Book Review

Linking Adults with Community: Promoting Civic Engagement Through Community Based Learning

Susan C. Reed, Catherine Marienau (Editors)
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Human beings are social creatures. They learn to live and live to learn through social interactions they have with each other and their environment. Social interactions help individuals experience, comprehend, learn and develop their own life meaningfully to themselves, to others, and to society at large. The most significant platform where people can draw fruitful learning from social interactions as such is simply their own community. That makes community-based learning become attractively challenging approach to effective educational provision.

The 2008 summer issue of New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, "*Linking Adults with Community: Promoting Civic Engagement Through Community Based Learning*" provides ideas and practices of community-based learning in various forms of adult education programs aiming to increase active participatory contributions between learners and community. Organization of the issue is arranged through nine chapters. Chapter 1 considers outcomes in three domains of adult development including cognitive growth in terms of adult's ability to think in more complex ways and to considers a variety of perspectives, moral development in terms of individual developing an ethic of care which is the ability to balance one's needs with a responsibility to care for others, and psychosocial development in terms of generativity which is the ability to support and nurture the succeeding generation. Chapter 2 explores the diverse ways in which community-based learning strategies are used to enhance further development of adults, raising their level of educational attainment and their involvement in public and civic activities.

Highlighted by the next three chapters is discussion on selected projects and programs involving community-based learning. Chapter 3 discusses how adult students in a social work program were supported in heightening and deepening partnership between a university's faculty member and a social work practitioner, together with the development of professional values for social work students through structured reflection. Chapter 4 discusses establishment of community-based learning program in a community college, the results of a first-year evaluation, and subsequent redesign and evaluation. Chapter 5 puts the concepts of informal learning and learning to volunteering into context and explores three key areas in which volunteers learn, namely instrumental

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skills related to their organization, learning to work with others, and learning about the role of volunteering in society.

Key elements of community-based learning are then identified in Chapters 6 and 7. These elements involve distinctive characteristics of adult learners, perspectives of educators on teaching and learning, and role of reflection in learning to derive meaning from experience through a model of "learning from events". The last two chapters pinpoint the necessity for having community-based learning endured in educational practice. A call to action for a more engaged citizenry to advance adult development and building community is addressed in Chapter 8. Finally, Chapter 9 concludes the issue with an analysis of the factors that promote and sustain adult's commitment to community-based learning.

Note for the readers based on the review of this publication comprises at least three dimensions. Cognitively, all of the articles could inclusively be found as enhancing and broadening the readers' understanding of what community-based learning is all about. Once being informed at the first start that community-based learning is also known as service-learning, the readers may get an idea of interactions between "taking from" and "giving to" community through a learning process. The more the readers get informed by the content, the clearer their concept of community-based learning is framed. The readers might somehow beware of themselves at the end whether the concept of community-based learning they have had is as it actually is.

With respect to an affective dimension, the selected cases might impress the readers with reflective information on the results of community-based learning. In accordance with community-based learning, learning should grow out of and has to provide contributions back to community, learners and community both gain benefits from the process. Not only are positive evidences informed, disadvantages of community-based learning are also notified. Double reflections as such might bring the

readers to quest on the validity and reliability of this approach to learning which would be an inviting challenge for the readers to get into further inquiry.

To the extent of literal dimension, the publication is easy to follow. Language is neither too simple nor academic intensive. The readers could find the content comprehensible in no time. The presentation of each article achieves the publication's purpose to convey clear, accurate, and practical information on community-based learning to the readers conceptually and empirically in an academic style. Although tables and diagrams are presented only as needed, they are however productive in strengthening the propositions each particular article means to address.

Within the current context of educational reform in Thailand where community participation in educational provision has been given high priority, this publication could be referred to as a resource for rethinking about community-based learning concept and approach. Although it is in the area of adult education and development, the implication of community-based learning is seen to be applicable to the area of pedagogical strategy. The publication might propose message to those parties involving in the reform of Thai educational system whether community-based practice involves only local curriculum development and community support attainment or it should have been far more extensive and expansive.

As indicated by the publication, value of community as an educational partner should be extended to reach its quality of lifelong learning context and resource. Meaningful learning should be established from learners' engagement in community context where their learning interest, inquiry skills, public awareness, and civic responsibility develop (Chapters 3 and 7). Learning is seen to be extended further to produce service in respond to community needs and wellness which in turn nurtures their moral development as community members (Chapters 1, 2, 3).

Moreover, the design of community-based

learning programs is not for adult learners only. As indicated on the editors' note, this learning approach has been widely used by both high school and traditional-age students with a range of accredited outcomes including greater reflective abilities, personal growth, and the likelihood of volunteering after college (Editors' Note). It is however noted that the design of learning program should reflexively address the dimensions of community-learning as well as characteristics and conditions of learners (Chapters 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7).

Being brought into the area of human and community resource development, community-based learning could be valuable approach. Since human and community resource development highlights capacity building and enhancement at individual, organizational, and community levels, community-based learning is all that. Community-based learning approach encourages learners to obtain their personal development from learning activities and interactions within the context of their own living. Hence contributes to self-reflection and social responsibility. In another word, community-based learning instills in learners the quality of "open-minded" and service-minded. All organizational sectors within community could have wider chances to provide learning bases and resources. Community at large is thereby empowered through active participation and concrete learning network establishment. With additional contextual understanding, sustainability of human and community resource development could be seen as being achievable.

"*Linking Adults with Community: Promoting Civic Engagement Through Community Based Learning*" is recommended to be a resource to success in realization of educational reform for human and community resource development in Thailand.