
Issue Editors' Notes

LEARNING CROSSES boundaries—time boundaries, place boundaries, and people boundaries. Young people learn lots of things, in lots of ways, and in lots of settings. Policymakers zoom in on academic performance, but parents and young people understand two things very well. First, academic competence, although critical, is not enough to prepare young people for the responsibilities of either adolescence or adulthood. Second, academic competence cannot be nurtured in a vacuum; young people's cognitive development is inextricably linked to a range of other domains, such as social-emotional, psychological, physical, moral, and civic development.

Paul Hill, one of the authors of *It Takes a City*, suggests that “the traditional boundaries between the public school system's responsibilities and those of other community agencies are themselves part of the educational problem.”¹ Rather than reform schools, Hill and his colleagues suggest that communities ask a different question: How can our community use all its assets to provide the best education for all of our children?¹

The answer, wonderfully documented in the eight chapters in this volume, is to blur the lines and connect the dots. Asking teachers and learners where, when, why, and how learning happens almost immediately uncovers the need to see the school day and the school building not as fortresses of learning but anchor points on a learning continuum. Challenging assumptions about who wants to or needs to learn and about what learning is important can level the playing field among providers and move communities a step closer toward Hill's vision.

The first three chapters are broad in scope, challenging conventional notions of when, where, how, and why learning happens. In

Chapter One, Merita Irby, Karen Pittman, and Joel Tolman explore why expanding commitments to learning are critical and present a framework for thinking about broadened definitions of learning. In Chapter Two, Adria Steinberg, Cheryl Almeida, and Lili Allen describe characteristics of effective learning environments for urban adolescents and explore exciting new structures and organizational arrangements that are succeeding in meeting the needs of some of the most vulnerable youth. In Chapter Three, Richard Tagle describes how the Public Education Network is supporting the development of learning-centered communities and the important role that public engagement plays in broadening definitions and linking ideas and institutions.

The next two chapters focus primarily on learning that originates in the community—outside the school day and outside the school building—but the authors also explore the relationship between those learning experiences and the goals and practices of school-based learning. Joan Wynn describes in Chapter Four a framework for transforming the nonschool hours for teenagers and in particular explores the challenges that the After School Matters initiative in Chicago is facing, such as developing strategies for documenting and acknowledging the learning that happens across settings.

In Chapter Five, Lynn Dierking and John Falk discuss the nature and role of free-choice learning—learning that is intrinsically motivated and under the control of the learner—and how it can supplement the outcomes typically associated with schooling. They highlight programs offered by science museums and describe the impact such programs have on youth and families' understanding of science, future aspirations, and attitudes toward learning.

The two chapters that follow focus primarily on school-based learning, but consider how that learning can be enhanced and transformed through intentional connections to community. In Chapter Six, Thomas Del Prete and Laurie Ross describe the challenge of blurring school-community lines in the context of the Worcester, Massachusetts, district-community plan for reinventing high schools. In Chapter Seven, Martin Blank, Sheri DeBoe Johnson, and Bela Shah explore how the community can serve as a valuable resource for learning during not just the nonschool hours

but the school day itself. The authors bring to life the community-as-text concept by describing specific approaches and recommendations for moving this idea forward.

In the final chapter, Gil Noam explores the unique potential of after-school programs to support learning that is aligned with no single institution but rather emerges from new collaborative spaces formed by networks of community resources. In doing so, he illustrates varying degrees of bridging that takes place between after-school programs and schools.

The authors whose ideas are collected here share a steadfast belief in at least two principles: that young people are more engaged when they see connections between school-based learning and their community life and that schools are one of a range of learning environments that share responsibility for helping young people learn and develop. We believe that the chapters in this volume offer a collection of innovative ideas and concrete examples that can both inspire and equip practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to act on these principles.

Karen J. Pittman
Nicole Yohalem
Joel Tolman
Issue Editors

Notes

1. Hill, P., Campbell, C., & Harvey, J. (2000). *It takes a city: Getting serious about urban school reform*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press. p. 77.

KAREN J. PITTMAN is executive director of the Forum for Youth Investment, and president of Impact Strategies, both in Washington, D.C.

NICOLE YOHALEM is senior program manager at the Forum for Youth Investment in Washington, D.C.

JOEL TOLMAN is senior program associate at the Forum for Youth Investment in Washington, D.C.

