

COMMUNITY BUILDING: PARENTS ALSO TEACH

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The knowledge building theory emphasizes the student's capacity to create knowledge since the early years. The 12 principles of knowledge building highlight the importance of the community as the foundation for a knowledgeable society (Scardamalia, 2002). Specifically, idea diversity, collective responsibility and democratizing knowledge strongly describe how learning occurs when all members of a community contribute together and are valued equally. However, knowledge building theory does not tackle the importance of the family as an essential part of the community.

Research has shown that family engagement has positive results on the development of literacy skills, fewer absences of students at the elementary level, among other benefits (Mapp, 2016). Additionally, studies suggest that parent's expectations about students' learning have long-lasting effects on student achievement (Froiland, Peterson & Davidson, 2013). Given the importance of engaging parents in educational communities, as well as the impact that communities have on learning building societies, the goal of this paper is to address the role of parents in a knowledge building society.

To address the shortage of theory about the role of parents on knowledge creation models, I decided to conduct a literature review in three steps. First, analyze literature that describes how parents can be engaged in their kids' education. Then, analyze the knowledge building framework and its relation to communities. Finally, involving families by asking parents of elementary and middle-school students what practices would promote their engagement in education. Given that the parents' opinion about their involvement is the least addressed topic on literature, this paper emphasizes that aspect over the others. Through an online survey, parents were asked to describe what actions schools can take to promote their engagement in the community. The results showed that almost half of the parents are interested in engaging with academic communities by having active participation in events, teamwork activities and by sharing their knowledge and experience with teachers and students. Additionally, one-third of those interviewed mentioned their interest on having more communication about the school system and practices, their kids' individual needs, and workshops where they can learn more about childhood development or subject-related content knowledge. These answers show that parents are willing to participate actively in educational environments and that they are interested in understanding the school system, academic practices and pedagogic strategies.

As a consequence for the existing research on the positive effects of family engagement and the parents' interest in participating actively at school settings, any further actions that look to create knowledge building communities must include three practices. First, share with them — design workshops for parents where they can learn about and understand knowledge building models deeply. By being aware of the principles and goals of this framework, they are more likely to create positive knowledge-creating practices outside of schools. Additionally, applying knowledge building principles outside of academic environments would be an enriching practice for students. Second, learn from them — Create strategies for parents' participation in knowledge-building activities and platforms like Knowledge Forum. Parents who support knowledge creation can enrich the discussions with their experience in different areas. However, if teachers do not address the first principle correctly, then parents might engage in negative practices that can interfere with the class' expectations and dynamics. Third, build with them — incorporate parent's ideas, knowledge and opinions during the development of new models for knowledge building communities. Valuing idea diversity and community engagement are essential practices for knowledge building. As part of the community, parents can provide a different insight that can be used to

create new practices. Additionally, utilizing families' experience in building new educational models would be a leading practice in education.

Knowledge building societies should not be reduced to school environments. By leaving families outside of the knowledge-creation process, we are losing valuable sources of experience, ideas and support. Parents are part of the community and will have a significant impact on the child's development whether we involve them on the learning process or not. Designing strategies to work alongside families will provide new ways to democratize knowledge. Above all, advancing knowledge is the base of this framework, and we can only achieve that by creating an active community that values all its members - teachers, students and parents- equally.

References

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