

Community Assets for Education (CAFÉ) Institute

Rationale: The Efficacy of Asset-based Community Development in the Educational Context

Community Assets for Education (CAFÉ) is a not-for profit society established in Alberta, 2007, aimed at helping communities build educational capacity through an integrative community development approach to leadership in education. Established and emerging research in social science and education formulates the basis for a framework that guides an asset-based approach to education. A consolidation of this supporting research is offered in this summary of the conceptual work by Jill Koch exploring the 'Efficacy of Asset-Based Community Development in the Educational Context'.

Introduction

A new vision for social change is emerging as the 21st century unfolds, which is founded on values of equity, democracy and diversity. Improving the human condition requires a global response that allows citizens to realize their individual and collective capacity. Central to this is education, which at all levels empowers people, strengthens nations, and is essential to achieving internationally mandated development goals. Efforts in education and development therefore must reflect changing global conditions and values as well as incorporate lessons learned from applied practice and emerging research. Contemporary practices must strive to engage the inherent resources of all stakeholders in building lifelong, supportive learning communities. The intent of this paper is to provide a rationale supporting the application of asset-based community development (ABCD) to the context of education.

Why Asset-Based Community Development?

The post-war conception of development in northern countries was one of a 'welfare state' in which government was perceived as having a duty to ensure certain fundamental living standards for all of its citizens (Hall & Midgley, 2004). A top-down strategy was advocated for central planning and regulation of the private sector in this approach. Modernization theory guided the belief that the economic gains from rapid urban-based industrialization would provide the basis for direct assistance to those less advantaged. In the international context, institutionalized conditions were imposed on less developed countries by the United States and Western European countries. The purpose of these conditions was to support economic growth efforts, which aimed for traditional societies to assume the modern qualities and values of more developed countries (Escobar, 1997; Hall & Midgley, 2004; Handleman, 2003). The target for development was primarily countries of the south characterized, for example, by lower post-colonial levels of living in terms of education, health, employment, and economic productivity or growth. During this period, the accepted practice was one in which external agencies/professionals designed, delivered, and directed all programs and services (Kahassay & Oakley, 1999). It was assumed that by introducing Western technology and ideas into impoverished countries, increased wealth and prosperity would be achieved thus reducing poverty and illness (Sawyer, 1995).

By the 1970's, this model of development and the viability of the comprehensive welfare state was being questioned. Anticipated outcomes such as reduced inequalities, had yet to be achieved and, as some scholars observed were in fact increasing (Foster, 1982; Esteva, 1992). It

was argued that this model of development failed to improve the human condition by not taking into account the needs and concerns of the people in which services were developed for (Kahassay & Oakley, 1999; Rahnema, 1992). A new populist or participatory approach to development emerged emphasizing the involvement of all people as community members in determining their own social welfare. A growing number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were instituted, whose flexible and entrepreneurial nature allowed them to be responsive directly to the people in the communities, thereby gaining prominence as key development agencies. Governments and NGOs from donor nations began to regularly partner with grassroots NGOs to implement programs at the local level. Policies promoting the integration of local input to improve standards of living began to dominate development practice. Significantly, the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) began a more coordinated mobilization among all sectors within the community, emphasizing the need to recognize unique national and cultural identities (M'Bow, 1976). This commitment to include community input materialized in programs with participatory structures, where needs and solutions were identified and derived from within the community with the assistance of development organizations.

One of the key implications of the shift from “top-down” to more democratic “bottom-up”, participatory approaches was the development of a range of research methods known collectively as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). Extending the ideology of Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), which inspired participatory learning in community development, PRA approach presents a variety of methodologies for engaging communities in the sharing of experience and knowledge. These techniques have been evolving from the late 1970s, based on a synthesis of lessons from applied practice related to action-reflection research, agro-system analysis, applied anthropology, field research on farming systems, and rapid rural appraisal methods. Chambers (1997), identifies the pillars of these alternative development strategies; role of outsiders as facilitators as opposed to dominators, opening of methods to effectively incorporate groups, and the promoting of partnerships and sharing of resources among stakeholders. With increased support at the field level, community-based approaches focusing on citizen engagement became increasingly mainstream in the 1990s. This ideology aimed to address existing imbalances in social, economic, and political power structures, based on the premise of human rights (Friedmann, 1992). This ideology reflected Seer’s (1972) vision of development, which focused on the basic right for citizens to reach their capacity. Instrumental in the transformation of this vision to development practice was the continued ability of the NGOs to work directly within communities to support local development.

Despite evidence of many successes at the grassroots level with people-centered approaches, key proponents of the post-development school of thought have questioned longer-term impacts of the post-war development (Escobar, 1997; Esteva, 1992). These leading theorists have argued the failure of development since World War II and supported Esteva’s account of the events of this era as “a calculation for the US to retain its hegemonic position in the post-war economy” (Esteva, 1992, p. 7). Escobar criticized the overall development practices of this period, observing that “development was – and continues to be for the most part – a top-down, ethnocentric and technocratic approach, which treated people and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of ‘progress’” (1997, p. 91). It was becoming more apparent than ever that the combined responsive efforts of the international and grassroots NGOs could not adequately overcome the imposing structures of governments and international governing agendas to achieve a desired level of sustainable social change.

In light of emerging post-development critique, global institutions in the 1990s continued their efforts by shifting to more people-centered and community-based development approaches. However, the complexity of the global situation continues to challenge those in development circles. Korten, a leading economist and proponent of people-centered development, presents evidence of the “global threefold human crisis of deepening poverty, social disintegration and environmental destruction” (1995, p. 21). These global conditions continue to motivate those people engaged in development efforts worldwide. In an evolving process, theorists and practitioners are now seeking to integrate development efforts into a new paradigm, building on lessons learned and the collective capacities within both northern and southern countries. The transition in development practice over the last half of the 20th century has seen several movements. First, ownership of the process shifted from foreign governments to the people by focusing on local capacity building, where the poor become the agents of their own development. Second, the vision of governments and funding institutions emphasize growth and development as satisfaction of basic needs with an emphasis on sustainability. Third, initiatives are increasingly being formulated from a national perspective with outside expertise and assistance continuing to be engaged as needed (Allen and Thomas, 2000, p. 35). This is currently reflected in global funding structures where donor institutions (e.g., World Bank, United Nations Development Program, United Nations Environment Program, Canadian International Development Agency) increasingly turn over funds and program responsibilities directly to national governments. Contemporary development practice necessitates the innovation and refinement of processes that reflect this changing vision.

Development organizations, foreign governments, and professionals are attempting to move from a paradigm of imparting expertise, to determining processes that allow communities to drive and engage fully in their own development. According to Wharf and Clague (1997, p. 11), Freire and Gutierrez first advocated for:

Conscientization, an approach anchored in the belief that we shall not have our great leap forward until the marginalized and exploited become the artisans of their own liberation – until their voices makes itself heard directly, without mediation, without interpreters. For Freire and Gutierrez, the oppressed not the professionals are the agents of change.

Asset-Based Community Development

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is a contemporary approach to facilitating community-driven development. ABCD was first proposed by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) as an alternative to the problem-centered approach to development most commonly adopted in urban communities in the United States. They recognized that traditional efforts to alleviate problems in communities result in an increased focus on deficits, compromising the community’s own capacity. This approach is perpetuated by a global funding system that requires leaders seeking support and resources to emphasize problem areas and deficiencies. Kretzmann and McKnight present an alternative approach that highlights and mobilizes the capacities of citizens as members of the greater community. Their research revealed that communities were already using existing resources and often it was the citizens who were driving the development process. Therefore, to capitalize on what communities were already doing well, the ABCD process was developed. This approach guides communities

through a strength-based asset inventory from which a vision and strategy for maximizing the collective potential of the community can be built.

In Canada, the Coady Institute at St. Francis Xavier University, Nova Scotia, is internationally renowned for its work with participatory models of community-based development and strongly advocates for the ABCD process. Mathie and Cunningham (2003), outline three key elements formulating the framework for the Coady's work with ABCD and international NGOs. First, the process is based on the practice of *Appreciative inquiry* (AI), first developed by Cooperider and Srivistva (1980) as an ethnographic model for examining the life of an organization through its positive elements. The second key element of the ABCD approach is the importance of mobilizing the networks and connections as advocated by social capital theory as a means of building capacity (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putman, 1993). Also fundamental to the development of this approach are the lessons learned from a third element – community economic development theory (Wharf & Clague, 1997). This framework is buttressed with a broad supportive theoretical base integrating essential elements of learning theory, psychological theories and organizational change theory. These key elements are presented to further the understanding of ABCD and to identify the theoretical connections of this approach with the goal of educational capacity building.

Appreciative Inquiry

Cooperider and Srivistva (1980) founded the AI process as a methodology for managing change, and as an approach to leadership and human development. The process focuses on discovering what is currently working well and how that can be extended throughout the organization. Originally developed for public management, AI is now emerging as an effective model for organizational change in both business and the non-profit sectors. (British Airways, NASA, United Religions Initiative, World Vision, Habitat for Humanity, Save the Children (Cooperider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003). Recognized for its basis in democratic, participatory methods, the AI model is increasingly being advocated by funding institutions (Ford Foundation, Synergos Institute, US Aid, CIDA). Mathie and Cunningham (2002, 2003) stress the relevance of AI to the ABCD approach for its strength in guiding communities to construct shared meaning and develop a collective, positive vision for change.

The implementation of AI centres on a whole system inquiry process using interviews designed to elicit stories of existing successes and capacity as a basis for envisioning future mobilization. In this process, a clear results-oriented vision for the organization emerges in relation to discovered potential. Participants capitalize on the generation of positive energy and explore the systemic structures needed to support or facilitate the delineated strategies. Cooperider, Whitney, and Stavros emphasize the centrality of the affirmative topic choice in guiding the cycle in a positive direction. "It is both the vision and the process for developing this vision, that create the energy to drive change throughout the organization (Johnson & Leavitt, 2001, p. 129).

AI presents an opportunity to move toward a paradigm of hope and optimism for development in today's environment. Leading psychologists increasingly note the negativity arising from a vocabulary of human deficit in the social sciences. (Cooperider, et al, 2004; Gergen, 1994; Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2004). These experts advocate finding ways for research and practice to move from a focus on the labeling and diagnoses of problems and disease to science that amplifies strengths and promotes resiliency. In development practice the concept of positive deviancy has been employed successfully by development

agencies as a means of presenting successful role models as the norm (Save the Children, ASHA for Education, India). Documentation of appreciative inquiry processes at the school level and within institutes of higher learning has demonstrated effectiveness in guiding organizational change. (Pinto & Curran, 1998; Quintanilla, 1999; English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003). Appreciative inquiry provides an optimistic starting point for the ABCD approach to assess and build capacity, and presents a positive orientation for educational change.

Social Capital

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) have based the ABCD approach primarily on the development of social capital. Leading social scientists have explored social capital theory to better understand the opportunities for individuals and their capacity within communities (Bourdieu, 1985; Coleman, 1988; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lin, 2000; Putman, 1993). These theorists differ in their orientation, yet fully concur that mobilization of social capital has the potential to affect desirable outcomes for individuals and communities.

Bourdieu first defined social capital as “the totality of actual and potential resources individuals can mobilize through membership in organizations and social networks” (Bourdieu, cited in McClenaghan, 2000, p. 567). Bourdieu emphasizes that the accumulation of social capital can serve to create closed structures that support power reproduction of the dominant class, resulting in unequal access to resources. However, Bourdieu also stresses the potential conversion of social capital to economic capital through opportunities based on social positioning.

James Coleman (1988) differs in his view of social capital, emphasizing the opportunities and resources inherent in creating social networks. Coleman’s work emphasizes the educational opportunities afforded to the learner through the development of relationships within and outside the family. Putman, along the lines of Coleman, refers to social capital as: “the connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (1993, p. 19). Putman notes a link between social capital and “civic virtue,” which he purports is most powerful within strong networks of reciprocal connections and relations, and makes a distinction between “bonding” and “bridging” social capital. Bonding social capital is described as the close relationships that tend to reinforce homogenous groups, such as those found in families, ethnic groups, and fraternal organizations, offering crucial support and reciprocity among particular segments of the community. Putman argues, however, that it is the bridging networks connecting across families, class and ethnic groups that have the greatest potential for social capital to serve as a social and economic equalizer.

The Government of Denmark’s Social Capital Initiative (1996) concluded that social capital was a key determinant of progress in a range of development projects and an important tool for poverty reduction (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001, p. xi). Social capital theory supports the need for development of multidimensional relationships across all segments and sectors of the community for effective development. With consideration to process design, social capital accumulation can serve to improve issues of power dynamics and fairness, and as an opportunity to maximize collective capabilities.

Community Economic Development Theory

Along with appreciative inquiry and social capital theory, ABCD incorporates the underlying premise of community economic development theory (CED). Community economic development theory has evolved from the combined perspective of three development paradigms

including the reform of economic systems, the building of economic capacities of individuals, and the endogenous development of economic capacities of the collective groups (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). A community economic development strategy focuses on livelihoods and addresses sustainability by examining the ways in which a particular society organizes work in terms of market and non-market institutions. A United Nations Development Plan identifies the principles of sustainable livelihood as “a holistic set of values that are non-exploitive, promote participation in decision making, emphasize the quality and creative nature of work, place needs over wants and foster healthy, mutually beneficial relationships between people and their environment” (Lawrence & Tate, 1997, p. 9). Applied CED theory offers an opportunity to redesign business strategies to incorporate a community perspective. Wharf and Clague (1997), argue that best practice demonstrates that Canadian community organizations integrating social and economic action experience cost effective solutions and durable results. By focusing strategies that allow communities to benefit from their own efforts of sustained development, the orientation of community economic development theory offers an opportunity to integrate social and economic development. The application of this theory promotes the development of human resource strategies, including education, for citizens to engage in their own capacity building toward poverty reduction and environmental as well as economic sustainability.

The ABCD process

Asset-based community development is a means to guide community-driven development, as opposed to offering a predetermined formula for implementation. A key element differentiating ABCD from past participatory models of development is the consistent strength-based orientation of the appreciative approach. An ABCD model allows the roles of the donor organization, local NGOs, or government to change from direct management of projects or programs to the provision of support and processes for the community to engage in their own development initiatives. ABCD requires a trained facilitator to assist the community in highlighting the contributions and linking of all stakeholders including individuals, associations, and institutions in order for a contextually relevant process to evolve. Supporting organizations may provide additional support in the form of training, space, resources, and assistance with evaluative and reporting procedures. Mathie and Cunningham (2002) emphasize the key role of local associations in empowering individuals and mobilizing their community building capacity, and stress the potential for both individuals and associations to bring institutions into the development process. They acknowledge that private businesses, public agencies, and international donors can tend to be organized and controlled by small groups, creating consumers and clients rather than producers and citizens. However, Mathie and Cunningham emphasize the critical role of the institutional representatives that recognize the limitations of the system to provide a bridge between the institutions and associations. Local governments can play a key role in an ABCD initiative by providing conducive and supportive policies, and access to information and resources. The strength of the ABCD process lies in the opportunity to link all stakeholders, including the institutions of the private sector, into the overall social and development goals of the community.

Increasingly, many businesses and corporations are giving serious consideration to fulfilling a role of social responsibility and community building. Private sector organizations can contribute by acting as a catalyst for the ABCD process, or by engaging in initiatives such as the creation of markets for community projects, provision of educational enrichment, building capacity for entrepreneurial skills, funding local initiatives, providing networking opportunities,

or addressing issues of policies and taxes (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). The Canadian International Development Agency policy reflects the growing focus on the private sector's role in development by encouraging these organizations to partner with civil society, multilateral institutions, and other donors to support their efforts (CIDA, 2003). ABCD provides a potentially powerful framework in which the private sector can become integrally involved in the development process, as opposed to assuming a traditionally fragmented role where business is seen solely as an external source of income and charitable contributions. The integration of individuals, associations, and institutions among all sectors including education, health, and business is characteristic of a renewed holistic community-driven development model.

The format in which an ABCD approach can be applied varies according to the specific context of the community. However, in offering a general outline of how ABCD can be applied, Mathie and Cunningham (2003) suggest that the process begins with the AI collection of stories focusing on community successes in order to identify the capacities that have contributed to their prior achievements. Based on this inventory, a broadly representative group can then consolidate a community vision or plan, and map the capacities and assets of individuals, associations, and local institutions. Participatory processes can then be employed to outline the relational profile of the individuals, associations, and institutions in the community, and conduct a community economic analysis to assess the flow of resources in the community. Categorized skills and assets can then be matched with the previously articulated goals in order for the group to mobilize fully for economic and social development. These participatory processes may result in changes such as the development of community foundations or altered governance structures to sustain the process. Dewar (1997) perceives the ongoing monitoring process of an ABCD initiative as an asset for the community, and stresses foremost the need to adopt an outcome-based approach with evaluation criteria tied to community-generated goals to ensure internal motivation and external credibility. The community-driven nature of an ABCD process does not intend to negate the need for external assistance, but allows groups to determine how to effectively access and leverage any available funding and resources from both inside and outside the community to support locally defined development.

ABCD provides an opportunity to consolidate this information into a framework upon which development initiatives can be built. In 1970, when Freire first advocated for 'concientization' he emphasized the inherent need for people to think critically, pose problems, and develop interventions that affect the sociopolitical, economic and cultural realities of their own situations. Building on the fundamental premise of self-sufficiency and community ownership of the development process, a renewed, strength-based paradigm of ABCD shifts slightly, yet profoundly, as the emphasis moves from a starting point of internalized oppression to one of internalized empowerment. The positive orientation of an ABCD approach to social development presents a process consisted with the capacity building, democratic nature of the globally generated Millennium Development Goals for social development. These goals represent a partnership between developed countries and developing countries to address human development by focusing on poverty reduction, education, health, human rights and the environment (United Nations, 2000). A growing number of international organizations are currently implementing and exploring asset-based approaches to work toward these development goals (e.g., Department for International Development, UK; United Nations Development Program; Ford Foundation; Canadian International Development Agency).

ABCD and Education

ABCD offers potential for building educational capacity at the community level, consistent with global socio-economic conditions and advances in theoretical knowledge and applied practice in development and education. The educational context is shifting from the paternalistic, post-industrial “banking” approach to education, to a more participatory student-centered philosophy. However, the underlying principle of needs-based, problem-centered inquiry continues to dominate learning theory, policy and practice. Simultaneously, education is evolving to embrace a number of asset-based principles reflected in globally mandated goals of gender equity, diversity education, human rights and citizenship education, and acknowledgment of indigenous knowledge. Asset-based approaches such as those based on Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences (1991) and community-based school philosophies are only beginning to emerge as universally relevant strategies. Clearly, there exists a disconnect between the deficit-based theories that have traditionally guided education, and the universal mandate to incorporate asset-based principles, presenting a barrier for the realization of these goals (see appendix I). This study proposes that changing conditions and advances in theoretical knowledge are guiding educational reforms in policy, administration, curriculum and pedagogy along three predominant themes: democratization, decentralization, and holistic practices. The changing orientation in education reveals a context consistent with renewed approaches such as the appreciative, capacity building orientation of asset-based community development.

Democratization

The first theme of democratization is reflected in international mandates to improve the universal quality and access to education, the integration of human rights-based principles, and a shift toward participatory processes. The democratization of education is strongly reflected in the international mandate of the Millennium Development Goals. Supported by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a sectoral global strategy for achieving these goals has been articulated in UNESCO’s World Declaration on *Education for All* – EFA (United Nations, 2000). Increasing global access to education, improving the quality of school programs, and engaging young people in the solutions within their communities, are central to the EFA strategic plan. The Canadian government’s official development assistance policy identifies education as a basic human need, and has focused on the merits of basic education as a key priority area for its global social action planning. Canadian foreign policy reflects a recognition that the scope of basic learning needs and how they should be met varies with individual countries and cultures (CIDA, 2002). A predominant vision for education emerges that is grounded in the democratic principles of equity and social justice.

All citizens, governments, development institutions, and civil society organizations have a vested interest in achieving the EFA goals for education. Despite some progress over the past decade, the international community will not meet all articulated MDGs for education (Department for International Development, 2004). Although there has been a great deal of debate among educators and policy makers as to whether the goals have been realistically established, there appears to be a general consensus from educators regarding the desired vision. Internationally, educational goals aimed at improved quality increasingly emphasize the principles of human rights and are reflected in a myriad of initiatives and programs related to diversity and intercultural education, peace education, and social justice. These philosophical shifts guiding education reforms are also illustrated in the incorporation of citizenship education, which has come to the forefront within newly democratized countries. Osborne (2000) calls for a

renewed focus on citizenship in Canadian educational policy in order to prepare citizens for the increasing complexities of local, regional, national, and global communities. Addressing the learning needs inherent in these goals will require a capacity building orientation to education that reflects the changing values and guiding principles.

Educators throughout the world are exploring ways to adapt to a renewed vision of democratic participation and citizen responsibility to address complex social issues. The Department for International Development (UK) is indicative of other global funding institutions in providing substantial support to organizations working to involve the participation of children in their own development. Successful outcomes resulting from programs supporting children's participation in education are increasingly being documented (eg. Malawi Free Primary Education Programme, bilateral programs with UNICEF, the Brazilian Youth Parliament, and the Commonwealth Youth programme). This community-driven philosophy supporting equal-voice for all that is emerging in educational practice, has influenced and been influenced by a global pedagogical shift from knowledge transmission to the building of participatory learning cultures. The paternalistic, didactic education practices from the time of the industrial revolution have increasingly shifted to more democratically aligned social constructivist and inquiry-based learning techniques.

Social constructivism reflects Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of learning, emphasizing the construction of knowledge based on the interaction between learners and mentors (Applefield, Huber, & Moallem, 2000; Gergen, 1997; Moshman, 2004). Gergen (1997) notes an increased emphasis on learning as a social process, where dialogue becomes the catalyst for acquiring meaning. Applefield et al, offer the concept of learning communities as the ideal learning culture for group instruction. The theoretical basis of social constructivism supports the building of inclusive educational environments, where learners, parents, community and educators engage in open dialogue and contribute as integral members of the learning community.

Not all authorities agree that this shift toward democracy is being sustained in reforms. Levin (2001) notes that current reform agendas are actually decreasing their attention to equity and focusing more on individual outcomes. This is cause for concern when the articulated goals for education are pointing in a different direction. "Educational systems have largely failed to address the needs of postmodern societies in relation to escalating societal complexity, globalization and technological advances" (Jenlinck, 2001, p. 283). With the global agenda being set, it remains to be seen whether the political will supports the full integration of the universally mandated goals for educational practice. Noddings (1999) argues that systemic reforms in education are aimed almost exclusively at increasing academic achievement of students and advocates a move from uniform standards, governance, and accountability to a renewal that promotes the discourse and engagement at the heart of liberal democracy.

Mezirow (1997) articulated transformational learning as the underlying goal for adult learners to develop independent thinking, and to develop the capacity to follow their beliefs and purpose in their actions. Based in Freire's theory of conscientization, where learning occurs through a dialogical process, transformational theory supports the creation of an environment where citizens engage in moral decision-making, through dialogue and critical reflection. This democratic vision for education requires an orientation in which the merits of all individuals and the community can be uncovered to formulate new possibilities for maximizing human potential. Although education has recently adopted asset-based goals of equity and democracy, contemporary participatory approaches continue to be based in a policy environment based within a problem-focused paradigm. Meeting the articulated goals of a democratic society

requires processes aligned with the changing context.

Decentralization

Also reflecting a participatory shift in education is the decentralization of educational processes and governance as a strategy to improve performance of schools. Decentralization initiatives are evidenced in changing administrative roles, community-based initiatives and increased levels of autonomy for parents and students. Levin (2001) argues that a key rationale for decentralization is both the general unhappiness with the perceived bureaucratic character of large school systems, and the issue of parental rights to influence and determine their child's education. The effects of decentralized strategies serve to bring the stakeholders closer to the interests of the learner, an aim well supported by research to positively affect learning.

The advantages found in increased stakeholder involvement in education is reflected in the relevance of social capital theory to education, which demonstrates a positive correlation between its many indicators and educational attainment, including economic status (Filmer & Pritchett, 1998), and parental involvement and expectations (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Israel & Beaulieu, 2002; Zhan & Sherriden, 2003). Christenson (2004) has consolidated research supporting overall family influences on education and concludes that potential contributions of the parents and greater community to the educational process must be acknowledged, incorporated and sustained. The barriers inherent in lower levels of familial social capital can be reinforced by the level of cultural capital, or the level of familiarity with dominant cultural codes and practices (Kilbride, 2004). The relationship between social and cultural capital indicates that social inequities are perpetuated when educational systems fail to acknowledge and validate cultural capital of those outside the dominant group (Hébert, Sun & Kowch, 2004; Kilbride, 2004; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

The correlation of the social capital indicators relating to parent and family involvement with educational attainment strongly supports the rationale for decentralization strategies. A sectoral example of community-driven development is well documented in the *EDUCO* project of El Salvador (1991), in which educational reforms were instituted at the national, regional, and local level to increase community ownership and autonomy. Self-managed community associations comprised of students, parents, and community at large were empowered with control of relevant budgets and teacher management. Significant increases in educational attainment levels and decreased attrition rates were demonstrated over the course of the project (Jimenez & Sawada, 2003). The "EDUCO effect" was explained by Jimenez and Sawada as the result of "intensive community participation, a better classroom environment, and careful teacher management" (p. 8).

Jimenez and Sawada's (1998) research on community managed schools in the Philippines shows parental involvement impacting attendance rates, and improvements in quality as pressure was placed on the provider to improve services. Preliminary results from these community-managed schools show a decreased cost without a negative effect on enrollment or quality of delivery. Further evidence that community management and accountability are improving educational outcomes can be seen in the research and initiatives of Escuela Nueva (2004), UNESCO, Colombia (2004), the Shiksha Karmi project in India (Ramachandran, & Sethi, 2001). These initiatives confirm the positive impact of the engagement of parents and the community on the experience of the student and efficiencies of delivery within the system. However, despite the many elements of education reorienting toward community-driven development, systemic constraints continue to restrict the involvement of all stakeholders. Theorists differ, not in the preferred vision, but in their perspective on the degree of changes to date in moving toward this

model. In the United States, Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) argue that schools are further centralized and distanced from the local communities thereby losing their people as valuable community resources. Kretzmann and McKnight strongly advocate for the capitalization of the resources centered in local schools as part of an overall community development plan to address economic revitalization. To attain the level of interaction between school and community envisioned by Kretzmann and McKnight, innovative processes must bring stakeholders together in partnerships for educational renewal.

Although international development ideology appears to be oriented toward a revitalized government commitment to improve base services, the reality in many countries is that national governments are continually reducing their commitment to the social service sector, which is reflected in changes in the education systems. Levin (2001) argues that in Canada, periods of economic uncertainty have resulted in efforts to deliver a service that would be less costly and more effective. Strengthened top-down policies resulted in the exclusion of groups from the system and less consensual policy. The environment of economic cutbacks that could be expected to catalyze community-driven measures as a means of improving services in difficult times, presented the opposite effect as government policies tightened to maintain power and control. Providing the processes to combine the potential of the students with the capitalization of resources within their families and community offers immense opportunity for change.

In Canada and internationally, however, there is currently evidence of shifts toward more decentralized policies. The Canadian International Development Agency is advocating for processes aimed at effectively integrating the civil society sector in working toward educational goals (CIDA, 2004). This signals openness on behalf of the federal government to relinquish power and autonomy to communities in the delivery of international education programs. Internationally, over 400 NGO's with an educational focus currently maintain official relations with UNESCO. Lopez, Kreider, and Coffman (2005) studied the role of national non-profit intermediary organizations in the United States and concluded that these organizations were able to successfully promote capacity in a number of ways including: program models, audience diversification, family-oriented approaches, and network building to promote learning and effective practice. Private sector support for educational initiatives is also growing, with funding and collaborative ventures in areas of scholarships, matching awards, technical expertise, career advice as well as research and infrastructure partnerships, and internship or mentorship programs. This emerging multi-sectoral interest for building educational capacity both within Canada and internationally further supports the need for processes that serve to effectively co-ordinate the efforts of these decentralized parties in achieving the same goals.

Lawrence and Tate (1997) outlined a proposal for the reinvention of education relating to the *UNDP Working Group on Sustainable Livelihoods*. They did so by addressing five critical elements:

1. Make equity and quality linked issues and build consensus for strategies that address them in tandem;
2. Achieve consensus on the elements that compromise quality;
3. Promote community based schools;
4. Systematically change the culture of the classroom (through the creation of teacher support networks, training for school supervisors, and outreach to pre-service institutions); and,
5. Assess the extent to which health, hunger, and nutrition constitute barriers to basic education and develop systematic plans for resolving these issues. (p. 13)

It can be argued that Lawrence and Tate's third critical element, the promotion of a community-based school model, presents a supportive environment and a viable framework in which to build and incorporate the remaining elements in a renewed educational strategy.

Community School Model

The community school philosophy presents an educational focus capitalizing on the inherent assets and resources within a school community. The community-based school model originated in the United States in the 1930s with a recreational focus, when educators began to open school facilities to the community after hours. The vision of community schools continues to be endorsed in the United States by the Coalition for Community Schools, who define a community school as one that is operating year round in a public school building, is open to all members of the community, and is jointly operated and financed through a partnership between the school system and one or more agencies. Families, students, principals, teachers and neighborhood residents decide together what happens at a community school (Harkavy & Blank, 2002). A community school integrates the strengths and resources of its members with the expertise of the educators and the school system to support the students directly, and to better assist the family and community in addressing the learning needs of the students.

In Canada, the Saskatchewan Department of Education is currently leading a resurgence toward this vision of community education by endorsing the philosophy of community involvement and lifelong learning for all public schools through the design of its *Schools^{plus}* program. This holistic model aims to support community partnerships to build capacity by involving family and community members in the development of health, nutrition, recreation, adult education, culture, and social justice services. The program envisions the school at the centre of the community, and works to enhance links between the school and community citizens, associations, and institutions (*Schools^{plus}, A Vision for Children and Youth*, Task Force, 2001). In research focused on outcomes of the community model, Dryfoos (2002) has recorded positive effects for students regarding attainment, healthy development, family life, attendance and safety, along with decreased dropout rates, suspensions and high-risk behaviors. Dryfoos notes that these results are corroborated by numerous reports from leading educational research institutes (e.g., the Academy for Educational Development, the Stanford Research Institute, the Chapin Hall Center for Children). Such findings make it attractive to advocate the suitability of the community school for building social capital across all levels of stakeholders within any community. The democratic and participatory nature of the model presents an environment supportive of endogenous development initiatives that are relevant to a school community's unique context.

In addition to the specifically designated community school model, there is growing support for generalized reforms to simply increase the interface between community and school (Ainsworth, 2002; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Christenson, 2004; Davies, 2002; Epstein, 1995). Successful accounts from a number of Winnipeg's inner city schools that are highly engaged with the community reinforce the importance of networks and communities, diversity, networking, belongingness, inclusion, valuing, and authenticity (Sutherland, & Sokal, 2003). Positive impacts were observed when community engagement increased, reinforcing the value for students to become active members of their own communities. Christenson (2004) suggests that moving to a culture of success requires a framework to direct efforts for engaging families within the educational process, and advocates a systems approach, where the dynamic influence of relationships among the systems provides this framework. The common underutilization of community resources due to a lack of processes within the school system becomes the challenge

to realizing the collective potential. Internationally, an increased focus on the school, family, and community interface as a means of addressing quality is being evidenced in multilateral development programmes such as the Egyptian Early Childhood Education (2004) initiative of CIDA, the World Bank, and the Egyptian Ministry of Education. This initiative specifically targets community involvement as a goal to increase kindergarten enrollment rates in Egypt. The global educational development programs, by nature of their integrated approach to development, may be further oriented to building holistic educational capacity than indicated by the educational goals of the industrialized nations to date. Research demonstrates, however, the potential benefits for all communities in decentralized processes, where parents, community, and school/students have increased involvement and autonomy within the educational system.

Holistic Approaches

The final emerging theme in education incorporates a holistic perspective toward policy and practice. First, an increased focus on the integrated development of the learner's intellectual, emotional, and physical well-being is being evidenced. Second, broad social development mandates including poverty reduction are increasingly being integrated into education. Finally, a holistic focus is seen in the development of inter-disciplinary and whole learning approaches to research and teaching. The complexity of influences impacting the experience of the learner warrants processes that can effectively integrate these factors to achieve successful outcomes.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) brings attention to the complexity of environmental influences impacting personal development in the systems ecological theory. This framework places the child at the centre of a multilayered system of influences starting with family, peers and schools, and extending outward to include the influences found through community associations and institutions. This theory focuses on the potential for personal support in the relationships formed among stakeholders across the different levels of the environmental system, with a shared interest in the child. Bronfenbrenner (1986) presents a consolidation of empirical evidence demonstrating a correlation between the child's positive development and the degree of influence of the parties and processes within each level. This model, along with evidence from other leading researchers (Ainsworth, 2002, Epstein, 1995; Howard & Johnson, 2000; Noddings, 1995), demonstrates that it is not only singular interventions, but also the cumulative effects of multidimensional relationships, influences and opportunities that affect the child's degree of resiliency and personal capacity. An adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's model demonstrates the complexity of relationships surrounding the learner, clearly affecting educational potential and opportunity (see appendix II).

This movement to a more holistic approach to education is also reflected in integrative practices linking curriculum, administration and research with social development goals. Organizations are increasing taking this approach to address development, particularly in communities lacking formalized resources (e.g. Teachers Without Borders). Canada's International Development Assistance fund has sponsored programs to implement holistic strategies aimed at shifting from traditional models of knowledge transmission to the building of learning cultures to address the overall goal of social and sustainable development of the communities. The positive correlation between educational attainment and increased socio-economic conditions provides the impetus for the development of these renewed strategies such as the human capability approach, which has demonstrated success in integrating educational and social development goals with economic development to maximize human potential (Sen, 1990).

Levin (2001), acknowledges the connection between educators and economic development, however, he cautions that the strong support for educational reforms initiated by business leaders

can present a risk that policy is driven by special interests and a global market agenda. However, it can be argued that in negating the potential contribution of the entire private sector to an educational community, a key institution is eliminated from the learner's support system as identified in the systems ecological model. The resistance expressed in Levin's (2001) research warrants an exploration for ways in which the business sector and economic development initiatives can support the learning environment, while concurrently reflecting the goals of the community and aiming to achieve goals of equity, social mobility and citizenship. The underlying premise for promoting the development of self-sufficiency and human potential is to ensure citizens the opportunity to impact their own socio-economic development and activate the potential educational advantages such as increased attainment rates related to higher socio-economic earnings.

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) suggest that there exists great-untapped potential for non-economic institutions such as schools to contribute to and build stronger local economies (p. 277). Depending on the policy environment and model of the school, the principles of community economic development theory that can be applied by schools may result in initiatives related to local purchasing, hiring, and investment strategies, developing new business, developing human resources, mobilizing external resources, and freeing potentially productive economic space. Engaging the principles of CED theory can contribute to the interrelated, overall socio-economic health of the community and offer a holistic perspective to incorporate educational capacity as a key social development goal.

The shifts toward democratization and decentralization of education are also reflected in holistic approaches to policy, curriculum design and pedagogy. The integration of subject matter in constructivist, whole-learning approaches to teaching returns the ownership of the learning process to the student and creates meaningful learning. Further evidence of holistic practices is reflected in the growing interest in interdisciplinary research and teaching, throughout all levels in the educational system (Stolpa, 2004). The holistic trend in educational practice is also reflected in the increased consideration of the development of the whole child, focusing on the interrelation of the emotional, physical, spiritual and cognitive aspects that determine well-being (Pintrich, 2000). The Government of Saskatchewan *Schools^{plus}* program views their community school model as the means to "develop the whole child, intellectually, socially, emotionally and physically" (*Schools^{plus}* – Saskatchewan Culture Youth and Recreation, para. 1). In implementing this policy program, the Saskatchewan government has clearly linked the overall development goals of the learner with the creation of an environment that broadens the relationships and networks of the child.

Socio-economic conditions, combined with advances in educational theory and practice are guiding educational reforms in policy, administration, curriculum, and pedagogy. Internationally, three predominant shifts in education have emerged to include democratization, decentralization and holistic approaches. This changing orientation reveals a context consistent with the appreciative capacity building orientation of an asset-based approach for developing educational capacity.

Discussion – Asset-based Community Development in the Educational Context

It is evident that the mobilization of the stakeholders across the environmental levels surrounding the learner warrants a multi-dimensional approach to educational capacity building. Lopez, Kreider, and Coffman (2005) outline the most common elements of family and school

capacity building requiring enhancement in today's increasingly complex educational environment. At the family level they advocate for building a parental sense of efficacy, a parental level of cultural capital, and expanded roles for parents in school governance and strategic planning. For schools, Lopez and colleagues call for increased effectiveness in forming partnerships with families, accountability to local communities, communication of complex policies, the bridging of cultural differences between schools and communities, and execution of best practices in governance, pedagogy and assessment (pp. 81-84). Levin (2001) furthers this argument by identifying key elements for meaningful and lasting school reform. He advocates for stakeholders to be collectively engaged in examining the reasoning behind the change. Levin also stresses the need for data to guide improvement, extensive staff development, and most importantly, for the processes to be centered on the value of learning to effect improvement. As much of the work to be done in building educational capacity clearly centers on the building of relationships and the engagement of stakeholders at all levels, asset-based community development offers an approach comprised of elements that are characteristic of effective educational reforms. This study reveals that harmonizing educational practice and policy with the principles and emerging goals of democratization, decentralization, and holistic development requires a capacity building orientation. ABCD has the potential to enhance this educational capacity at the societal, community, and the local school community levels.

Societal Level

For society at large, ABCD presents an approach consistent with the internationally mandated EFA goals to increase global access and quality of school programs, and engage young people in the democratic processes and solutions within their community. The focus of ABCD to build social capital provides an opportunity to maximize the collective potential of individuals, associations, and institutions. From a social justice perspective, ABCD presents an opportunity to bridge the foundations of learning, organizational change, and psychological theories within an asset-based paradigm reflecting the goals of inclusive, democratic education. A global strategy for poverty reduction has highlighted the potential for the integrated, holistic approaches to social development offered by an ABCD model.

Asset-based community development presents an opportunity to impact the ongoing social challenges presented by changing geopolitical and economic conditions through educational capacity building. Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) studied changes over four decades in the lives of youth in the United States and identified two emerging trends, which were reflected to a lesser extent in subsequent research conducted in other economically developed countries. The first revealed what authors refer to as 'growing chaos' in families, schools, and unsupervised peer groups, along with a progressive decline in measures of competence and character. Bronfenbrenner and Evans argue that these trends are manifesting in growing numbers of single parent families and complex family structures, violence in schools, levels of poverty, distrust and cynicism, and declining participation in democratic processes. The challenges of social development, according to these experts, indicate a lack of common focus and coordination between social systems at the micro-level of immediate settings (home, school, peer group) and in the dynamic mesosystem relations between these settings – family and school, family and peer-group, school and peer group (p. 120). Hébert, Sun, and Kowch (2004) address this growing theme of marginalization of individuals and groups of young people in Canada and other pluralistic countries, and advocate for research and policy to address the development of competencies, skills, networks, and other assets to promote the well-being of youth. The collaborative nature of ABCD applied to education could

serve to integrate the contributions coming from the decentralized sectoral (school), local government (school board and Ministry), and direct community support (school community) approaches to development. A process, which is designed to integrate the contributions of these stakeholders is advocated by the participants of the International Conference on Local Development as having the greatest potential for enhancing developmental capacity (World Bank, 2004b, p. 2).

Community Level

A local community perspective on education is offered by Ruth Ramsden-Wood, President of the United Way, Calgary chapter, in her address to the Centre for Leadership in Learning (University of Calgary, October, 16, 2002). Ramsden-Wood put forth an argument for increasing the role of social service and outside community agencies within the school system. She maintains that Canadian schools are inherently closed institutions that are trying to meet the entire social, emotional, and physical needs of the students without adequate resources or supports. From Ramsden-Wood's community perspective, an effective vision for public education parallels the supportive environment offered by the community school model, where the school as the centre of the community fulfills a crucial role in meeting the overall development needs of students. Ramsden-Wood calls for further support to integrate community services at the policy and funding level in Calgary. An ABCD model is consistent with characteristics of Ramsden-Wood's vision of school communities, a vision which involves incorporating existing resources and assets, providing an environment open to advocacy, building capacity to leverage for external funding and, most importantly, creating a supportive environment for the learner.

The theme of building a school-family-community interface into education is increasingly emphasized in educational planning and policy and supported by underlying research principles. Given the growing demographics of immigrants in Canada, the challenges associated with low levels of social and cultural capital exists to some degree within all school communities, and can then be manifested in the form of violence or inequities in educational attainment. Traditional educational methods tend to focus research on the problems in search of solutions. However, countless examples demonstrate the successful adaptation of immigrants to the educational system. It can be argued that understanding successful responses to specific issues such as the experience of immigrant education, through an 'ABCD lens,' has the potential to provide valuable insights for building success within that segment of the population. Most importantly, the process presents the opportunity to build a sense of efficacy for groups as they focus on successes to build strategies consistent with their existing capacities. "Only local groups can catalyze the commitments of local people and only those commitments can insure success in education and development efforts" (Kretzmann, & McKnight, 1993, p. 211).

School Community Level

School and community stakeholders stand to mutually benefit from the elements of engagement within an ABCD approach. Individual citizens will develop a sense of purpose, personal efficacy, and a feeling of caring and belongingness as they further their involvement and contributions to the community through the school. For local groups and associations, the development of relationships may assist in the process of meeting their own objectives, and provide an opportunity to make meaningful contributions to the community. The societal institutions including governments, universities, or religious organizations that become connected

at the community level will increase their capacity to provide responsive services to the public and develop efficiencies through collective efforts.

Scholars engaged in a Canadian federal government initiative, *Understanding the Early Years*, have been conducting research across Canada to assist communities in understanding and improving their capacity related to supporting child development. A longitudinal survey measuring used to measure school readiness for grade one (Kohen, Hertzman, & Brooks-Gunn, 1998) and the use of community-mapping exercises (Conner & Brink, 1999) have presented an opportunity to examine the link between preschool educational outcomes with family and community characteristics. Findings reveal the importance of family characteristics and community supports, and the need to develop social capital and economic opportunities for parents. Doherty (1991) advocates the provision of direct services targeted to the children through programs such as high quality daycare, or measures to help parents upgrade work skills to improve their financial capacity. He acknowledges a need for overall livelihood and capacity building development opportunities for parents who are often primarily focused on providing for the basic needs of their families. Clearly, direct-targeted services such as quality daycare can be part of the solution for achieving educational goals. It can be argued, however, that these services may be more effective and sustainable when initiated within a community-driven process based on a collective vision. The difference between the two approaches lies in the impetus for the change or intervention, which in the case of an ABCD model comes from within the school community.

Applied within an individual school, ABCD presents the opportunity for an expanded vision of the school community to assess individual strengths, assets and talents, and the combined capacities for providing educational support. A school learning culture can be promoted through the inclusion of those members with previously untapped, diverse sources of cultural capital. Opportunities exist for all stakeholders to afford an enabling environment for the learner by providing financial and physical resources. Social support can also be provided by caring parental or adult involvement through community networks, mentoring, expertise, and curriculum support. Christenson (2004) argues that educators seldom question the conditions that help a child make a personal investment in learning or recognize the degree to which children's family and school contexts are already complementing the learning environment. Asset-based community development provides a forum in which the cultural capital within the school community can be fully acknowledged, supported or enhanced for students to reach their full potential.

Sutherland and Sokal (2003) note that the term capacity building is often used in reference to marginalized groups in the educational system, but is rarely discussed as a pedagogical goal in for example, science instruction. Based on the foundational work of Freire (1970/2005), Sutherland and Sokal (2003) highlight the need to consider the context of the learner, an understanding of the pre-existent capacities of learners, and argue that educational interventions must take into account the different ways in which individuals and social groups are affected by the processes. Freire's (1970/2005) vision of the educator as a conduit for learning is consistent with the facilitative role of the educator in an ABCD approach. The nature of the ABCD approach will present teachers and parents with the opportunity to connect the learner with their own socio-cultural context.

Implications for Practice

Based on the consolidation of validated research, a number of applications can be considered for the adoption of the ABCD approach in the educational context. Developing educational capacity through a community-driven development approach holds promise from two key perspectives. First, it is proposed that an ABCD change process can be applied within a single

school, where the school community is defined by the stakeholders from within the school and from the citizens, associations and institutions of the greater geographic community. Second, educational capacity can be addressed within an integrative, holistic ABCD community development process originating from outside the school, but where the school is recognized as central to the overall development of the community. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) address the fact that rebuilding of low and moderate-income communities “from the bottom-up” requires the “mobilization and participation of all assets at hand and prominent among those assets are the local schools” (p. 1). In either application, the shift to an ABCD approach will have direct implications for all stakeholders within the educational community.

In a single school initiative, or as part of an overall community development project, the appreciative orientation is key to the implementation of the ABCD model. Appreciative inquiry provides an empowering framework for the community to assess their own capacity on which they will build. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) outline a traditional problem-centered, deficit-based map of a community that presents a paradigm upon which needs-assessments tend to guide development policy and practice. This perspective is then contrasted with an asset-based view of the same community. Appendix III illustrates an adaptation of this same exercise to a school context, highlighting notable differences in perceived potential and promise. The deficit-based model portrays the school community as a host of challenges and problems, where the asset-based model shifts the focus to existing strengths and capacities. This positive re-orientation toward education has potential implications to create an environment of practice based on hope and promise. Given the supportive theoretical and applied constructs, it can be concluded that an ABCD philosophy is relevant in all educational communities. However, it is evident that a number of specific contexts, both in Canada and internationally, are particularly suitable for an ABCD facilitated approach. First, the non-formal education sector, given a predominant focus on holistic social development goals and the incorporation of livelihood and capacity building initiatives presents a logical application. This sector is particularly evidenced in rural and remote communities located outside of the service realm of the formal education system. Northern and remote agricultural communities throughout Canada are also oriented to a holistic development approach as a means of developing self-sufficiency, sharing the challenge of building capacity with limited access to resources. Communities in Canada with high immigrant and refugee populations are also well suited for an ABCD approach to ensure that diverse cultural capital is engaged within a systemic structure of schooling that is being guided at the provincial or territorial level.

The international environment of refugee and post-conflict situations also presents a potentially effective application for an asset-based approach to education, where non-formal education is frequently engaged through a transition period until formal education can be re-established. UNESCO’s coordinated Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE) has generated a globally adopted set of minimum standards in which governments and other providers strive for in terms of educational quality and access in emergencies, chronic crises and the early reconstruction phase (2004). Community participation is identified as a key standard throughout all stages of assessment, planning, implementation and monitoring of the education programs. Given that the teachers in these situations may have little prior experience or formal qualifications, training in an ABCD orientation could guide teachers to engage community resources, and build on their own success whenever possible as a means of increasing capacity. Rural and remote communities, high immigrant populations, and the non-formal education sector, including refugee and post-conflict environments, clearly demonstrate suitability of an ABCD approach for building educational capacity. However, it is evident the benefits resulting from any

processes designed to build support within the environment of the learner would extend to all educational contexts.

With a great deal of variation in terms of application, asset-based policies and approaches are increasingly being adopted successfully in fields of social and human development. A number of educational organizations have taken this community building direction (e.g. Search Institute, Thrive, The Canadian Centre for Positive Youth Development, Claremont Graduate University, (B.A/M.A in Community Education), Teachers without Borders, Learning without Frontiers (UNESCO)). The impetus for these applications arises from desired improvement in areas of educational attainment levels, livelihood development, response to social issues, and curriculum development.

Implications for Stakeholders

There are implications in an ABCD approach for the role of all stakeholders within an educational community: administrators, teachers, parents, community members, community associations, institutions, and students. First, the role of the school administrator is of key relevance and may require a shift in leadership toward a more catalytic role. The administrator has a great deal of potential influence in which to guide a school community toward an appreciative approach. In doing so, however, it is logical to question the authenticity of the community-driven process if the change process appears to be institutionally driven. In a true community-driven change model, the parents and community stakeholders would initiate change processes within the school environment. However, an administrator has the opportunity to introduce an ABCD approach to a school by building on the momentum and energy from an existing initiative, or in response to an issue or need raised by the school community. The role of the administrator may be to act an emancipatory leader in facilitating an environment of openness and transparency to support an ABCD approach. In offering the school community a framework in which to channel their energy, the administrator can guide the stakeholders without directing the change. Leadership from the institution does not have to take away from the community driven aspect of the development, but will require the administrator to lead by stepping back.

The role of the “gapper,” identified by Mathie and Cunningham (2002), as the person responsible for linking the school and community institutions and associations, may logically fall to the school administrator or member of the parent’s council. An external facilitator, however, could fulfill this role and work closely with the school to help guide the process. The impetus for the change process and subsequent leadership may also arise from intermediary educational associations or other sectors of the community who take on this catalytic role, as evidenced in the case of Trident Exploration, an Alberta energy company, who has adopted an ABCD approach to community engagement in its area of influence in Alberta (Fisher, & Wills, 2005). In an effort to contribute to the socio-economic health of the community, different sectors can provide local schools with collaborative opportunities and a framework to generate community-based development. Whether the original inspiration for adopting a strength-based model such as ABCD in an educational community comes from the administration, outside agency, community, or governing bodies, the administrator will play a key role in building a case and supporting the process with all stakeholders.

The incorporation of an asset-based approach does not necessarily require a commitment to large-scale organizational school reform processes. Depending on the context, this scope of change may be overwhelming from the point of view of the administration or stakeholders driving the process. An administrator could introduce ABCD as a philosophy toward learning, administration,

and professional development. This approach can evolve with simple, yet profound, initiatives such as increasing the commitment to relationship building at all levels of the school community, engaging an asset-inventory process for the school community, contributing to the neighborhood economy whenever possible, or expanding current use of technologies to build communication networks. The approach can also be applied through a learning assessment tool, or as an economic capacity building model for school budgeting, or for the operation of the Parents Advisory Council. There is great potential to adopt an appreciative approach in the professional development of teachers, by engaging in a renewed emphasis on success stories and capacity building. The appeal of the ABCD approach is in the contextual relevance and potential for flexibility in its design.

It is recognized that a supportive policy environment and a commitment from school personnel is critical to successful community engagement. At an administrative level, the principal will need to be closely oriented to building the family-school-community interface and build on current successes to leverage external funding. Molnar (1999) has consolidated research addressing parental involvement in local school governance and outlined the support needed from administrators for successful parent involvement in local school reforms to include: the facilitation of trust and mutual respect between teachers and parents, joint training to increase effectiveness of parents and teachers, provision of training for school councils in the basics of governance, management, and educational policy and finance and community consultation, and the provision of specialized training for pre-service teachers, and staff development for practicing teachers in dealing with parents. (p. 8) These interventions illustrate some of the possible implications and considerations for the role of an administrator consistent with the ABCD approach.

An ABCD school based initiative presents implications for the parents as they become more engaged as valued contributors in the educational development of the child. Parents will generate and enhance opportunities to contribute to the greater community through activities centered on their child's education. As a learning culture develops, opportunities arise for parents to engage in lifelong learning, or to further their own socio-economic capacity for the benefit of the family and the community overall. An ABCD approach presents a situation where the parents' cultural capital may be validated, thereby potentially contributing to an increased sense of self-efficacy. This important element of capacity building directly impacts the experience of students, who are highly influenced by the attitude and expectations of the parent toward education.

The implications of an ABCD approach will vary for teachers according to their different starting points in level of openness with families and the community at large, and the degree of deficit versus an asset orientation. In line with a social constructivist approach to learning, ABCD supports the adoption of a capacity building approach within teaching practices. Curriculum activities can be explored from a strength-based orientation, by focusing on the lessons of previous success which are consistent with the fundamental principles of the asset-based goals they are working to achieve. Asset-based community development offers teachers a supportive environment in which to prepare students for learning in a world that has changed a great deal from the time of the teacher's educational experience. One of the challenges for teachers today is to manage the overwhelming amount of information and resources available in the community. As the complexities of the environment increases no longer can the teacher or the parent assume sole ownership of the learning process and well being of the child. ABCD provides a process to share responsibility and to stream the available information and resources into workable plans and initiatives.

Most importantly, an ABCD approach in the school environment will have implications for the learner. A community-based educational environment allows the learner to develop positive relationships with supportive adults, thereby accessing the potential benefits of social capital to positively affect attainment levels. The child benefits from the caring and nurturing environment, where cultural capital and capacities become validated as a key contribution to the school community.

Building a supportive environment around the shared interests of the learner has the potential to positively affect all stakeholders. As with any change process, however, key considerations must be attended to throughout the development to ensure relevance and equity. The focus of ABCD aims to equalize efforts over the community by utilizing all resources, sharing responsibility, and having succession planning built into any community initiatives that evolve. In line with organizational management endeavors proven to be effective in civil society organizations, training and support is critical within an ABCD application. Volunteer management is guided by a great deal of progress in research and processes, as such teachers and administrators who are not provided with the specialized skills in their training can be unprepared for the implications of this role. However, the traditional approach to “managing volunteers” shifts in a community driven orientation to one of collaboration where training may encompass processes that ensure the internal sharing of talents and skills within the community. In community-driven development initiatives, the transition in ownership of the process may bring forward issues of entitlement, which can be difficult to balance in a process advocating self-reliance. Moving to the self-sufficiency orientation of community-driven development, while continuing to advocate for the government to provide services requires a balanced orientation to educational policy.

Implications for Policy

A community-driven development approach cannot take place in isolation of the external policy environment. To engage the public, community-driven approaches in education must be introduced as an opportunity to increase effectiveness, rather than as a reactive response to lack of services. Educational communities must understand that participatory processes can prove to be empowering in building the social advocacy capacity that is required to pressure governments to fulfill their commitments. Stakeholder influence on systemic policy development is critical as schools are frequently functioning within a complex and constraining policy environment. The educational policy environment will both affect, and be affected by, the impacts of a community driven model. This educational policy environment evolves from a combination of forces or interests that influence the direction of change. Processes must be adapted to the complexity of organizational interests in order to effectively incorporate all stakeholders as central participants in the planning.

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) provide numerous accounts from ABCD oriented projects that have been successful in mobilizing the various sectors of the community and school together in a capacity building model. These initiatives creatively linked schools with community members, associations, public institutions, and the private sector, in developing mutually beneficial relationships, and applied community driven action plans. Characteristic of these successful ABCD oriented initiatives was the capacity arising from the personal and collective commitment of these stakeholders and the supportive environments provided by the governing bodies. Hébert, Sun, and Kowch (2004) advocate further exploration of models of school policy oriented to social capital policy accumulation and evolving partnerships between the public, associations, institutions and governments.

Levin (2001) addresses educational reform from an international perspective, presenting a model that illustrates the complexity of influences that determine the development and implementation of educational policy in a comparative study of educational reform. Levin clearly illustrates the distance of the learner, families, teachers, and administrators from the proximal influences and decision-making most closely affecting the policy environment. This model further supports the need for processes that build strong connections among stakeholders within the consultation process and present an open and responsive policy environment.

An ABCD approach to education has implications for policy related to the current paradigm of funding structures and government administration of education. As with any social service or development funding structure, school administrators are consistently required to emphasize problems and deficiencies in order to leverage funding. This orientation is contrary to an ABCD approach where community success is emphasized to leverage further support. At the donor level, flexibility and openness will be required in order to explore this renewed orientation. Increased autonomy at the community level requires donor organizations or governments to step back and maintain flexibility in their governance, specifically adapting to community generated goals in term of time-lines, results, and reporting. In order to facilitate this shift, Mathie and Cunningham (2003) recommend a slow moving and openly communicative process, and the ongoing use of successful examples of community-driven development to advocate for this changing paradigm.

Conclusion

Over the last two years there has been a remarkable growth in the number of asset-based applications in the various disciplines of social development. Although many of the foundational elements of ABCD are well supported in research, there is a need for further action research documenting both the individual elements of process and the specific application of an ABCD orientation to educational practice. This study has presented a review that supports the efficacy of an ABCD process in the educational context. The evolving shift in development from fragmented and paternalistic practice to holistic community driven models is increasingly mirrored in the educational context. Current developments in educational research, policy, and practice indicate similar shifts to reveal more inclusive, democratic processes for teaching and supporting the learner. Educators are struggling to address issues of social justice, diversity education, gender equity, and acknowledgment of indigenous knowledge in policy and practice. This study brings attention to a disconnect in the attempt to reach these asset-oriented, participatory goals of education, with learning theory and practices based primarily in the more traditional problem-solving paradigm. In order to effectively address the elements of a globally generated vision for education, conciliation between the intended outcomes and the approaches to be employed is indicated.

Asset-based community development provides an opportunity for the capitalization of the strengths and talents inherent in the collective environment of stakeholders surrounding the learner to impact educational capacity. Capacity moves beyond educational attainment, in terms of school success, to the development of citizens with the ability to make valuable contributions and moral decisions about their own development. A renewed focus on the contextual factors of reforms in development practice and education, along with a supporting theoretical foundation, clearly indicates the potential for ABCD to be applied at the school or community level. Building

educational capacity relevant to internationally mandated goals of equity and social justice requires a shift in orientation toward inclusive, participatory learning communities.

Gardner (1991) argues that education systems have not changed relative to the degree of transformation in today's society. He posits that educational systems must be built on the recognition of individual differences, and that learners must be highly literate, flexible, and capable of achieving deep understanding. He advocates different pathways for different communities and cultures, recognizing that "students, teachers, community members and policy makers can sort themselves according to the pathway that they favor" (p. 246). Gardner presents a vision of education where individuals develop a commitment to their community and to the larger world. Asset-based community development presents a pathway to building educational capacity, consistent with Gardner's emphasis on the capability of people to guide their own development. There is no doubt that in educational environments across the world there are countless examples of successful community-driven initiatives. Learning from these capacity building endeavors will provide a foundation for future stimulation of community-driven processes to support learners in reaching their full potential, and move educational practice significantly forward in the 21st century.

Source: Koch, J. (2007) The Efficacy of Asset-based community development in the educational context,

Appendix I

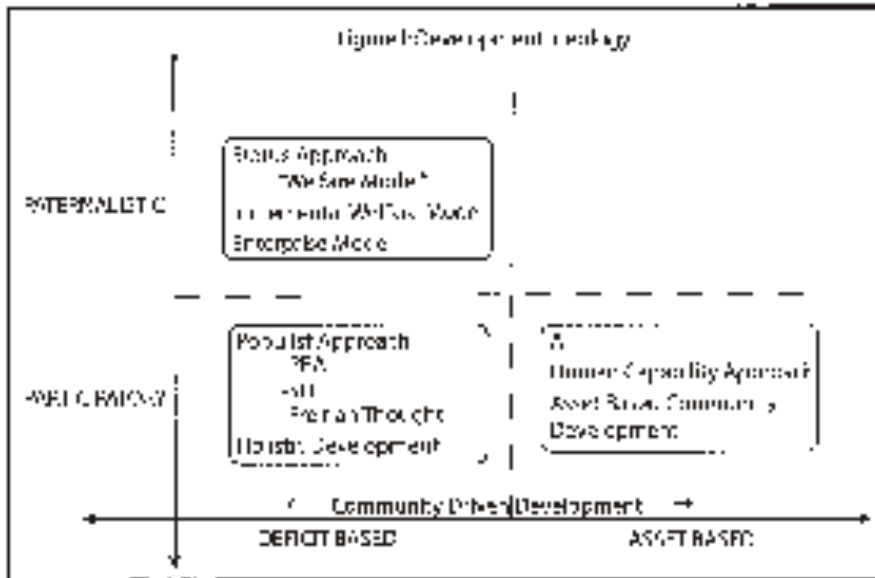


Figure 1. Shifting development ideology toward participatory and asset-based approaches.

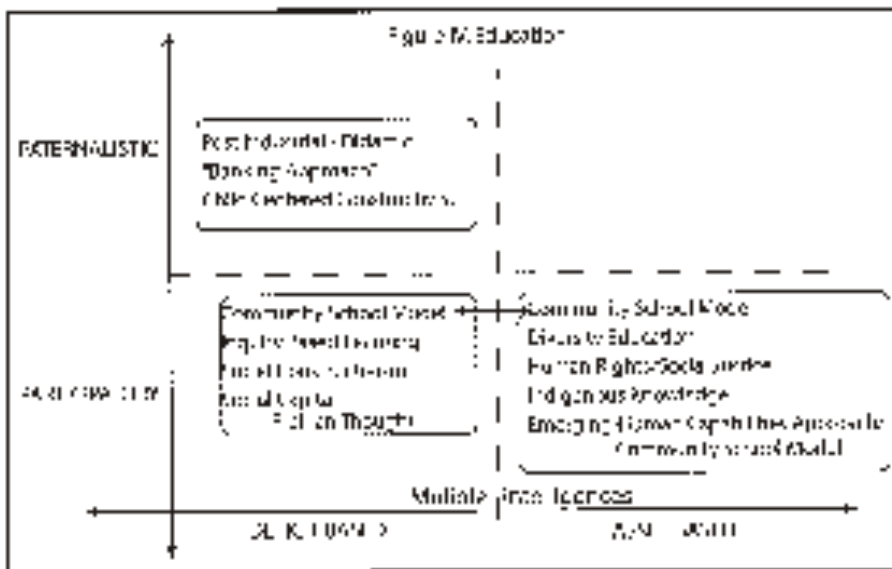


Figure 2. Shifting education ideology toward participatory and asset-based approaches.

Appendix II

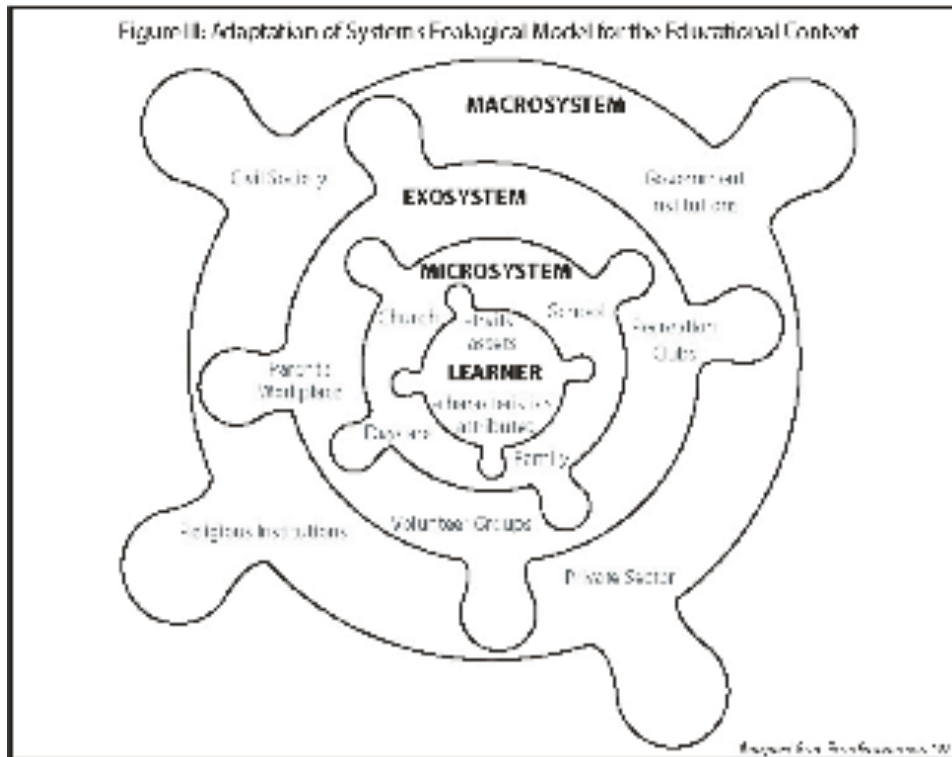


Figure 3. This conceptualization of the systems ecological model builds on the work of Sutherland and Sokal (2003).

Appendix III

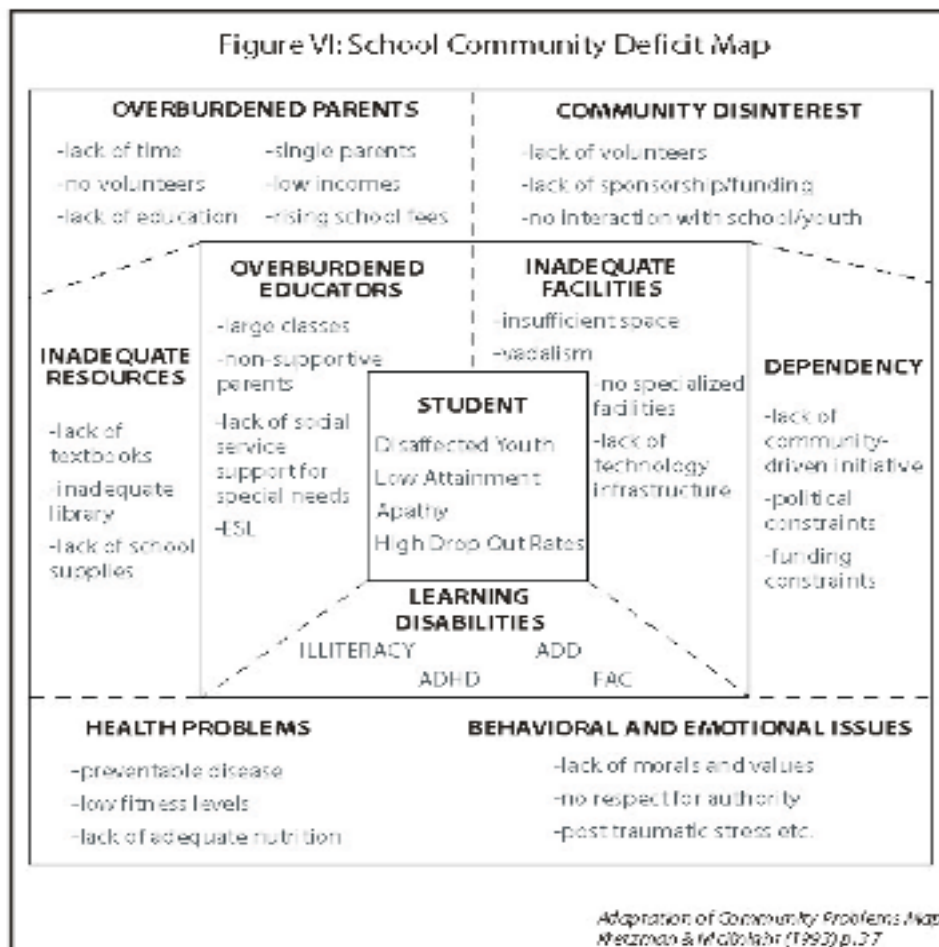


Figure 1. School Community Deficit Map (Adapted from Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993 for an educational context).

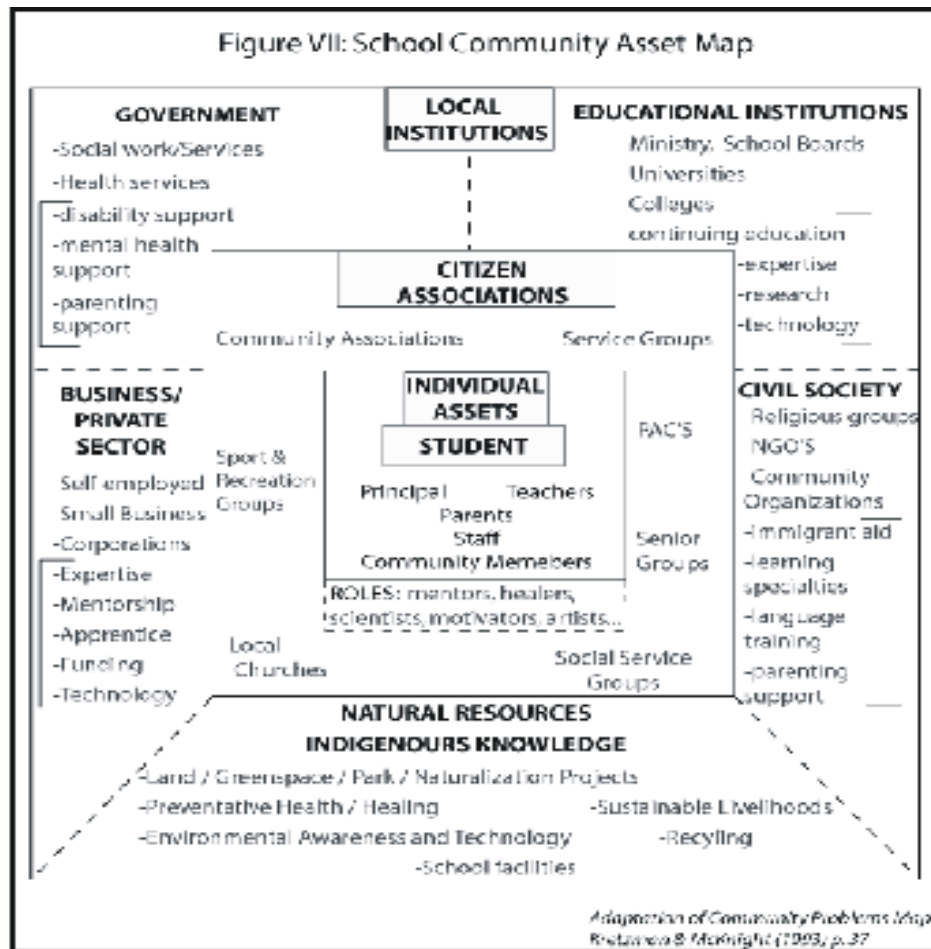


Figure 2. School Community Asset Map (Adapted from Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993 for an educational context).

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