

Guest Editor Introduction

Learning is often exclusively associated with what occurs within the walls of a classroom, which ignores educational experiences embedded in family and community-based activities. As a former urban educator, I hold a passion and appreciation for the powerful influence of a child's family and community. Learning outside of the classroom creates important consequences for children's achievement in school. In fact, children gain innumerable social and cognitive skills as part of their everyday family lives, as well as through community-based and extra-curricular activities. Although collaborating with families and communities is now viewed as an essential role for teachers and schools, the field still struggles to demystify the thoughts and behaviors of students' families, and capitalize upon opportunities in the community to support children's learning and development. For that reason, this special issue focused on children's education outside of the classroom. The general goal was to facilitate the sharing of family and community-oriented research, as well as prompt reflection and discussion on this important topic.

In the articles that follow, the authors offer a range of lenses into the lives of children and families through the study of language practices, alternative learning spaces, parental memories of school, and multigenerational community-events. Although each set of authors pursued distinct and diverse research questions, they all considered the strength and promise of families and communities. Their emphasis resides in unpacking the history and cultural values of families, and critiquing traditional practices that place some families at a disadvantage. The perspectives of these authors challenge the ubiquitous deficit-based discourse on families and communities, which focuses on what is "lacking" rather than the potential strengths of contexts outside of the school. I find each study unique, inspiring, and relevant to the current landscape of educational practices and research.

This special issue includes three articles on the contexts of communities and families. Hinman and Ye's article entitled, "Hybrid practices in the alternative learning spaces of community-based heritage language programs" provides a description of a study designed through a community-school-university partnership, which examined the cultural wealth that parents, students, and teachers bring to heritage language programs. Reinking, Vetere, and Percell describe a community-based family event that infused science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) with developmentally appropriate theater (DAT) in their article, "Collaborating with theatre, nature, and STEM: A multigenerational event." Veitch's article, "Parental memories of school and children's early learning: A comparison of higher-income and lower-income mothers" brings a historical explanation to home-based learning by investigating how parents recall their own school experiences.

It was a privilege to review the manuscripts submitted to this special issue. I hope these selected articles help to further the dialogue on the importance of families and communities to children's learning and educational success.

Kyle Miller
Guest Editor