, the readers are provided with a comprehensive summary of key points followed by recommendations and concluding reflections offering a deeper understanding of the chapter's content and encouraging further engagement on the subject matter. This book is intended for an audience who are actively engaged in the field of education, community development workers, youth workers, social workers based in community and educational settings, policymakers and all those professionals and members in the communities including parents who see the potential in the communities and schools as agents of change.

This research is about the schools and communities working together in contribution towards the overall educational success of students and youths. It also sheds light on the reality that obstacles and challenges to collaboration exist. Thus, professionals can use this book as a guide for further reference on the subject matter, and researchers can be inspired to explore the school-community and family collaborations even further.