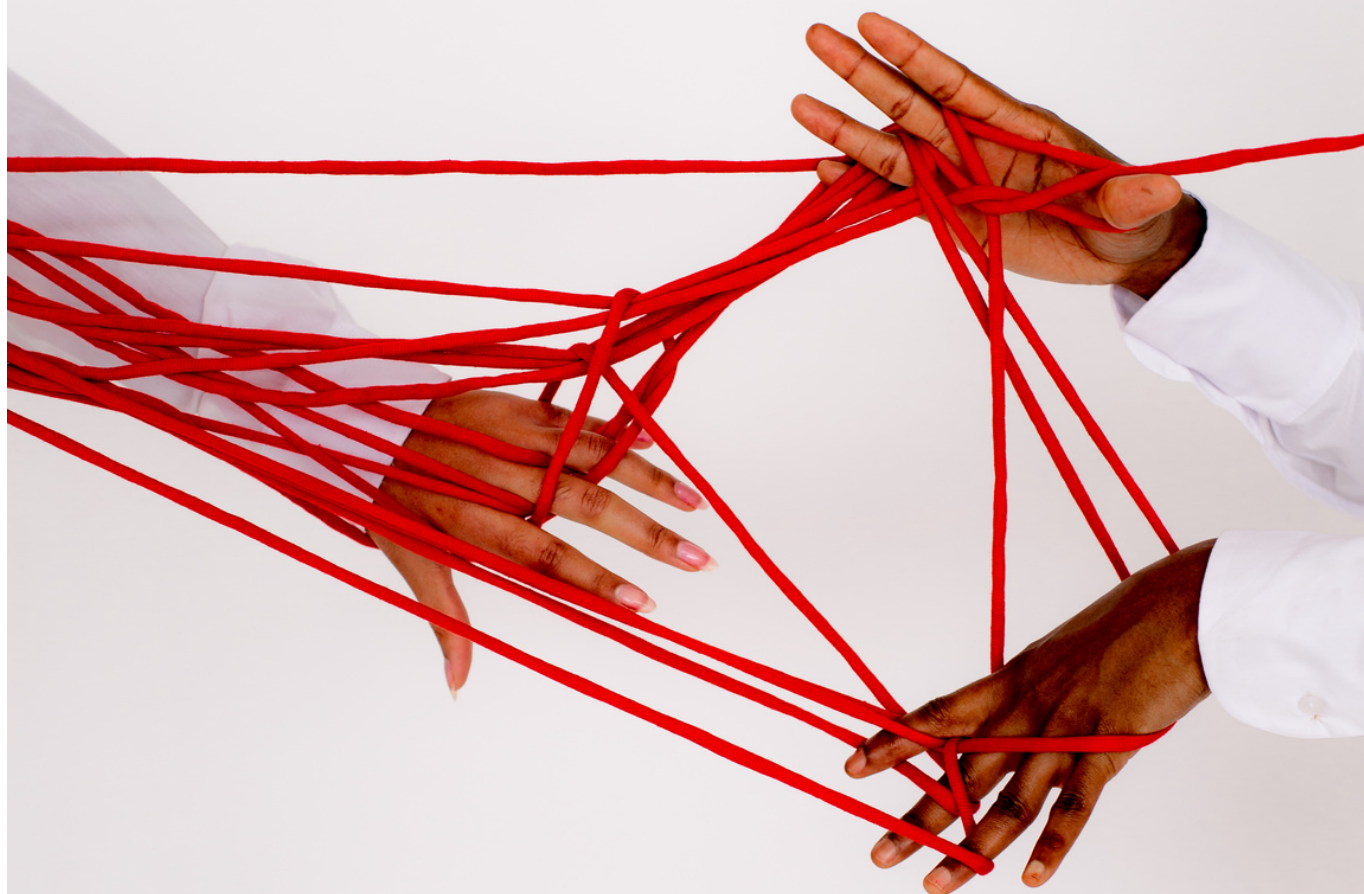




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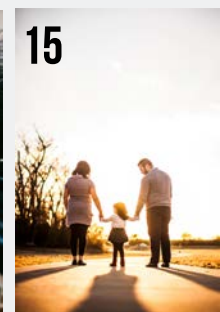
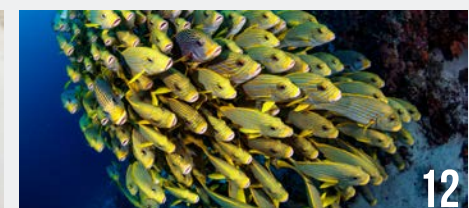
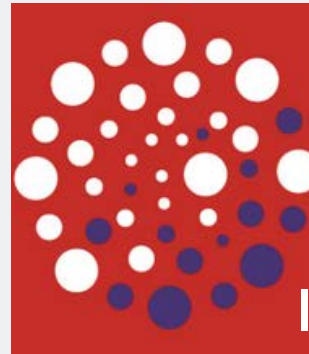
PROBLEMATIZING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOLS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES



International Congress for
ICSEI School Effectiveness and Improvement

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ICSEI DIALOGIC | 2023

In early 2020, we volunteered to be co-editors of the ICSEI Publications series. We were excited to take on a new challenge and learn new things together (none of us has been anything beyond a peer editor before!) and we were inspired by ICSEI's willingness to let us explore new approaches to sharing knowledge and communicating with each other. At the 2021 ICSEI Congress, we launched the first issue of the *ICSEI Dialogic* – an informal publication that seeks short viewpoint pieces in response to thought-provoking questions. The issue was called *Crossing Boundaries and Building Bridges* and it was met with great enthusiasm from our colleagues around the world. So much so that we continued our work in 2022, launching our second issue, *Back to the Future? Problems and Possibilities for Educational Equity, Quality, and Sustainability*.

For our third issue, *Problematizing the Relationship between Schools, Families, and Communities*, we collaborated with the 3P network who created the call for submissions for the 2023 ICSEI Dialogic. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Anton Florek & Sara Romiti for their leadership. As the title states, the theme of this issue problematizes the relationship between schools, families, and communities and highlights how important these relationships are for school effectiveness and improvement. We thank all of the authors who thoughtfully prepared their viewpoints to stimulate further dialogue on this important topic as we continue to (re-)conceptualize schools and schooling in the post-pandemic world.

Muchas gracias to Dr. Nicole Bustos and her colleagues from the Universidad de Chile with whom we celebrate our first Spanish language submission!

As with previous issues, **we will be hosting a Fireside Chat session during the 2023 ICSEI Congress** (see details below). For the first time ever, this will be a hybrid session where colleagues are invited to participate in the in-person session (which will be conducted in Spanish and English) or online (via Zoom) for those of us who are unable to travel to Chile this year. We are excited to present this issue and look forward to future collaborations with other ICSEI networks as the *ICSEI Dialogic* continues to evolve.

With best wishes,

Joelle, Trista, and Paul

(Joelle Rodway, Trista Hollweck, and Paul Campbell)

JOIN US!

ICSEI Congress 2023

Viña del Mar, Chile

Fireside Chat

Wednesday, January 11

11:30am - 1:00pm [Viña del Mar]

(Time Zone Converter)

In-Person: Vergara C

Virtual:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84138224497?pwd=cmFORVBKRdDZeEdaVWhvTXBpUnJiZz09>

Meeting ID: 841 3822 4497

Passcode: 139061

Join the conversation!

Learnlab.net code: 714293



ICSEI ETHICAL STATEMENT ON GENERATIONAL RENEWAL, INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY



ICSEI is a global community collaborating for enhanced quality, equity, and excellence in education. ICSEI's purpose is to have an impact on the quality of education by providing an international forum for researchers, policy makers, and practitioners. Our community comes together to:

- share ideas,
- conduct and promote research,
- develop knowledge, policies, and practices,
- innovate as world-class leaders in enhancing the quality and equity of education for all people around the world.

ICSEI strives to be a community that is internationally inclusive for all its members. ICSEI further endeavours to ensure that every member and participant has an equal, unhindered opportunity to fully participate and engage with ICSEI Congresses and other activities, regardless of cultural, religious, racial/ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds, sexual orientation, or gender, in a safe space of intellectual openness, respect, and the free exchange of evidence and ideas. ICSEI embraces diversity and recognises it as a source of strength and value for all.

As a global community, ICSEI aims to advance education everywhere and to enable professionals in education to learn from and contribute to the global conversation about educational effectiveness and improvement through dialogue and the exchange of ideas. We believe that we can improve the world and make it more inclusive through education. In order to do so, our discussions and decisions about where to hold particular Congresses take into account the opportunities for participation of and exchange with professionals from many countries, faiths, and identities on the one hand, and the policies of their governments on the other.

To these ends, the ICSEI Board has taken various steps towards making ICSEI more inclusive and diverse. In addition, it has developed and implemented a strategy for improving Generational Renewal, Inclusion and Diversity.

For the GRID Statement on COVID and Social Justice, please see this contribution by Dr. Jacob Easley II in collaboration with the 2021 GRID Committee in Issue II of the ICSEI Dialogic available [here](#).



ICSEI Dialogic Call for Proposals

“Schools do not operate in a vacuum. Successful schools depend on the resources and support of their communities and schools at the centre of their communities are often the most successful schools. In turn, schools are vital to the social health of their local communities.”

(OECD 2018, Valuing our Teachers and Raising their Status: [How Communities Can Help](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

This insight from the OECD is the start of our exploration into the important relationship between schools and the communities they serve. We know that links and connections matter, but why? What kinds of links? How do these work and for whose benefit?

Interest in this important topic of inquiry, particularly at such a time of uncertainty and instability, can lead us to problematise the relationship between schools and the communities they serve. This prompts us to ask some crucial ‘why’, ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions, such as:

WHY?

- Why schools should be connected to their communities? (Asking the why question might take us to very different views about purpose and the role of the school in the social context.)

WHAT?

- What do we mean when we refer to “community” in different cultural contexts? (Families, other institutions and cultural agencies, localities)
- What do we mean by connections? ‘Information sharing’ (one way or both ways?); ‘collaboration’ (for what purpose?) ‘partnership’ (who decides the terms?)
- What do we know about what is working well? (Policies, practices, involvement of different levels and tiers in a local system?)

HOW?

- How do these connections take place and does cultural context make a difference?
- How does the COVID-19 pandemic and other current insecurities change the relationship?



ICSEI Dialogic invites YOU to contribute a short viewpoint piece in response to the above questions. Our aim is to bring together different perspectives for the 2023 issue of the ICSEI Dialogic.

Contributions from ICSEI members and friends (regardless of network affiliation) are welcome in many different forms: written, video, audio, or visual formats. Written submissions should be 500-750 words and audio/video submissions should be limited to a maximum of 5 minutes. Submissions in languages other than English are accepted.

Please submit your work by November 21, 2022 to icsei.dialogic@gmail.com. The ICSEI Dialogic Committee will review all submissions and authors will be notified about acceptance by November 30.

As with previous Congresses, we will be holding an ICSEI Dialogic Fireside Chat during this year's gathering in Chile in January 2023. The session will be hosted by the Policymakers, Politicians and Practitioners (3P) network, which prepared this call at the invitation of the ICSEI Dialogic. Details will follow once conference program is confirmed.

How does the collaboration between schools, families and community take shape? Some ideas for contributions in visual form (pictures selected from the web).



Parents' meeting, Strathmore School, Nairobi, Kenya



Parents Orientation Meeting, Shantiniketan Indian School, Doha, State of Qatar



Meeting of the Parents' Association, Fermi Primary School, Milan, Italy



Virtual Parent-Teacher Meeting in Preschool, Seri Mulia Sarjana School, Brunei



Strengthening Cooperation and Collaboration Between Families, Pupils, and Schools to Improve Educational Quality and Equity: Lessons Learned and Possibilities for Change

Romina Madrid, University of Stirling (UK) and Sara Romiti, National Institute for the Evaluation of Education and Training (Italy)



The State-of-the-Art session at ICSEI 2022 Virtual Conference focused on exploring current debates and theoretical and practical approaches to pressing education topics with the purposes of inspiring and illuminating education policy, research, and practice.

One of the most central topics but simultaneously one of the most difficult and probably one of the least explored during the pandemic has been the topic of family-school relationships, community, and parental engagement. How has the pandemic transformed school-family relationships?

Three outstanding scholars: Professor Janet Goodall, Professor Megan Bang and Professor Karen Seashore reflected on emerging approaches/practices/lenses to increase a stronger relationship between families, students and schools; barriers to strengthen partnerships that works for all communities, especially for those who are more disadvantaged, and the most critical changes as result of the COVID-19 pandemic in the school-family relationships.

The session discussed the misconceptions that exist about parental engagement, which are based usually in equalising parental engagement with good parenting, which is in turn class and racially based. Professor Goodall reflected on the pressures and demands on teachers regarding engaged families without the appropriate support to do this, while Professor Seashore highlighted the role of communities and leaders outside the school boundaries to engage in imagining new ways to connect with schools. Through the work of Professor Bang, the session offered an historical perspective to the topic, inviting us to reflect and consider the historical complex legacies that have served as foundations of school-family relationships and the need to problematise these in our efforts to reimagine not only new ways of connecting but new ways of learning.



Participants reflected, among other, on the possibilities offered by the context of the pandemic to teachers and families to know and to appreciate each other's world, as well as the need to open the conversation about the purposes of schooling in current times.

Moving from this stimulating debate, 3P Network decided to launch a special Issue with the *ICSEI Dialogic* dedicated to the relationship between schools, families, and communities.

If you are interested in learning more, we suggest you read the complete document on the State-of-the-Art session in this issue on page 31.



Comunidades de Aprendizaje en Red en Latinoamérica: Países Hermanos Enfrentando la Pandemia

Nicole Bustos, Josefina De Ferrari, Fernanda Correa y Catalina Zúñiga,
Universidad de Chile (Chile)



Este trabajo presenta los aprendizajes que nos deja la creación de una red durante los años 2021 y 2022, en el contexto del programa Escuelas Chile de la Agencia Chilena de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (AGCID), en torno a la implementación virtual de la metodología de Indagación Colaborativa en Red por líderes escolares de escuelas de 11 países latinoamericanos. Estos países son México, República Dominicana, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Colombia, Perú, Argentina, Ecuador y Paraguay. Habitualmente, al hablar de redes escolares se piensa en establecimientos educativos de una misma localidad, distrito o país. Sin embargo, en esta experiencia distintas escuelas de Latinoamérica han logrado conformar una comunidad, pese a la distancia geográfica.

El sentido de comunidad surgió en los miembros de la red a propósito de la identificación de desafíos de mejoramiento en sus propias escuelas, que al ser analizados colectivamente mostraron grandes semejanzas, tanto en las situaciones que debían enfrentar como en la forma en la que las estaban enfrentando. Desde la mirada de los miembros de la red, éstas no son producto del azar, sino del ser escuelas de países hermanos, con similar cultura, valores, historia y recursos. En efecto, gran parte de los desafíos identificados se vinculan a cómo estas escuelas enfrentaron la pandemia desde el particular contexto latinoamericano. Entre ellos, se encuentra el temor de ser afectados por el covid-19 y a que sus sistemas sanitarios no pudieran dar respuesta y el escaso y/o irregular acceso a las TICs, lo que dificultaba mantener el contacto con sus estudiantes. En el retorno a la presencialidad, se vieron enfrentados a fenómenos de violencia escolar y la presión por disminuir las brechas de aprendizaje. Estos estresores se sumaron a las ya precarias condiciones laborales de los docentes latinoamericanos, intensificando su desgaste profesional.

En este contexto, la red conformada por Escuelas Chile actuó como un sostén donde la metodología de Indagación Colaborativa fue la herramienta práctica con la cual enfrentar la adversidad, seleccionando algunos de estos desafíos para abordarlos colaborativamente en la red, ya sea mediante la generación de nuevos conocimientos que permitan una comprensión más profunda, o bien, mediante la implementación de una acción de mejoramiento. Los miembros de la red valoraban el sentirse reflejados en otras escuelas latinoamericanas, veían en sus pares a referentes para liderar sus propias instituciones educativas, pero también se veían a sí mismos como



un aporte a la comunidad general, generando un alto sentido de corresponsabilidad y reciprocidad. Así, el espacio de la red se conformó como una comunidad profesional de aprendizaje entre países hermanos, que permitió a los líderes incrementar sus recursos - pares, ideas, experiencias, estrategias, materiales, reflexiones - para liderar un proceso de mejoramiento en su propia escuela, ya que la Indagación Colaborativa debía ajustarse tanto a la realidad común de la red como a sus contextos particulares.

Para la adecuación al contexto local, los integrantes de la red involucraban miembros de sus comunidades educativas - docentes, asistentes de la educación, estudiantes, familias - en la Indagación Colaborativa, acción mediante la cual se trasciende el espacio de la red para levantar las voces de la comunidad local, conocer sus percepciones y/o apoyar su práctica diaria. Al analizar los resultados de estas acciones, los miembros de la red han constatado resultados similares en sus indagaciones y han accedido a estrategias de mejoramiento significativas para sus contextos locales, reforzando su sentido de pertenencia a una comunidad internacional más amplia, y el de aquellos actores educativos que sin ser miembros de la red participaron en la Indagación Colaborativa. Igualmente, la red ha modelado en los líderes participantes una forma colaborativa de trabajar que ha sido transferida por algunos de ellos a sus escuelas, por ejemplo, incluyendo a sus docentes en la toma de decisiones y/o consultando la opinión de apoderados/as y estudiantes, mediante lo cual han fortalecido el sentido de pertenencia de estos actores a sus escuelas.

En conclusión, esta experiencia nos muestra que puede existir una comunidad de escuelas que traspase las barreras de lo local y presencial, mientras existan semejanzas entre ellas que les permitan sentirse identificadas, y un vínculo caracterizado por la reciprocidad, corresponsabilidad y colaboración en torno a un objetivo común. Esto es valioso ya que incrementa los recursos disponibles de cada escuela para la mejora, yendo más allá de lo que podrían haber logrado aisladamente, y provee un referente de trabajo colaborativo que replicar en cada escuela para fortalecer sus propias comunidades locales.



My Community or Yours

Kathryn Riley, Institute of Education, University College London (UK)

The notion of ‘problematizing’ is an issue that has long fascinated me. It’s that opportunity to put aside what you think you know (what you assume to be true) and to explore what you really know. The ‘problematizing’ activity for this ICSEI Dialogic revolves around our understanding of the school-community relationship.

Let’s start with the school. A school, of course, is just a building. What matters is what goes on in and around that building: the relationships, the connections, the learning. Who feels part of the school community? Who feels connected and has a sense of belonging? The images below give a flavour of what it feels like to ‘belong’ and be welcomed as a community member (the left-hand side), or to ‘not belong’: the right-hand side.



In this short input to our dialogic interchange, I want to pose three questions:

- *Why* should schools engage in strengthening school-community relations?
- *Who* are they connecting to: *who* is ‘in’ and *who* is ‘out’?
- *What* helps the process of connection?

Let me touch first on the notion of ‘community’. Community is a word that has many meanings and is used widely because it conveys that sense of individuals working together with shared beliefs and goals. The intrinsic value of community membership has become a cliché: something warm and cozy that we all want to be a part of.

1.K. Riley (2022) *Compassionate Leadership for School Belonging*, p84.

Download for free at UCL Press <<https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/171324>>



It is a truism to say that schools should relate to their community/communities. No one seriously suggests that schools should merely do their best to process the children who come through their gates every morning, while ignoring whatever goes on outside those gates. Truisms have the advantage of being true, but very often – as in this case – they also have the disadvantage of being imprecise generalisations. I hope that these questions will help us to develop more precision about some of the issues.

Q1. Why should schools engage in strengthening school-community relations?

Some years ago, Professor Karen Seashore Louis and I carried out a project on school-community relationships. We wanted to understand more about perceptions, practices, and realities. Our exploration included a literature review. Broadly speaking, we concluded that there were five main reasons why schools sought to become more engaged with their communities. These were to:

- Improve student achievement;
- Become more accountable to communities and increase their involvement;
- Build social capital, by encouraging collaborative activities that would, for example, lead to healthier or safer communities;
- Develop the role of the school as a moral agent which had some responsibility for promoting issues for young people, such as social justice;
- Promote the school's self-interest, by developing good public relations.

Very different starting points, assumptions and end goals are embedded within these five drivers. Yet, schools rarely articulate their intentions and expectations about school-community engagement. To hear the views of one exemplary school leader, Jo Dibb, until recently head of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School (EGA) about school-community engagement follow the links below. EGA is a great favourite of Michele Obama who visited the London school and wrote about it in her book 'Becoming'.

Q2. Who are schools connecting to: who is 'in' and who is 'out'?

This second 'problematizing' question raises a raft of issues about who is 'in' and who is 'out': who makes up the student community/ the local community. These issues include:

2. https://www.theartofpossibilities.org.uk/explorer/videos/S1_V2, 'Student researchers show the way'



- *Access:* Is this school open to everyone? Is there a selection process (governed by ability to pay or to pass a test)? Is it a specialist school of some sort, drawing on a wide circle of young people from several localities? Is the school set up to serve a particular gender or community (e.g., a faith community)?
- *Locality:* What's the school's catchment area? Does it serve a local population, or do the young people come from some distance? Is the community which the school serves relatively homogeneous or are there diverse and multiple communities? What are the social and contextual challenges within the neighbourhood?
- *Insiders and outsiders:* Once entry to the school has been determined – what happens next? Schools can be places where students feel welcomed, or places of rejection and exclusion. Across OECD countries, young people's sense of belonging is declining, with nearly 1 in 3 now feeling they don't belong in school.

Whose voices are listened to and whose ignored? Some – and arguably those with the greatest needs – may find themselves being handed the ultimate₃ 'red card' of exclusion. The excluded often become the exploited.

And what about the families of these young people and the communities in which they live? Many researchers have argued that the ways in which schools engage with their communities frequently exclude particular groups, such as refugee and migrant families. UK organisations report that a number of young people from refugee families experience a sense of being 'the other': not being wanted in their school.

Q3. What helps the process of connection?

We know that for school-community engagement to be effective, it needs to be authentic and based on mutuality, connectivity, and trust. Trust is the super glue that binds schools and communities together. Trust does not appear out of the ether. It cannot be assumed. It has to be created, and it has to be earned.

3. <https://www.theartofpossibilities.org.uk>> Home Page, Podcast 1: Shut up and leave me alone <https://open.spotify.com/episode/3No1oVKILOTWxvUTKIfwe?si=80151cd4fca84df2>



When trust flourishes, it is manifested in relationships at all levels: *between* school leaders and classroom teachers; *between* teachers and young people; *between* school staff, families, and communities. To find out more about how headteacher Dave McPartlin, Flakefleet Primary school England, built trust and community, follow the links below. These will even take you to *Britain's Got Talent*!

Endnote: When schools are attuned to young people and take account of families and communities, they succeed in creating a sense of school belonging. In schools where belonging works, young people tend to be happier, more confident and perform better academically. The staff feel professionally recognised and their families welcomed.

-
- 4 (i) For the school's strategy go to K. Riley 2022 (reference: footnote 1), p.64. 'Seascape' school is Flakefleet Primary.
- (ii) To hear Headteachers' Jo Dibb and Dave McPartlin in conversation go to the [Podcast series](#), Podcast 4: Zero Tolerance or a Sense of Us or [here](#).
- (iii) To see Flakefleet perform go to Britain's got Talent 2020, flakefleet primary



Navigating Rapid Change and Dynamic Instability - Education in an Age of Uncertainty

Andrew Wambua (Africa Voices Dialogue - Kenya), Robyn Whittaker (Africa Voices Dialogue - South Africa), Abdelaziz Zohri (Africa Voices Dialogue - Morocco)



Africa Voices Dialogue is a dialogic platform which enables the voices of Africa's educators, learners, and communities to be "seen, heard, and loved".

Established in July 2020, and building on a sense of synergy and co-operation, Africa Voices Dialogue convenes a regular series of dialogues, workshops, and think tank spaces to discuss pertinent issues facing education and their possible solutions. These sessions connect and foster a sense of belonging, agency, reciprocity, and courage amongst an increasingly far-reaching set of education stakeholders across and beyond the African continent. From the sessions, we have learnt that with deep networking, backed by genuine cross-sectoral partnerships, educators, policymakers and practitioners—alongside their respective education communities—are uniquely placed to transform education on the African continent for the better.

Although conceptualised prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Africa Voices Dialogue started operating in the initial months of the pandemic, meeting a clear need for education stakeholders to connect with each other for support, and to develop innovative thinking in dealing with the consequences not only of COVID, but of the many other structural and pervasive challenges facing education on the continent. Though we are yet to fully grasp the long term implications of the lost learning for the millions still missing out on school, the pandemic has and will continue to have a life changing impact—especially on those students who are furthest behind. Given this grim reality, each school re-opening is a victory for all the learning community; support offered to educators, learners, and communities to enable continued learning environments is invaluable.



In a recent series of LearnShops, under the theme of 'Parental Engagement and Empowerment for Education' conducted in collaboration with the [Regional Education Learning Initiative \(RELI\) Africa](#), it was noted that parents and teachers must work together if they are to deliver quality learning to all children, no matter where they live or how prosperous or poor their families might be. Parental engagement and empowerment is fundamental to catalyzing necessary change as we re-imagine teaching and learning beyond the pandemic. Building partnerships and strong social learning ecosystems within school communities helps develop mutual responsibility for children's success within educational systems (Durišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Research has shown that students who have strong relationships with both parents and teachers are more academically engaged, have stronger social and emotional skills, and experience more positive behaviour (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). This has been the experience of other partner organisations working with us - such as [Inventor's Playground](#), and MIET Africa's [Care and Support for Teaching and Learning Programme](#) - in the African context too.

Effective schools with conducive environments for learning make real efforts to reach out to students' families with an aim of deepening their relationships, conversations, connection, and dialogues. This has been especially true during the VUCA era—a period characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Friedman, 2007). From its inception, Africa Voices Dialogue has embraced the approach that the only feasible response to rapidly changing, complex, difficult, and dynamic circumstances is to grow our ability to connect and trust effectively. In this way, the VUCA environment may be transformed from one that induces fear and uncertainty to one which is brimming with hope and possibility.

Post-COVID, systems analysts and futurists are recognising that we are entering into a new era, where different sets of attitudes and conditions are present. Our current era is being defined by the acronym BANI - "Brittle, Anxious, Non-Linear, and Incomprehensible" ([Cascio, 2020](#)). In such conditions, we believe that it is even more essential for us to move away from a linear, programmatic and highly hierarchical, structured way of engaging that is based on authority and expertise—an approach that can no longer accommodate the fact that our world conditions are like shifting sands under our feet. More than ever, what is needed is learning partnerships between and among parents, teachers and students, conducive learning environments and pedagogical practices which call for differentiated teaching and learning - if we are to address the inequality challenges imposed by the pandemic.



Through Africa Voices Dialogue, we are hopeful that we can play a part in learning how to navigate and transform our experience of the new BANI paradigm we find ourselves within. We perceive, through our experiences over the past years, that the route to transforming this experience lies in refocusing our attention onto the substrate of relationship and connection, so that BANI is able to re-emerge as:

- Brittle → Bonded
- Anxious → Anchored (stable, secure and supported by a community that you trust)
- Non-linear → Nurturing (self and community/ others)
- Incomprehensible → Insight and innovation (through shared sense-making)

We are excited by the way in which our community is rapidly developing the capacity to engage, reintegrate, learn, and create, with very little additional facilitation beyond the consistent hosting of spaces to connect - and we are excited by what emergent opportunities lie ahead.

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Cultivating Social Ecosystems

Martin Scanlan, Boston College (United States)



A key way for educational leaders to interrupt inequities and advance the common good is by crafting authentic partnerships with stakeholders. Authentic partnerships, as Auerbach (2012) describes, are “respectful alliances among educators, families, and community groups that value relationship building, dialogue across difference, and sharing power in pursuit of a common purpose in socially just, democratic schools” (p. 29). Since schools’ stakeholders bring diverse and often conflicting perspectives, forging such partnerships is exceedingly complex. One way to cut through this complexity is to think about this work as cultivating social ecosystems.

Ecosystems are communities of organisms interacting with each other and the environment. Educators work in one such social ecosystem, serving “the developing child nested in a family that is in turn nested in a neighborhood” (Scanlan & Johnson, 2020, p. 88). The social ecosystem of a school is multifarious - with parents and caregivers, neighborhood residents, and members of community-based organizations engaging with the school community in both interdependent and divergent manners. Cultivating implies not merely recognizing social ecosystems, but seeking to form them in deliberate directions. When we cultivate a garden, we are selective: we nurture the radish but perish the ragweed. Educators do not approach social ecosystems with agnosticism, but with ethical intentionality (Starratt, 2003).

What does it look like to approach forging authentic partnerships with families and community members as a process of cultivating social ecosystems? The case of Gardner Pilot Academy (GPA) provides an illustrative example. This school was founded in the early 20th Century in an urban area of the United States. As a traditional public school serving neighborhood students, parents were minimally involved and community-based organizations were basically absent. Over the past three decades, however, the school has transformed into a full-service community school.



The process began in the 1990s, when critical feedback from parents spurred educators to reconsider the opportunities for learning that they were providing. They began by developing afterschool programs for students to receive academic support and participate in extracurricular activities, such as art classes. Lacking resources to provide these directly, the educators partnered with community-based organizations and institutions of higher education to develop these programs. This initial innovation - responding to parent feedback by extending the school day - was the first step in what has turned into an iterative process that has continued to the present. Over the first few years the afterschool programming became increasingly embedded in the identity of GPA, which became known as an “extended day” school. Then, in 2007, the school successfully petitioned the school district to grant it status as a pilot school, affording it significant autonomy in governance structure, staffing, budget, schedule and curriculum/assessment. This allowed it to deepen the partnerships in the afterschool offerings as well as integrate more holistic supports for students - such as medical services and mental health counseling - into the school day. Within a few years, it became officially designated as a full-service community school.

This process shows how three core groups - educators, families, and community members - have deliberately and iteratively redefined the school’s identity and the accompanying educational infrastructure. For instance, GPA formalized the distribution of decision-making authority. Parent representatives now have seats at the table where decisions are made on budgeting, strategic direction, and staff hiring. GPA developed novel means to provide support to families - such as adult education classes in evenings. To leverage families’ funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth, parents and community members were invited to offer classes and extracurricular offerings to support whole person formation, counseling, dental, and medical services are available to students and families alike.

The case of GPA illustrates several key benefits of approaching the complex work of crafting authentic partnerships with families and community members as cultivating social ecosystems. First, it shows that a foundation for this work is the school mission. When parents first criticized the school, educators could have responded with a defensive posture: “It’s not our job to provide opportunities for students after the school day ends.” Instead, they listened and considered how they could rethink their identity as a school. Second, and relatedly, this shows how to adopt an abundance mindset in fostering authentic partnerships. Initially the school simply offered some afterschool opportunities. These were only made possible because the educators



looked for innovative ways to expand the resources available for supporting the students. Over time, an ambitious, expansive conceptualization of how the form and function of the school evolved, with families and community members playing a central role in both leading and benefiting from this process. Third, this example points to specific strategies - such as boundary spanning and border crossing - to cultivate social ecosystems. When we span boundaries, we bridge two distinct spaces. When we cross borders, we leave one space and enter another. Both strategies help educators negotiate tensions and build trust amongst constituencies that differ across multiple dimensions- including cultural, linguistic, racial, and religious.

To productively problematize family, community, and school relationships, we must conceptualize these anew. Cultivating social ecosystems provides one lens for considering how to forge authentic partnerships that advance the common good.

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Parents and Schools in Italy: Communicating and Participating in Decision Making. What Else is Missing?

Sara Romiti, National Institute for the Evaluation of Education and Training (Italy)

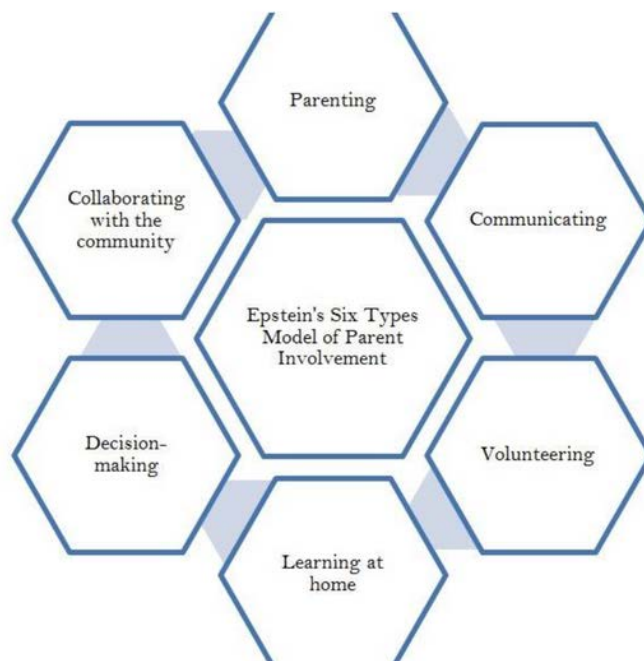


My contribution aims to reply to the “how” question in the call: how do the connections between schools, parents and communities take place, and does the cultural context make a difference? I’ll present how the connections between schools and families take place in the Italian context by adopting the Epstein framework. Parents’ involvement in Italy is regulated by national laws and follows established and widespread practices. The most important ones are:

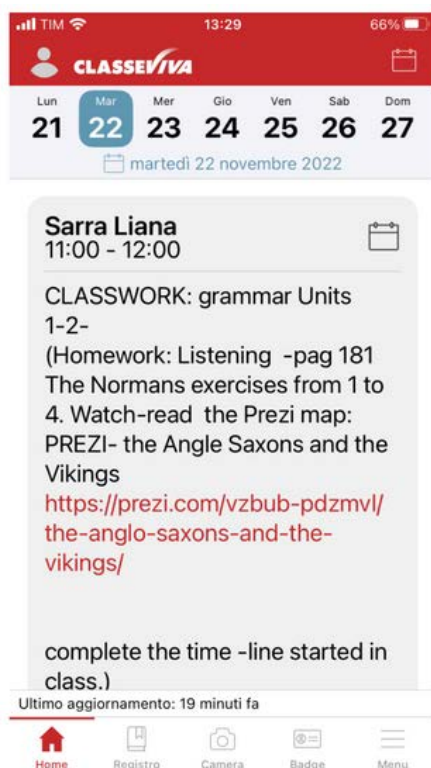
1. Parents receiving information by the schools through emails, website, and now mainly through the electronic register app (online class journal with information on student attendance, homework, school grades, official school communications)
2. Parents’ participation in the school board, with the election of the Parents’ members
3. Parents’ participation in the class teacher councils, with election of parents’ representatives at the class level
4. Individual parent-teacher meetings attendance, where teachers inform on the progresses of the students, usually once or twice a year
5. Parent-teacher conference attendance, where the school invites parents for general meetings at the class or school level, usually once or twice a year
6. Parents contributing to the school budget, where the school asks parents to pay an annual voluntary fee for specific purposes
7. Parents’ participation to special days’ events (welcome party for first school day, Christmas party, final school day party)

Joyce Epstein, one of the most influential authors studying school, family, and community partnerships, developed a model that identifies six types of parents’ involvement (see picture below). These types represent possible ways in which schools can involve more families in their children’s education.





Looking at Italian schools, two of these dimensions appear to be more developed than others. The Communicating dimension has been increasingly supported by ICT in recent years, and with the "Electronic register" app an additional step forward has been taken. Nevertheless, this huge and uninterrupted flux of information is mostly one-way. We should reflect on how to design and conduct effective forms of communication regarding school programs and student progress that involve parents in an active role.



The above image shows an example of an electronic register app. It allows parents- and others- to know in real time what is happening in the class (left side) and the student's grades (right side).

A second dimension, that of Decision-Making, has grown strongly in Italy thanks to the national laws introduced in the 1970s, which promoted the social involvement of all school actors (teachers, parents, and students) in the democratic governance of schools. Parents are elected to the school board and the board president must be a parent. School elections are held annually to elect parent representatives at both the class and school level. Despite these laws, many argue that the social governance of a school is formal, and that decisions are made primarily by the school principal and its staff.



This picture is an example of the decision-making dimension: a school board meeting, Istituto Comprensivo Santena (Torino), Italy. Eight parent representatives are sitting in the school board meeting, along with the school principal and eight teacher representatives.

On the other side, there are two dimensions that appear underrepresented in the Italian educational debate and school practices, namely **Parenting** and **Learning at home**. By “parenting” we mean aiding families to understand child and adolescent development and helping to establish home environments that support children as students. “Learning at home” refers to providing information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and curriculum-related activities and decisions. These two dimensions are closely related to the learning process and involve the student-parent-teacher triad. During the first Covid-19 pandemic when



schools stopped face-to-face lessons and we experimented with distance learning on a large scale, we realized how necessary an educational dialogue on these topics between teachers and parents was. The health emergency revealed the importance of family resources, well-being at home and parental support for children's learning. Important places for developing Parenting and Learning at home are individual parent-teacher meetings.



The picture above depicts an Online parent-teacher meeting, Istituto Comprensivo Lepido, Reggio Emilia, Italy. The online mode was introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic in almost all Italian schools.

I would like to conclude by using the inspiring work of Janet Goodall, Learning-centred parental engagement: Freire reimagined (2018). She suggests that parental involvement with schools (attending meetings, events and so forth) is nothing but the first step in achieving parental engagement in children's learning. Schools should involve parents in their children's learning, helping them to create a positive attitude towards learning at home. Parents can be co-constructors of knowledge about their children. Teachers and parents working together to support the child's learning is one of the lessons learned during the Covid 19 emergency, and one that we must not forget.

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Parent–School Partnerships in Morocco: Areas for Closer Alignment between Policies, Partnership Practices, and Improved Learning Outcomes

Mohammed Elmeski, The Nordic Centre for Conflict Transformation (Morocco)

Parents have been filling an important role as their children's first teachers since prehistoric times (Berger, 1997). The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has enshrined parental rights in articles 5, 14, 18, 24, and 30. However, the extent to which these rights are enacted varies across and within countries based on policies, school cultures, distribution of roles between parents and schools, and other important factors such as the perception of the value attached to education and learning.



In the U.S, Epstein (1990) describes an evolution in relations among schools, families, and communities from perspectives advocating separate spheres to a partnership characterized by overlapping spheres of influence. This shift reflects the rising levels of education among mothers, increased parental awareness of how to support children's success, changes in federal regulations and funding for parent involvement, and changing family structures.

In Morocco, prior to the generalization and unification of public education in Morocco post-independence in 1956, the community managed children's schooling (Boukamhi, 2004). Families had the power to hire and fire school teachers based on mutual agreements between the teachers and the community and clear quality indicators. These included memorization of the Qur'an, mastery of Arabic, basic numeracy, and respect for elders. The Koranic teacher performed community duties as well. He led prayer, oversaw funerals, officiated marriages, and read letters and official documents (Houtsonen, 1994, Crawford, 2001, Boukamhi, 2004, and Tawil, 2006). Jewish communities, especially in rural Morocco, had a similar say in their children's education. According to Boum (2010), local rabbis tutored Jewish boys. The traditional school *sla* was an important Jewish institution responsible for children's literacy, respect for traditions, and moral structures of the community.



At the policy level, the first ministerial memo calling for school parental involvement dates back to 1960 (Idrissi, 2009). Major education reform milestones in 2000, 2015, 2019, and 2022 have continued to underscore the central role of parents and families in learning improvement. As a result, parent associations have gained stronger representation in local, regional, and national governance structures. Nonetheless, evaluative reports (e.g., COSEF, 2005; HCE, 2008) agreed that while the structures for parental involvement exist, there is little evidence of partnership between parents and schools.

The results of a mixed methods study of parent-school partnerships in 120 public middle schools in Morocco (Elmeski, 2012) indicated that members of parent associations were for the most part consulted on education reform policies. However, involvement in consultations through parent representative bodies around policy reform, did not translate into successful partnerships between schools, parents, and communities. Further quantitative inquiry into the disconnect between political consensus on reform priorities and dispositions, behaviors, and conflict resolution strategies associated with successful partners (Mohr & Spekman, 1994) highlighted multiple issues undermining genuine involvement of parents and communities in Morocco's public schools. These analyses unearthed significant gaps between parents and teachers in terms of mutual trust, commitment to collaboration, coordination, communication quality, and conflict resolution.

At a deeper level, qualitative inquiry dug further into the structural, cultural, political, and human resources that act as barriers to parent and community engagement (Elmeski, 2012). These factors included deficient financial and administrative support, vague regulatory framework, limited accountability, inadequate leadership, limited opportunities for capacity development focused on partnership building, and last, but not least, fragmented parent and teacher organizations that were too politically and ideologically divided to put the student interests at the center.

Parental and community involvement in Morocco is an example of a desired school improvement output whose structural, political, human resources, and cultural trade-offs are not adequately appraised or effectively confronted. It presents a case of a desired engagement where the *why* question skews towards the benefits for schools rather than the gains to families, communities, and children. The *what* dimension highlights sustainability concerns about formal institutions of parental involvement that are often solicited for their cash and in-kind contributions rather than mutually rewarding connections where parents see teachers as allies in improving their parenting skills and helping all children to learn. Finally, the *how* front can be further strengthened through leadership drivers that minimize the cost of parental involvement, maximizes its rewards, and strengthen bonds of trust between school staff and the community.



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Why Build the Connection of Community to Schools?

Natalie Barry, Garden River First Nation; Beverley Freedman, Independent Consultant; Mona Jones, Garden River First Nation; Dianne Roach, Shingwauk Kinooamaage Gamig (Canada)



Colonialism devastated Indigenous communities, forcibly took children into residential schools, and punished people for speaking their language or engaging in cultural practices. This was true globally. Ninety countries have Indigenous populations including Canada, Chile, and Australia[i]. For many, education was oppressive. Currently, the need is to engage community in rebuilding trust and supporting lifelong learning. This viewpoint describes community engagement with three Anishnaabek communities[ii].

Canadian Context

Five percent of Canadians, according to the 2021 census, self-identified as Indigenous. Jones (2021) measured the economic intergenerational damage resulting from the imposition of the residential school system. Her research concluded that those who attended residential schools had a lower high school graduation rate, which then negatively impacted their lifetime economic earning potential. A “sense of distrust in mainstream educational institutions” continues to persist (Jones, 2021:25).

According to Statistics Canada (2016), 68% of Indigenous adults aged 35 to 44 completed a high school diploma; as compared to more than 80% of their non-Indigenous peers. Education remains a lever for change, an investment in our future (Di Cecco & Freedman, 2013). Increasing educational attainment as measured by high school graduation rates and post-secondary certification are a way forward. However, this means engaging the community in trust building to support formal education and lifelong learning.

While disparities persist, the future for Indigenous post-secondary attainment is changing. Increasingly, Indigenous adults who initially dropped out of high school diploma/equivalency are returning to upgrade, to complete their diploma, or achieve its equivalency through the General Education Development (GED) [PC2] option (O’Donnell & Arriagada, 2019).

[i] <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/indigenouspeoples> approximately 500 million Indigenous Peoples

[ii] <https://www.anishinabek.ca/>



When they attain high school accreditation, Indigenous adults are more likely to be employed, and increasingly are continuing with formal education to obtain a post-secondary diploma or degree (O'Donnell & Arriagada, 2019). Obtaining high school and post-secondary credentials support continued employment and wellbeing. It also improves adult oversight for today's children and youth in school.

"Cultural interventions may provide a buffer to the harmful legacy of this historical trauma" (Jones, 2021:1).

What Community?

For on-reserve communities the voices of Elders and Knowledge Keepers are critical to preserving Anishnaabemowin^[iii] and Identity. They link the past, present and future. Additionally, there are underserved voices of parents/families who need to feel they too have influence in shaping the education of their children. The impacts of multigenerational trauma require intentionality in engaging community.

Rebuilding trust, gathering authentic input, expanding voices through stakeholder engagement is critical to moving forward towards Truth and Reconciliation. Gathering input from the community on collectively determining their priorities, rebuilding governance, and developing strategic plans to create pathways forward to enable:

- K-12 education that is culturally responsive, experiential, and Land and Language based to revitalize Identity
- The return of adult learners who left school before graduation
- Increased access of First Nation students to post-secondary degree/diploma programs

Elders and Knowledge Keepers interact with students including post-secondary learners to ensure that an Indigenous worldview is integrated, since for Indigenous Peoples; Land, Spirit and Language are intertwined. This is important to foster belonging, wellbeing and identity. Toulouse (2016) states, "What matters to indigenous peoples in education is that children, youth, adults and elders have the opportunity to develop their gifts in a respectful space" (Toulouse, 2016:1). The Elders and Knowledge Keepers were consulted in structuring community engagement.

[iii] <https://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/main-entry/anishinaabemowin-ni>



How to Build Trust and Engage the Voices of the Community

It is important to decolonize stakeholder engagement. The process was iterative and collaborative. It began with discussions with Portfolio Holders (Band Members on Tribal Council with responsibility for Education) and Elders Council. This involved respectful, active listening. Based on their input, themes were developed to anchor the engagement strategy. From the themes emerged questions and probes designed to gather input on the priorities and pathways moving forward. Language matters, so wording of questions were authentic, responsive, so they would resonate with the community.

- Online survey: Respondents were entered into a raffle for prizes to encourage participation from all community members.
- Community focus groups: Initially live-streamed for community members who could not attend the session. COVID-19 made these gatherings problematic and moved to Zoom, which was less than desirable and now just returning to in-person gatherings. [PC1] These in-person gatherings were welcoming; including blessing ceremonies, stories shared, with appropriate food and refreshments.
- Targeted zoom interviews with selected community stakeholders including key leaders from the North Tribal Council, representatives from local agencies, and health organizations and former graduates. These stakeholders were identified by the liaison team leading the process, as people whose input mattered.

Data were analyzed and preliminary findings shared. The design and development of strategic planning was collaborative, with ongoing input reflecting community aspirations and building community. Strategies focused on continuing engagement and reclaiming control of education. Globally, as Indigenous educational systems work to elevate outcomes; Identity, and Connection to People, Land, Language and Culture matter.



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Problematising the Relationship between the School, Family, and Community

Daniel Oduro, Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain)



Connection between schools and communities

Education is vital for the advancement of every economy and requires varied mediums through which it can happen. This calls for the establishment of schools in various localities to help train people with the knowledge required for development. When we make mention of school, for some people, it is a place where training takes place. In many countries, the community is integral in providing the land and resources for the establishment of schools because they want their children to receive education and close the gap of rural-urban divide and development in the locality.

This piece responds to the Dialogic question on why community is very important regarding the success of schools. The existence of the community enables the school to survive. A school's survival and goals are threatened when there is opposition in the locality. In short, school and community partnership are a sign of success, quality education, and development of a place.

In my opinion, schools should be connected to their communities. In this piece, I will share my thoughts from the perspective of developing countries. There are some difficulties and challenges that are out of control and the reach of the schools. For example, in the global south where a child can decide not to attend school or could be seen working during school hours without the parent or the child facing punishment, schools are powerless in dealing with such challenges. Schools depend on the relationship with the community to be able to make certain decisions and find amicable solutions to the problem and needs of parents. This is because these localities have respected traditional bodies that shape the area and the community. A good connection between schools and the community will enable schools to thrive, acquire the needed peace to operate, and also to solve any negative external influences that may arise from both camps. This requires the school to become acquainted with the people of the community and their beliefs, and adapt to their system as communities know how best schools can assist them.

Generally, the purpose/goal of schools is to achieve quality education. To achieve quality education is not merely the sole effort of the schools or the government but the involvement of other strategic constituents that can include stakeholders



like community, parents and other bodies (Cheng & Tam, 1997). When schools are connected with their community, they are able to develop the curriculum and reading materials in such a way that it reflects the day to day lives of the children which will make learning more relevant because the children adapt easily when they find relatable experiences. The community and parents are able to act as resource personnel to teach the children some indigenous knowledge and organize community programs to shape their future.

Meaning of community in different contexts

Community is defined as a group of people who share the same values, convictions and worldview and are separated by physical boundaries but connected by social or cultural ties. A community could be bound by common ties of kinship, friendship, rivalry, familiarity or jealousy. When we talk about community in relation to school, we refer to the group of people with a common interest in the school, which comprises the traditional, educational and political leadership in close proximity to the school. With Bray's (2001) work on community partnership in education, he identified the types of community important in the field of education. These are: geographical communities (individuals living in the same villages or towns), religious bodies, community based on shared family concern (PTA for their children concern), ethnic and racial groups (minorities with self-help structures) and community based on shared philanthropy (NGO's).

Understanding connection in terms of community and best practices

When we say 'connection with schools', Bray (2001) suggested the concept of partnership. This is because partnership goes beyond information sharing and collaboration. It denotes more engaged and active participation. Practices and policies suggest that when there is a connection between school, community (local educational body, traditional, religious and stakeholders) and parents that members share their respective expertise and learn from each other, there is an increased sense of ownership, mutual support, monitoring and evaluation, increased resources and increased effectiveness (Bray, 2001).

Avenues for this connection in schools

In most countries, there are already instituted avenues where parents and community partners connect with the schools. There are bodies like parent-teacher groups, school member committees, village committees, mothers' groups, etcetera. Some of these bodies are well organized in some countries. Some of these groups do organize face to face meetings once a month or twice where parents and community meet to discuss the issues regarding the school's improvement. However, insecurities and COVID19, have restricted the survival of these relationship especially in areas where there is no access to internet while others have subscribed to online meetings.



Conclusion

Schools must always endeavour to partner with community members in a locality to ensure a success. Such connections allow for trust and mutual support which lead to quality education and success of both school and community. Schools should always find means to strengthen this link in this time of insecurities.

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'Strengthening Cooperation and Collaboration between Families, Pupils and Schools to Improve Educational Quality and Equity: Lessons Learned and Possibilities for Change'

State of the Art Session

Romina Madrid, University of Stirling (UK) & Sara Romiti National Institute for the Evaluation of Education and Training (Italy)

One of the most central topics but simultaneously one of the most difficult and probably one of the least explored during the pandemic has been the topic of family-school relationships, community, and parental engagement. How has the pandemic transformed school-family relationships?



The COVID19 pandemic transformed the role of home-based learning and, with it, a new configuration of school-family relationships around the world appears to be underway. The online learning experienced during the pandemic reasserts opportunities to leverage home and community settings as reservoirs of knowledge deserving greater attention for teachers and teacher educators and to consider how educational technology can be used to support pedagogies that are more centred on students' interests, assets, and needs (Means et al, 2013). In turn, this also offers an opportunity to rethink the role of students in the school-family relationship.

With that context, we invited our speakers to reflect on the following questions:

1. What emerging approaches/practices/lenses do we have available to increase a stronger relationship between families, students and schools?
2. What are the barriers to strengthen partnership between families, students and their schools for all communities, especially for those who are more disadvantaged? What do we know or need to know in order to address these barriers?
3. What are the most critical changes as result of the COVID19 pandemic in the school-family relationships? How should these changes inform our understanding of this topic?

The ICSEI 2022 State of the Art session was led by three outstanding scholars who focus on these topics: Professor Janet Goodall, Professor Megan Bang and Professor Karen Seashore.



Professor Janet Goodall is an Associate Professor in the Department of Education and Childhood Studies and Director of Postgraduate students at Swansea University. Dr. Goodall's research is primarily about parents' engagement in their children's learning. She has worked with numerous schools, governments, and governmental bodies to support parental engagement, and lectured and written widely on the subject.

Professor Megan Bang is Professor of the Learning Sciences and Psychology at Northwestern University and is currently serving as the Senior Vice President at the Spencer Foundation. Dr Bang studies dynamics of culture, learning, and development with a specific focus on the dimensions of identity, equity, and community engagement. She conducts research in both schools and informal settings across the life course; designing and building science learning environments from Indigenous knowledge systems; and studying child, family, and teacher learning and practice in novel environments.

Professor Karen Seashore Louis is Regents Professor and Robert H. Beck Chair at the University of Minnesota. She has more than 50 years of experience studying school improvement. Professor Seashore's research centres on school improvement and reform, school effectiveness, leadership in school settings, and the politics of knowledge use in education. Current projects include research-practice collaboration and the application of positive psychology to larger social settings.

Parental Engagement: Misconceptions, Good Practices and the Post-Pandemic Future, Janet Goodall

I think it's important to start from a shared basis. What is parental engagement? What does it mean? We've been talking about this in the literature for the last 25 and up to 50 years. But we also know there's a gap between what the literature says and what happens on the ground and practice.

My mother-in-law is incredibly wise, and she says you can raise a child by the book if you have a different book for every child. And you can do parental engagement by the book if you have a different book for every family, while we have a tendency in many areas of education to want sort of tick boxes. So, we can say "Oh, we've done that", but that's never going to be the case with parental engagement. Because every family is different, every community is different, every young person is different.

And we know from the literature that parental engagement changes depending on the context. And it can change depending on the age of the young person. Reading with children is very important when they're very young, but my children are in their 30s and I don't tend to sit down and read with them, yet I still do discuss their day with them and find out what's happening.



There are a lot of problems around parental engagement, and the concept is often really misunderstood. I've highlighted a few of the misunderstandings below.

One of them - I think this has come to the fore particularly in the last five or six years - is the emphasis on good parenting. And schools being interested, or school staff being interested in **good parenting** and making sure that parents behave well, which is another stick to hit parents with. Some probably have experienced the fact that everybody is very happy to tell you what you're doing wrong in the world and is very happy to tell parents what they're doing wrong. We very rarely tell parents what they're doing right. I've attained the age where I can say to parents in a supermarket that I've really enjoyed listening to them talk to their child. But **good parenting is often constructed as parenting the way school staff parent their own children, so it's class based**, it's socioeconomic based, and it's often racially based. So, what do we mean by good parenting? Do we mean parenting? That's good for that individual child? Or do we mean that's parenting the way I would expect parenting to be done?

A second misunderstanding is that **systemic issues** are often addressed by individual interventions we've got. Most of us agree we have an inequitable system which does not serve all our children as well as it could. And often we try to fix that system by individual interventions. I'm not saying we shouldn't do that because we have to deal, and we have to support the children and the young people that are in the system now. But it doesn't mean that we don't have to look at the systemic problems as well. This is not a dichotomy. This is not an either or situation which I keep saying to teachers. Teachers are by nature change agents. We all go into education because we want things to be better. But there's a wider system as well, within which education sits, and some of those wider systemic issues impact on families and we need to look at them as well as we need to look at individual interventions.

The third aspect to highlight is that often we have a **deficit approach**, and we talk about parents or groups of parents being hard to reach. And we categorize parents and we found this particularly in teacher training, which is particularly worrying. I think there's some definite barriers that we need to overcome, and these are not just local barriers to me in Wales, these are international barriers according to the literature. The first is that we're asking teachers to do something we haven't trained them for. We're asking them to support parental engagement when it often doesn't form part of their teacher training, and it doesn't form part of their ongoing **professional development**, which is unfair to teachers. We don't do that about a new way of teaching math. We teach the teachers, and we support them. We need to do the same around parental engagement.



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There's a lack of understanding of what we mean by parental engagement, and the last aspect is **deficit views of families**.

Moreover, there are a few things I would like people attending to think about. One is **good practice**, what good practice have you seen around parental engagement? Because there's a huge amount of good practice out there. So, we could share that with each other. And what are we going to do going forward? It's very well to get all these bright ideas, but the reality of school is often that nothing happens because of it. So, what are we going to do on the ground?

Finally, I've got two questions that I'm very interested in. The first is related to **long term impact of learning going on at home**. Are parents more engaged now? What's the relationship like between parents and teachers? Short term impact seems to be that this relationship has gotten better.

And a question that is particularly relevant in the UK, there must be a better way of reporting to parents other than parents' evenings. We know they're not fit for purpose, but we don't know what else we could do. **Many schools moved to virtual meetings; are they useful? Will they continue?**

Towards Transforming Histories and Foundations of Family-School Relations, Megan Bang

Hi everyone, I am so glad to be here. I guess I wanted to sort of push a little bit about **how much I think our models of family, community and school engagement need to take seriously the kinds of histories and legacies which we're building on**.

As educators, we often forget them and I think most of us are probably convinced that schools are a good thing and forget that these legacies are not a long time ago. I'm partly coming from you as I'm a granddaughter of a boarding school survivor and the mother and grandmother of kiddos that have multiple boarding school survivor stories.



The New York Times

'Horrible History': Mass Grave of Indigenous Children Reported in Canada

SCIENTIFIC
AMERICAN

Canada's Residential Schools Were a Horror

Founded to carry out the genocide of Indigenous people, they created conditions that killed thousands of children

The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

U.S. boarding schools for Indians had a hidden agenda: Stealing land

The government closed most of these institutions once the dispossession was complete

 ALJAZEERA

Inside the US push to uncover Indigenous boarding school graves

Researchers say unmarked graves likely will be found at majority of boarding schools for Indigenous children across US.

These headlines are all from the last year in the United States and Canada, and part of what I want to say is that I think that we have to take seriously the kind of colonial and assimilationist agendas of our school systems. Obviously in the US and Canada and other settler colonial nations, that's especially true, but this is also more broadly applicable where education is based in extractive models of taking children from their families into school buildings and arguing that ultimately it is better for them to be there than to be with their families, and so I'm going to talk at sort of both of those levels and just say I think there are deep lessons to be learned about how we might think differently about this.



What I like to tell people a lot is that it is both the case that I love school, that I study schools, that I design schools and I'm accountable to my elders and community members who also survived the evils of the same schools. And, for many people, that is the kind of complexity we work in.

I work in schools where grandmas drop their kids off into the same exact building where they were beaten for speaking their language. That's true in lots of places, but **teachers and educators are typically mobile in a way that they're dislocated from those lived histories and realities of the children and families that they engage with.**

This translates into deep misreadings driven by deficit models of families and communities and then creating models of family engagement that are driven by compliance. That the terms of the relations between parents and some extended family members and schools becomes compliance and, in the United States, if you don't comply you get criminalized. You become truant. Over time families that don't comply with schools have faced increasing consequentiality to the point that, at least in the US, teachers and schools are the largest reporters of harm and lead to the most school kids' removal from families of anybody else in society. Now I'm not saying that they're wrong necessarily, but there is an interesting longer-term dynamic between the experiences of children and family and what counts as a good life.

I think that the other thing that we really need to grapple with is that often we engage in a kind of content neutral or disciplinary neutral forms of family engagement, and that is part of a legacy of not seeing the worth of individuals and communities – our knowledges and expertise and deliberately engaging in an intellectual assimilative agenda in which some forms of knowledge are valued, and others are not.

What we, in a lot of the work that I've been up to and see a lot of people starting to push on, is to say what does it mean to reimagine not only how we engage families, but how we think about fundamental practices of teaching and learning? How do we see deep content learning in family and communal life as relevant to academic learning and not just in the practice of family engagement? What would it mean, what would we need to fundamental reimagine some of our deepest foundational assumptions?



For us, we have been engaged in co-designing new learning environments with families and communities. And when you actually engage families' and communities' expertise, you begin to recognize the deep wells of knowledge and potential that we are just not engaged with at all at present. It also helps educators really know how to engage in teaching and learning in ways that are meaningfully connected to children's lives. Unfortunately, students all too often experience school based learning as disconnected and inconsequential at best, and more pointedly many children experience a kind of epistemic violence in which their own ways of knowing, their families, and communities are positioned as wrong, inferior, and in need of change.

I had a student ask once: "Is carrying capacity of an ecosystem a real thing in the world? Like is that really real?" We had been in a unit for weeks about ecosystems' carrying capacity and habit decline and it took about three or four weeks for him to wonder if the phenomena mattered in the world. And one day he asked literally, "Is this a real thing in the world? Like, could it get so bad here that there wouldn't be any more deer?" Important to know is that he and his family were hunters and he in that moment realized he was learning something that intersected with his real life. Essentially weeks of instruction had never connected to the routine cultural practices of this student, to the phenomena that is deeply ingrained in what he lives and knows. It is through the engagement of families and communities that you can start to develop practices and material tools that help facilitate these connections in more robust ways. I think it's important that we're serious about family engagement that is in disciplinary specific ways because I think it helps us learn what it means to teach educators to do that better. Rather than them figuring it out on their own.

I'll end with a kind of COVID story because I had my 4-year-old granddaughter on my lap in a zoom session for her preschool and I'm a former head start teacher and I felt like I was in a joke. I just was like I cannot believe that I'm participating in this. I'm a former preschool teacher. All I'm doing right now is scolding her for not paying attention to the screen boxes and telling her not to touch the keyboard. And I'm not suggesting her teacher isn't lovely.

It was a serious failure of imagination about what we could have done. All of the families we were working with PK3 said: "Please, don't give us anything to do online." And so, we designed what we called a family storyline which guided families through a field-based science investigation. This storyline was a series of material tools that supported families do things in and around their family, their homes and their communities that also deeply align with learning objectives. The family storyline was seen as helpful to families, but we had to get out of the well-worn deficit assumptions about families and what we imagine "scaling" or policy can and should look like. As we engage in questions of policy and scale, we need adaptive approaches that allow us to be responsive in new kinds of ways.



School-Family-Community: Policy Challenges Posed by COVID, Karen Seashore

I have almost 50 years of doing work in this field but most people in ICSEI would think of me more as an organizational scholar than a parent engagement scholar. On the other hand, I am interested in boundaries and equity and my policy work has examined the intersection between the school and parents/community, so I'm going to try and take a policy perspective that would complement both Janet's and Megan's perspectives, starting from and building on what they've said.

I make a very clear assumption that school community relations and parent community relations are complementary but not always the same. But both require a strong effort on the part of leadership, and I'm talking about leadership from both sides. If you want engagement, you need to have community and parent leaders engaged in this project as well as school leaders. It's a two-way street that requires enormous capacity and commitment over time. Yet we know that, at least in the countries that I have been involved with, community engagement is not high on the list of priorities for school leaders.

There's been some interesting research, building on what Megan discussed, about how you connect and create the capacity of communities and parents to influence schools in ways that are positive for the children and do not necessarily stir up conflict. But over the last few years, Covid has undermined the resources that are available. What I am referring to are the human resources on both sides: educators and parents/community members are stretched thin and have less capacity to develop this relationship. It is hard to calculate the energy that has been required simply to keep the systems functioning in most countries.

Now I'm not doing research on this right now, but I'm fairly active on Twitter and the other arenas where people in schools are sharing their experiences. And, with Jeff Walls, I also have some recent data from school administrators in one state - not the state that I live in or work in yet, by the way, just in case you want to know. And there is a great deal of angst - among the parents who have had to learn how to "homeschool" their children and support their mental health, among community members whose lives have been disrupted and who can't meet in person, and among educators who were stretched thin responding to rapidly changing requirements and new tasks.



I think that we need to look at the long-term consequences for community and parent engagement and how these vary between countries. I am privy primarily to media sources in North America, where there are vocal expressions of frustration, anger, and exhaustion. But I recently read a report from the Inspectorate in the Netherlands (unfortunately only in Dutch) that suggests that the Covid effects have been less pronounced and, overall, things have gone rather well. Now the Dutch system is quite unique in its organization, which creates stronger connections between parents/communities and schools, so that might have something to do with a lower key response. But we still know much less internationally about the way in which parents and communities have responded to the unstable conditions in schools.

But one of the things that we know, at least in the United States and I suspect in many other countries, is that if you gave school leaders 10 more hours in the week, they would not allocate them to school community relations. It's kind of low on their priority list when they have less energy, and their time is consumed with just trying to make the schools function with whatever resources they have available. In North America, much of their effort on a local level has been on mediating the changing conditions and requirements of the various governing authorities, which have been poorly coordinated in many instances. Community leaders don't have the capacity to respond: **If students are at home and not in school, what is the role of community? The burdens have fallen almost exclusively on parents** – but the extent to which this has taken a toll on their confidence in the school system is not well known.

And the community has been concerned with economic and social survival. Some places have their mask requirements, others shut down and are quarantined. They're all consumed with how to live in this very strange and very unpredictable environment. Schools and youth have been too far down on the survival agenda. So, where's the energy to sustain these relationships when you can't meet in person when you are just in a little box on a screen and when you have so many additional things to do. I think that we really need to think about what it will take to reenergize, to recommit to the success of our young people, in and out of school?

The other thing that has been apparent – probably in every country – is that **COVID has increased inequity between schools and between families within schools**. My grandchildren attend a school where every child gets a laptop to take home with them to use. There have never been any interruptions in online learning. Teachers have been given extra time and extra resources. The schools that I've been working with, on the other hand, are rural. They have weak internet connections. Often, they don't have a lot of resources. Many of the families have very limited internet skills and others are in immigrant communities where, if there are two-parent families, there



are also four jobs. As always, well-educated, more affluent parents who have extra time to spare at home were better able to help their children negotiate this new world of online learning.

Many families simply don't have those resources and we know that the teachers are very aware of this. Because of online learning, they see into their students' homes, and they can observe those inequities and it is causing them enormous distress. If you look at the US tweets, it's very hard on teachers and school leaders and there is moral distress everywhere. They can see very clearly that some children have suffered more than others and they are powerless to do anything about it because they're still in a chaotic environment with very limited resources.

Communities are also aware of this, and we must be very concerned about the degree to which these kinds of issues have reduced confidence in schools. This affects both local policy (where national policies are adjudicated) but seems to have had limited impact on state/province and national policy. Community confidence in schools requires stability, possibly along with evolutionary adaptation, but what happens when stability is upended?

We, as educators, want to attack the problems, we want to work on these issues. We want to have more and better community input as we make lemonade out of COVID lemons. What the parents and community want, however, is predictability. Unpredictability makes people anxious, and it makes them question whether "those in charge" know what they are doing. **Questions are being raised about the role of educator/teacher associations, who have the dual obligation to protect their members as well as to foster quality education. Policy makers at all levels and in different sectors disagree. Youth services as well as schools are disrupted, which further strains parents and communities.**

The big question is: How do we address these issues at any level of policy? It's not just a question of going back to what was because the disruption has been too significant. Policy must address not only some of the issues that Megan has talked about - inequities which were already there, but which have been exacerbated, and the increased disconnection between the parents who are "most difficult to reach." Local policies need to address this loss of confidence, as well as the de-mystification of classrooms and teaching that has occurred with online learning. More parents (and grandparents) that Megan is reporting on seeing in classrooms and saying "wow, you know I don't think this is really what they need to be doing right now..." So, I think a lot of parents are not questioning classrooms or even teachers. They're questioning what's being taught and they're questioning how it's being taught because they've seen things that they did not see before. This adds to teacher stress.



So, lack of confidence is also, I think, a result of too much information on both sides. **Teachers in some ways are in shock because they've been able to see into children's lives in ways that they couldn't previously; families are shocked because they see into the teaching environment and don't always like what they see.** So, I think this is the biggest challenge that's facing us.

We're not in an environment where we should be talking about going back to what was before without addressing some of the things that Janet and Megan have talked about. It's going to be very difficult to come together to create something that might be a new consensus around what we need for learning and what we can agree with and how we reach points of equity, get parents and community more engaged.

And I have one other comment. There's been important progress in many countries around the Community Schools model. Community Schools are open to the community, not just the parents to come in for parent night, but programming for children and adults going on 12-16 hours a day. When people come in, the schools end up belonging to the community in ways that they miss if it's not there. It's a major movement, not in every country but certainly in many countries, and now the schools have been closed. What is going to provide the impetus for thinking about schools as being resources for their communities again, without policy intervention?

I don't see and I do not believe this will probably be effective at the national level, but there will need to be policy intervention at some level that's more proximate to the schools. This is going to be a greater challenge in some countries than in others. So, I will leave with that dismal thought, as most policy analysts are a bit dismal.

Group discussion and reflection

Chris Chapman: The last point that Karen has made about seeing into each other's worlds in a different way during the pandemic. And I guess one research reflection is what has it done? It's given parents and carers an insight into classrooms in a different way which is not all bad, but I think what has been done is to highlight the variation and the inconsistency in teacher quality and that's one of the things that struck me most. Being visually able to see how different teachers clearly have different capacities for engaging with online and even blended learning. And the relatively little support they've had to prepare themselves or to come or to support them in a particularly challenging time.

The second point I'd like to make is how this has exacerbated inequities, and I'm talking from a UK perspective, in socioeconomic terms rather than in race terms, although I'm sure that's the case to come. But what we mustn't forget is, and this goes back to Janet's point in a way about having different books. The pandemic has affected all children in different ways, even those from highly supported middle-class families.



I was talking to a Director of Education with a Scottish school district last Friday, and we were reflecting on this, and he has had one teenage suicide and 5 attempted suicides within his district and they were all-in middle-class families. So, we must not forget that it's affecting all sectors of society in a way.

Janet Goodall: Building on Chris's point, we can't underestimate the impact on teachers and administrators, and there's a little bit of a tendency in some areas to kind of put everything on teachers, put everything on administrators. One of the points I constantly make is that we talk about teachers and parents as though they were separate species. But as far as I can see, you know most teachers are parents, and they're not actually separate species.

And building on that and what Megan was saying, we don't want to go back to what we had. There were really good bits of what we had, but there were also some bits that were really problematic and some of the things that seemed like really good ideas were problematic.

So that we have many Welsh medium schools, with English speaking parents who were unable to help their children with their schoolwork because the school work was in a language they didn't speak, which is a reverse of what you know. We can build back better to borrow someone else's phrase. But we've got to do that together, and then there was a point in someone's slide about where are children in all of this? Where are the young people's voices?

Megan Bang: There's a couple of things that I also think are important to say. I don't do scholarship, I have done some family engagement scholarship recently with some middle school in high school, but I want to pick up on Chris's point. I think there are now 11 states in the United States that have declared a mental health crisis for adolescents right now. I think most psychology wards in the United States for youth are filled. And so my kids' high school is having an emergency training for parents for signs of suicide tonight. So, I think that, and I say that because I think that one of the key things that if I had to, I don't think that any of us know is what we should do next.

But here's one thing that I would tell you that I think increasingly that we might need to take seriously is that our push to recover academic learning is making it worse, and that actually what we may need to do is be serious and understand the kinds of trauma and emotional recovery. I mean, it's interesting to think about how much the push has been on social emotional learning and that if you don't have good social, emotional, kind of a baseline, it's hard to learn, no matter. What and yet? What we've done is invested in academic recovery on a policy level. Like it's exactly opposite to what any evidence pre-pandemic was about. What leads to good learning and the problem is that I think we've been so driven by academic outcomes and a worry



about future job loss that it's like invisible eyes, kids and family and communal needs right now. And I think that's why we have an exodus of our teachers happening now. It's because they know, like asking kids to do this worksheet when I'm barely not crying is a ridiculous ask. Partially, what I am saying is that there is a failure of imagination and maybe a little bit of inhumane will.

Given all the monetary incentives that typically frame our policy conversations right now and so I just, I do think if we start to think about what are the data sets that are actually being put out in front of families or school leaders or policymakers about. What is the best decision to make about a child's long-term trajectory and it's interesting to me about the health crises that are getting zero public engagement, but if you dig a little bit, it's all right under the surface, and it's probably because people are really unpractised at talking about it? There isn't a public discourse about some of these things at all, and so we kind of all stumbles into it. But the trouble is I don't know that adolescents are going to recover at any of the speed that we're asking of them. I must be honest; I think we'll see faster recovery and be able to re-engage with younger children quicker. I do think that we'll see a kind of plasticity with younger children and yes, we'll have to worry about some, those who won't make all the marks that we they weren't making beforehand either by the way.

The other thing we haven't even recognized is that we weren't making those things really work in the first place and now we're doubling down on them. So, I **don't know for me there is this really interesting opportunity to think hard about what it would mean to lead with wellbeing as school systems and what Community Schools are really after is to cultivate a sense of wellbeing in community.**

And I so I'm with you caring about what would it really mean to lean into a kind of Community School model that cared about wellbeing and not just academic outcomes.

Doris McWhorter: Thank you. What Megan said just really resonated with me and I really like the idea of leading with wellbeing and encouraging and supporting teachers and school leaders to reach out to families. I was just thinking about a time in my early teaching career when I had a student in Grade 9 who was really struggling for a lot of reasons. As he entered high school, he had some reading challenges and started to experience some real emotional challenges as well. I called his mum and had a chat with her one day and we talked about some strategies to support him at home as well as school. And I called her back two or three weeks later to tell her about the kind of progress that he was making and that he was getting re-engaged, and to thank her for her support at home. We were talking about what was working and so on and I remember that when I called her, I could hear a sharp intake of breath when she heard who was calling. And after I told her the good news, **she told me that this was the first time a teacher had ever reached out with good news about him**, which floored me at the time.



Jim Spillane: Something that has permeated this entire panel is **the idea of multiple purposes of schooling, which several people have written about. And I think one thing that the pandemic has done, it has got us to revisit that again.**

I am at home in Ireland, where we have one of the oldest public education systems in the world, but it was founded by the colonists to come get the Irish to speak English and give up on the Irish language, etc. **I think what is brilliant about the three presentations and the conversation is it rises again. Why school? And I think it's important that we engage in that conversation.** Megan makes this point when she speaks about the pressure for kids who are falling behind in academics, but schooling serves a whole variety of purposes and I think it's a good time for us to re-engage in that.

Karen Seashore: Building on what everybody has said I would like to say I'm very concerned that we turn only to educators and educational policy makers to try and address this issue. When systems are in crisis, we know (this is my organizational hat coming out) there's a tendency to centralized decision making rather than to do what would be best, which is to decentralize it, and continue decentralizing it.

If we ask educators to do that, trying to create and draw on community leadership to provide support for what's needed to get the kids back into some kind of healthy, thriving environment, we're just adding one more thing to a plate that they're not doing all that well right now because much has been added to their plate over the last few years. And we're not taking advantage of the fact that there are in almost all communities, leaders who can be part of the solution.

A lot of the policy decisions are made at a very local level. They're made school by school in large school systems. Even in Chicago. They're certainly made at a municipal or district level in most countries. There's some umbrella over it, but what people are doing every day is decided locally.

What if we get communities engaged in saying what do we need now to create a healthy environment for our kids? That would be the only conversation, it seems to me, that we could begin to create a new consensus around. What do we want to drag along with us into this new setting and what needs to change very fundamentally? And that will be a book for every community, not one book, so I'd just like to say that I think that for me has been a very important outcome of all the comments that have been made.



Continuing the Conversation

This dialogic poses a number of important provocations and questions that require continued dialogue, conversation, and action.

To support this, we invite all readers to join the ICSEI Dialogic Fireside Chat either in person at the ICSEI Congress 2023 in Viña del Mar, Chile, or online via Zoom.

This will take place on Wednesday, January 11th, 11:30am - 1:00pm [Viña del Mar] (Time Zone Converter)

In-Person:
Vergara C

Virtual:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84138224497pwd=cmF0RVBKRDdZeEdaVWhvTXBpUnJiZz09>

Meeting ID: 841 3822 4497
Passcode: 139061

We also invite all readers to participate in the LearnLab below and explore what others are thinking and planning as a result of engaging with this year's Dialogic.

LEARNLAB.NET CODE: 714293

Open Question:

We know the important relationship between schools, families and the communities they serve. As a result of today's conversation, what is your work?

Reply

Show results

