

**Thinking About Community**

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Community is something that I was fortunate to be a part of growing up as a West-Islander and English Montrealer. The West-Island isn't a huge place, and I think everyone is at most two degrees of separation away from each other. When I think of the role of community in my learning experience, I think of my high school, my friends, and being involved in organized sports. That was my sense of community growing up, and where I learned to love, win, lose, and study. William Ayers (2019) noted in his novel a list of commitments to himself as a teacher, which includes the statement "when I say be a good citizen or community resident, I'll show them (students) what joining the larger community looks like" (p. 199). Ayers' promise to himself highlights how good teachers shouldn't only be active in the classroom, but proactive in establishing a greater sense of belonging for students. In this essay, I will discuss the importance of establishing a culture around a community, and how a sense of belonging can promote global citizenship.

In Eric Schaps' (2003) article entitled "Creating a school community", he states that research shows that "students in schools with a strong sense of community are more likely to be academically motivated, to act ethically... to develop social and emotional competencies and to avoid a number of problem behaviors, including drug use and violence" (p. 31). This statement is important because it correlates a strong sense of community to the overall adoption of a positive culture that can help to shape a school. Schaps (2003) goes on to clarify that "schools with a strong sense of community are fairly rare" and "low-income students and students of color usually report a lower level of community in school than affluent white students" (p. 32). This comes as no surprise, that poverty and systemic racism play a role in causing students to feel

excluded from the greater school community. I can't help but think of my own community in this context, and the racist video that was released just a few days ago, and how that works to further alienate people of color out of a predominately white and affluent community.

Schaps (2003) states that research suggests that "schools can strengthen student's sense of community by... actively cultivate(ing) respectful, supportive relationships among students, teachers, and parents" and that by doing this it can "enable students from diverse backgrounds to bring their personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences into the classroom" (p. 32). I think that by looking at Ayers' statement alongside Schaps' research on educational communities, it underlines how a sense of community is not only important for academic success, but for making people of different backgrounds feel welcome and free to express themselves.

To conclude, I feel that if a community promotes healthy relationships, respect, and empowers the voices of the most oppressed people within, then that community is set to shape a generation of productive citizens.

### References

Ayers, W., 2019. About Becoming A Teacher. Teachers College Press.

Schaps, E. (2003). Creating a school community. *Educational Leadership*, 60(6), 31–33.