

# UNIT

# 10

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## *Asset-Based Community Building<sup>1</sup>: Creating Social Capital to Build Neighborhood as Better Places to Live*

### ◆ **OBJECTIVES**

- 1) Understand Asset-Based Community Building
- 2) Understand how students can become members of their community
- 3) Understand the importance of social and human capital

### ◆ **TOOLS and MATERIALS NEEDED**

- 1) Web access for online projects and research

### ◆ **ACTIVITIES**

- 1) Group Activity 1: "What Are Your Gifts?"
- 2) Group Activity 2: "The Community Tree: Where do I Belong?"

### **SUMMARY of the LESSON**

When communities face difficult issues such as poverty and crime, it is easy to talk about them based on their problems and what they lack. However, we can look at communities like a half empty or a half full glass, depending which perspective we decide to take. The goal of asset-based community building is to reverse the perspective of most community development that looks for problems and needs before seeing the advantages and solutions already in place. Before we point out the problems in our communities, we need to look for the resources that already exist there. Many of the resources we need to improve our community life are available in our own backyard. The most important resource in the world is human and social capital: individual skills, experience, and collective energy to make the world a better place. We need to search out our neighbors' assets and find out what each person brings to the community. Every member of our community has a place at the table and each of us brings different gifts to the feast.

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<sup>1</sup> This unit is largely based on John P. Kretzmann & John L. McKnight's "A Guide to Capacity Inventories: Mobilizing the Community Skills of Local Residents" (Chicago: ACTA Publications, 1997).

# *Asset-based Community Building*

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## *Implementation Outline*

- 1. Introduction: What is Asset-Based Community Building (ABC)?**
- 2. What is the connection between individual gifts and community resources?**
- 3. What is capital? What are human capital and social capital?**
- 4. How does human/social capital relate to asset mapping?**
- 5. How can youth build social and human capital?**
- 6. Service Learning and social capital: What-s in it for me?**

# ***TEACHER GUIDE to CLASS DISCUSSION***

## ***UNIT 10: Asset-based Community Building***

### ***Teacher's Note!***

Many school systems increasingly require service learning credits for high school graduation. This unit can be helpful as an orientation for youth who are launching their service learning activities or are engaged in afterschool programs that emphasize community service. Resources from the Asset-Based Community Development Institute (see Internet Resources) can broaden this unit further.

### **1. Introduction: What is Asset-Based Community Building (ABC)?**

- The goal of ABC is to reverse the perspective of most community development that looks for problems and needs before seeing the advantages and solutions already in place. Many of the resources we need to improve our community life already exist in our neighborhood. The most important resource in the world is human and social capital: individual skills and collective energy to make the world a better place. We need to seek out our neighbors and find out what each person brings to the community. Every member of our community has a place at the table and each of us brings different gifts to the feast. Before we point out the problems in our communities, we need to look for the resources that already exist there. One way to find out about all the social (e.g., expertise, experience, skills, interest), economic (e.g., skills, properties, money), and political (e.g., networking, accessibility to political figures) resources that the members of a given community have is through the process called community asset mapping.

- The goal of ABC is to shift the focus from community needs to community capacities . . . by asking about the personal >gifts= that individuals can contribute toward building their community.<sup>2</sup>

- How do we build up our communities? By finding out all the

***SKILLS*** that can be put to work  
***TALENTS*** that can be shared

***EXPERIENCES*** that can teach others  
***DREAMS*** that motivate individuals

- We need to find out these things so we know who our neighbor is and wants to be. Without this knowledge we cannot understand the abilities and goals of individuals and groups that sustain communities. This information will help to

***ORGANIZE*** our neighbors  
***PROMOTE*** job opportunities and connections  
***SHOWCASE*** individual talents and resources  
***REBUILD*** relationships and community

<sup>2</sup> John P. Kretzmann & John L. McKnight A Guide to Capacity Inventories: Mobilizing the Community Skills of Local Residents (Chicago: ACTA Publications, 1997, p. 3).



**Student Activity 1: What Are Your Gifts?** In this exercise, hand out the questionnaire, *What Are Your Gifts?* to survey your students' gifts (see Handout 1)

## 2. What is the connection between individual gifts and community resources?

- The goal of community asset mapping is to find out the individual skills, interests, experience of community members and connect them to community goals and projects. One of the ways to think about asset mapping is from economics. Think about individual gifts/talents/interests as tools for building something, as an economist looks at capital. It is important for the students to see how relationships, experience and education all lead to opportunities for personal and community development.

## 3. What is capital? What are human capital and social capital?


■ **Capital:** Capital is the tools and assets of a business that makes work possible. The capital of a business is the building, vehicles, credit/financial resources, employees that allow it to function.

■ **Human capital:** Individual skills/interests/experience that lead to productive work. Human capital represents the personal resources that enable someone to find a job, contribute to projects, make friends, and participate in public life. Economists measure human capital in terms of someone's earning potential, but we can expand that definition to include personal measures of satisfaction. One can lead a life rich in human capital—an appreciation of arts, music, foreign languages and cultures, wide circle of friends—without enjoying financial wealth. Human capital can be individual training and experience. Although a student rarely enjoys great financial capital, her investment in education increases her human capital. Traditionally, increases in human capital increases the potential for earning and/or professional satisfaction. Human capital leads to opportunities.

■ **Social capital:** Social capital is the glue that holds a community together. It is a collection of individual human capital invested in the common life of a community. Social capital refers to organizations and networks that unite members into communities of mutual respect and shared responsibility. The key is participation. If individuals do not participate in the community, the amount of social capital diminishes. Imagine a very talented musician who never leaves her room or records her music. She may have a great deal of musical talent, but who would ever know? When she decides to share that talent, she benefits her community and herself through financial reward and public recognition. Individual participation is a central feature of flourishing communities.

#### 4. How does human/social capital relate to asset mapping?

- When human capital is applied in the world, it helps to hold communities together *and* encourages the development of further human capital. When someone volunteers, one learns new skills and makes connections that lead to other opportunities, social, and professional.
- One way to think about social capital and its connection to my own life is to ask:
  - *What do I need to survive one day in my life?* Food, water, housing, work, relationships, etc.
  - *What do I need to flourish everyday?* I need to know that my food and water are safe (trust) and satisfying (healthy mix of tastes and textures for variety). I need a safe home and the opportunity to fill it with personal objects of beauty and memory such as art or photographs (confidence and appreciation for beauty).
  - I want an occupation that interests me, fits my particular talents, and provides for my family and myself (opportunity). I want to enjoy friendships with a variety of people from my neighborhood, school, and job (community and fellowship).
  - All basic human needs connect us to others. We trust that the government, restaurants, builders, employers, neighbors all share a commitment to making the world a safe, productive place to live. If no one made sure that food and water supplies were safe, it would be very difficult to find enough to eat. If we thought that our neighbors would steal from us when we left our houses, we would never have the chance to work away from our homes or invest in private property.

<p><b>Internet Resources</b></p> 	<p><b>Researching Social Capital</b></p> <p>If you want to learn more about social capital and the concern that America is losing the glue that keeps democracy together, visit the home site of Robert Putnam's <i>Bowling Alone</i>. Putnam is a social scientist from Harvard University, who has been looking at the role of social organizations in democracy. He provides a definition of social capital and links to other resources online.</p> <p>At <a href="http://www.bowlingalone.com/">http://www.bowlingalone.com/</a></p>
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**Student Activity 2: The Community Tree: Where Do I Belong?** The goal of this exercise is to discover all the different organizations in your community and their connection to everybody in the room. This lesson will give students an idea of all the groups that they participate in and their potential contribution to community resources (see Handout 2).

## 5. How can youth build social and human capital?

- One of the most exciting venues in which students can experience the process of community building through social capital enhancing is service learning. Service learning and public service provide opportunities to develop useful skills for school and, eventually, for the workplace. Depending on the nature of the project, students might develop useful office and computer skills. Students can see different kinds of work environments (e.g., community based organizations) and what expectations organizations have of their members. How do I relate to fellow employees or volunteers?
- One of the primary obstacles youth face when looking for opportunities of serving others is the lack of experience. Many organizations are looking for people with the background and skills for the job and may not devote resources for training inexperienced employees or volunteers. Service learning work gives students a chance to feel helpful and committed with a cause that is personally important. Service learning work helps students develop new skills and interests in different fields. Furthermore, working on volunteer projects brings all kinds of individuals together and these contacts can lead to other opportunities. Service learning can develop individual capital at the same time as social capital.

## 6. Service learning and social capital: What's in it for me?

- It is natural for students to question why they have to give up their time and freedom because of service learning requirements often imposed by high schools. Many argue that such work is only valuable if it results from volunteer commitments. They raise a legitimate concern. Ideally students would want to volunteer on their own. Nonetheless, much of public life depends upon the participation of fellow citizens who are not paid for their time and labor. Think about how small and petty life would be if people refused to participate unless some obvious reward followed.
- Furthermore, it is important for students to view service learning as an opportunity to participate in public life, improve their neighborhoods, to develop important skills (human capital) and make connections to others (social capital). Networking with others is one of the most important aspects of public service. In addition to working with one's peers, one can develop important contacts that lead to recommendations, career opportunities and more. People need to find mentors or teachers in their lives that guide them in their choices and careers. Consider volunteer opportunities as a chance to meet others and find out what really interests you.

## ***WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?***

- ❖ **The most important resource in public life is people.**
- ❖ **Everyone has a role to play in civic life.**
- ❖ **Students need to see themselves as *Aproblem-solvers@* and *Aconnectors.@* *AProblem-solvers@* make things happen and serve as assets to a community. *AConnectors@* bring people and organizations together.**
- ❖ **Service opportunities and involvement with local organizations provide important opportunities for developing human and social capital.**
- ❖ **Students need to see themselves as responsible for their own choices, careers and communities. Service learning provides the chance for individuals to explore different fields and interact with a variety of people.**
- ❖ **Service opportunities and involvement with local organizations provide important opportunities for developing human and social capital.**

## ***KEY TERMS or CONCEPTS***

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\*Unless otherwise noted, all definitions are taken from Webster Dictionary at <http://www.m-w.com>

- ❖ **Asset:** The entire property of a person, association, corporation, or estate applicable or subject to the payment of debts; an item of value owned.
- ❖ **Community:** A unified body of individuals; the people with common interests living in a particular area; an area in itself; an interacting population of various kinds of individuals (as species) in a common location; a body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests.
- ❖ **Capital:** A stock of accumulated goods especially at a specified time and in contrast to income received during a specified period; the value of accumulated goods; accumulated goods devoted to the production of other goods; accumulated possessions calculated to bring in income.
- ❖ **Human capital:** Individual skills/interests/experience that lead to productive work. Human capital represents the personal resources that enable someone to find a job, contribute to projects, make friends, and participate in public life.
- ❖ **Social Capital:** According to Robert Putman, "The central premise of social capital is that social networks have value. Social capital refers to the collective value of all "social networks" [who people know] and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other ["norms of reciprocity"] (taken from <http://www.bowlingalone.com/socialcapital.php3>)



## ILLINOIS LEARNING STANDARDS INDEX

The Illinois Learning Standards for Social Science were developed using the 1985 Illinois State Goals for Social Science, the National Standards for World History, the National Standards for United States History, the National Geography Standards, and National Standards for Civics and Government, other various state and national work, and local standards contributed by team members.

### *Online Resource:*

Information regarding the Illinois State Board of Education Learning Standards can be found online at: <http://www.isbe.state.il.us/ils/default0.html>

### Illinois Learning Standards Alignment

State Goal	14	Understand political systems, with an emphasis on the United States.
Learning Standards	A, B, C, D	
Major Emphasis	14.C.3, 14.C.4, 14.C.5, 18.B.1a-b, 18.B.2a-b, 18.B.3a-b, 18.B.4	
State Goal	18	Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the United States.



## NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)

The Curriculum Standards for Social Studies were developed by a Task Force of the National Council for the Social Studies and approved by the NCSS Board of Directors in April 1994. Its *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* focuses on ten thematic strands in social studies considered essential for educators and students. More information can be found at their website: <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/>

This unit addresses the following thematic standards:

- ❑ Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- ❑ Power, Authority, and Governance
- ❑ Individual Development and Identity
- ❑ Civic, Ideals, and Practices



# ***DICTIONARY and INFORMATION LINKS***

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There are many helpful resources online for you and your students. Those below will just get you started.

## **LibrarySpot.com**

This is one of the best places to begin any kind of information search. It provides direct links to encyclopedias, dictionaries, curriculum ideas and library resources.

<http://www.libraryspot.com/>

## **Dictionary.com**

Free online English dictionary, thesaurus and reference guide, crossword puzzles and other word games, online translator and Word of the Day.

<http://www.Dictionary.com>

## **Webster Dictionary** at [www.m-w.com](http://www.m-w.com)

Online version of the Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary. Simply enter keywords for a comprehensive definition, with thesaurus option.

<http://www.m-w.com>

## **AllWords.com** - Dictionary, Guide, Community and More

allwords.com provides English definitions plus a multi-lingual search. Search in German, Dutch, French, Italian, Spanish and English. It provides a helpful pronunciation guide and gives students a chance to see how words often share cultural roots with geographic, and cultural neighbors.

<http://www.allwords.com/>

## **AskJeeves.com**

One of the best search engines on the web. Web users simply put questions to AJeeves@the butler, who then searches the web for relevant information and web sites.

<http://www.askjeeves.com/>

# ***INTERNET RESOURCES on ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY BUILDING***

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Visit the following web sites for more information on how to connect your students to public life. Some of these sites provide information while others outline opportunities for getting students connected to their communities. Unless otherwise noticed, all quoted material is taken directly from the listed web sites.

## ***⊕ Asset-Based Community Development Institute***

John L. McKnight and his long-time collaborator in community research, John P. Kretzmann direct the Asset-Based Community Development Institute (ABCD). These social researchers have challenged the traditional approach to solving urban problems that focuses on the needs and deficiencies of neighborhoods. In fact, Kretzmann and McKnight have shown that community assets are important building blocks in sustainable community revitalization.

At <http://www.northwestern.edu/IPR/abcd.html>

## ***⊕ Asset-Based Community Development Training Group***

The Asset-Based Community Development Training Group, which works in partnership with Northwestern University's Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute, provides a national program that focuses on knowledge and practical skills for putting ABCD into action. The program is designed for neighborhood professionals and community leaders familiar with ABCD basic principles.

At <http://www.abcdtraininggroup.org/>

## ***⊕ Connecticut Assets Network (CAN)***

The Connecticut Assets Network (CAN) is a nonprofit network that promotes the integration and successful use of asset-based strategies for community development.

At <http://www.ctassets.org/>

# ***CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT***

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This curriculum was developed with the support of a grant to the Center for Urban Research and Learning (CURL), Loyola University Chicago, from the Technology Innovation Challenge Grant Program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The project team consisted of:

- ✦ Brian C. Shea, Ph.D. candidate, Department of Philosophy, coordinator and principal author;
- ✦ Alan Gitelson, Ph.D., Department of Political Science, faculty consultant;
- ✦ Nelson Portillo, Ph.D. candidate, Department of Psychology, evaluation, editing, and web design;
- ✦ Yolanda Suarez-Balcazar, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, evaluation supervision;
- ✦ Linda Von Dreele, Associate Director of CURL, oversight and editing.

The original community partners were Erie Neighborhood House (ENH), Howard Area Alternative High School (HAAHS), and Family Matters (FM) where the curriculum was piloted on a limited basis. The project is indebted to Ric Estarda and Maria Matias (ENH), Chris DeNevue (HAAHS), and Twanna Brown and Kim DeLong (FM).

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