

# SCHOOLS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

TAKING ACTION AND DEVELOPING CIVIC LIFE



Edited by Dr Sebastien Chapleau

Foreword by Dr Karen Edge

Postscript by Professor Liz Todd

A collaboration between  
Citizen School and Blg Education



# SCHOOLS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES: TAKING ACTION AND DEVELOPING CIVIC LIFE

Dr Sebastien Chapleau, Editor

Research for this publication was undertaken as part of The Big Leadership Adventure, a two-year, deliberately different, leadership programme designed and delivered by Big Education Trust, to empower, enable, and inspire the leadership required for a Big Education. The programme is for leaders working in education and social enterprises who are ready to think differently about the challenges faced by schools and their communities.

More details about The Big Leadership Adventure at  
[www.bigeducation.org/big-leadership](http://www.bigeducation.org/big-leadership).

Published by

Big Education | [www.bigeducation.org](http://www.bigeducation.org) | @\_BigEducation

In collaboration with

Citizen School | [www.citizenschool.org.uk](http://www.citizenschool.org.uk) | @Citizen\_School

June 2020

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Design by Ben Rollo-Hayward

*In memory of Josephine Mukanjira, a great friend and colleague, as well as a leader who touched the lives of so many through kindness, compassion, and courage.*

*There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the practice of freedom – the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with the reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.*

Richard Shaull, in his preface to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

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# FOREWORD

## REFLECTIONS FROM BEYOND THE SCHOOL GATES

Dr Karen Edge

When I was first asked to write a lead-in chapter for this amazing collection of essays, it was January 2020. The opportunity to celebrate the power and practice of *schools in their communities* and *education beyond the school gates* was exciting. Our schools and educators tirelessly support their students, staff, parents and carers. Schools are central to the health, wellbeing, and success of their communities. More personally, I revelled in how the book would influence my own knowledge and insight as Year 4 parent and Governor in my son's three-form entry London primary school.

By the end of January, I was preparing for a research trip to China's Shanghai Normal University. As news of China's initial COVID-19 outbreak rippled across the globe, I watched Chinese schools and universities close from my local colleagues' vantage point. Weeks later, University College London (UCL) suspended all work travel and closed most of our London campus. My 9-year-old, Isaac, and I retreated to our new 'work and learn from home' normal. From early on in lockdown, the role of our schools as essential agents of care and cohesion became more evident each day.

As we move through lockdown, schools and leaders now have the nation's attention. They educate our families through emergency remote teaching and learning strategies developed almost overnight. Schools coordinate catering and food delivery to offsite families who need it most. They remain open to care for the children of keyworkers. Teachers and leaders are checking in on their students and families. Our schools' roles as central to our communities have never been clearer to the wider public. I am heartened that the nation appears to have woken up to the power and possibility our schools offer their students and communities.

These scary and challenging conditions make the timeliness and importance of this collection even more paramount. The authors' reflections on creating stronger, more cohesive, schools and communities will provide food for thought for readers as we contemplate our 'new' ways of working and living. We will all need to be even more inclusive and understanding as we build back to our new education realities. It is with this in mind that I share my own reflections on education beyond the school gates.

### REACHING PARENTS AND CARERS: MY LIVED PARENTHOOD

Pre-lockdown, I began to sketch out how my own parental struggles to fit in and support our school shaped my reflections on community and advocacy. Most people would never imagine my own parental engagement journey and challenges. In the spirit of honesty and moving us collectively forward, I share my views as a community member of one of the most engaging and caring schools I have ever worked with.

**The not always at school parent/carer.** As Isaac's mum, like many parents and carers, I strive to be an active member of our school community. My ambitions often fall embarrassingly short due to being a 70% solo-parent and holding down a full-time job involving international travel. Playdates, school bell pickups, daytime parental learning sessions and evening socials are a struggle. However, in Reception, Isaac and I agreed that I would move mountains to attend concerts, plays, parent-teacher meetings and sporting events. While I can proudly report my outstanding record on these priority activities, I often feel I am not truly integrated into what is truly a welcoming school community. I am often, in the eyes of others, absent. Too often, parents and carers who are not regularly present are seen as disinterested. For me, it is not disinterest but timing, work and caring duties. As we explore throughout this book, schools that successfully work with their communities regularly challenge their own assumptions about engagement. They believe all parents and carers have an interest and desire to engage. These schools relentlessly create meaningful and creative ways to nurture connections with different segments of their population.

**The ‘other’ or international parent/carer.** I am the first to acknowledge my position(s) of privilege in my school community and this drives much of my contribution at school and in my work. However, it is complicated. On many counts, I just don’t fit in. While British since birth, I lived in Canada until my mid-30s. I speak English as my first language – pretty well I would like to think. However, I am still regularly told I talk ‘funny’ or my accent gets regularly mocked. I lack many of the cultural references I would have from growing up here. After 15 years in London, people regularly hint that, ‘**here** we do things like **this**.’ It is hard to believe this happens, but it does. Everywhere. At least a few times a week! I am white, have a PhD, and English is my first language. Combined with work and travel, I am not a ‘normal’ mum – if one actually exists. That said, my struggle to feel like I belong perpetually challenges my will and ability to engage fully in our school. Feeling like you are a member of at least one group of people ‘like you’ will greatly influence your likelihood of engagement. For schools trying to find ways to engage parents and carers, there are lessons from these essays that demonstrate how to create ‘in groups’ that shape meaningful belonging.

**The transnational parent.** To make things even more complicated, it can sometimes be complicated engaging transnational parents and carers as many of us do not have the cultural capital to understand ‘how things work’ in the UK. We may need different kinds of reminders and understanding that English ways of working are layered, complex and, often, impenetrable. Many of us live across at least two countries. We may have strong lifelong ties elsewhere. Our former lives have taught us different ways of being and interacting with schools. Here, we may not have, or feel we have, the authority or invitation to advocate for ourselves and our families. Our communities are not only local but global. Sometimes, our strongest ties are the ones that reach the farthest away. Maintaining our legacy ties often require the greatest investment of time and resource. Our dual lives may influence our local ties. Yet again, as parents and carers, we have much to offer our schools and communities. However, understanding us and reaching us creates complex challenges for schools. We need to look no further than the examples in the book to find ways of working that create connection and celebrate the true diversity of our communities.

## HAND, HEART, AND HEAD

I have always been inspired by Surrey Square Primary School, School 21, now part of Big Education, and their aspirations for all students’ education of the *Head, Heart and Hand*. The essays in this collection advocate for the need for this robust approach to development and the importance of strive for all three within schools. However, even more importantly, the essays highlight how engaging the *heads, hearts and hands* of parents, carers, and communities can create meaningful and sustainable change beyond the school gates. I acknowledge I am stretching the concept. Nevertheless, I think it is a helpful frame for exploring engagement beyond the school gates.

**Hand: Support and contributions.** Most schools are well versed in offering support to their parents, carers and communities. In England, families and communities often rely on schools for emotional, linguistic, academic and even, at times, economic support. Relationships developed during these supportive exchanges often provide inroads for community members to become more closely engaged in the school. At the same time, parents and carers are often asked to lend a helping hand: to provide; to prepare; to fix; to volunteer; to bake. These important functions often curate short-term transactional interaction. For parents and carers, these moments may provide gateways to more substantial engagement. With the right pathways in place, these points in time become powerful levers for stronger community partnerships.

**Heart: Trust and relationships.** Many schools deliberately build on these lighter touch connections to build deeper relationships. Often, relationships evolve due to the many finite and serendipitous interactions that bridge communities and schools. Schools that welcome their communities are able to create conditions that accelerate the likelihood of these interactions. I experienced this first-hand when my former partner and I moved forward with our separation. I knew that Isaac would want his teachers to know. So, the night before we told him, I took paper copies of the letter I had written for Isaac to the school. The Assistant Headteacher looked at me with care and said: ‘Do not worry. We are here for you. We can support Isaac. Will you need two report cards? If you do, that’s fine!’ I looked at her in shock. Two report cards? However, that small gesture became a landmark moment that created new inroads for me into my school community.

As when we told Isaac about our family's new arrangements, his second question was: 'Do my teachers know?' My 'yes' was met with great relief on his part. His third question was: 'Do I need two report cards?' At this moment, I realised as a parent my school had supported me in ways I had never imagined possible. Our school families' turning points are regularly dropped into our educators' work day. Teachers and leaders are expert in spotting them, holding them and using them to support us and build our school communities. At that moment, we became true allies with the joint mission of supporting Isaac through his next transition. Our allegiance has continued and now, I can see how small acts of trust building have nurtured relationships between other families and our school. These relationships have sparked great points of change in our community. Schools that successfully reach beyond the school gates view each segment of their community as an ally. They work, without judgement, as they strive to mutually identify how best to support their communities.

**Head: Big ideas and co-creation.** As our current pandemic crisis illustrates, we need everyone at the table with all of their knowledge, insight, and wisdom to find solutions to our most pressing local and global challenges. We also need creative ways to communicate, with all of our different communities, widely and accurately. To this end, more broadly, many schools are making strides to ensure students understand their power and prepare them for their roles in the world.

Students, like Isaac, are learning how solve problems while thinking about fairness, caring for others, and advocacy. I cheered (quietly as not to embarrass anyone) when he described why the new child in class would be successful. He said: 'she has a great thinking partner.' When I asked him what he meant, he replied: 'her partner has good ideas, is a great listener, is very helpful and makes things possible.' I was ridiculously proud of his definition and I was reminded of it when I read the essays in this book.

The book provides vivid illustrations of how schools can engage their students, educators, parents and carers, and wider communities as thinking partners in the truest sense. These schools do not approach their communities as problems but as partners. They nurture community connections by actively working with parents and carers to identify needs and interests. They build trust and strong relationships over time. Schools and communities demonstrate respect for each other's priorities, challenges, and contributions. Parents and carers are met and accepted where they are, and everyone works together to shape future possibilities and create actions for improvement. Co-constructing solutions are essential. With practice, and the right support and encouragement, communities become able to work through the thinking and design strategies on their own. Schools can create a culture in which challenge is received as an opportunity to make something better and where the challenger is an ally and an advocate, not an opponent.

## CONCLUSION

My reflections are written from lockdown as a researcher of global cities, leadership and education systems. I am also an increasingly frustrated emergency learning-at-home supervisor. I remain amazed and proud at how quickly we have all pivoted to this new normal. However, not an hour passes in which I do not worry about the members of our school communities that are being socially and economically devastated by this current crisis. How this moment in time, our shared pandemic pause, will influence our new normal remains to be seen.

As we prepare for, construct, and move through our new way in schools and communities, we will all have a role to play in caring for and nurturing each other. Creating spaces for sharing ideas, constructing new ways of working and coming together to advocate for awareness and real change will become even more important. Building on the lessons shared by these schools, it is my hope that we each strive to remember that engagement and advocacy are predicated by a sense of belonging, membership and a belief that working together will lead to something better.

I don't think any of the authors of this book could have foreshadowed the importance of their experiences. The lessons from the stories shared herein may well provide examples of how our schools and communities can come together to heal and move forward in our new normal. This book, in my view, sets out to showcase new and innovative ways of working with communities as a celebration of our schools and leaders. Collectively, the essays demonstrate that there is not a one size fits all model for schools working to catalyse



and nurture community action. Individually, the essays provide a set of helpful roadmaps for those desperately seeking another way to engage, build and celebrate their communities beyond the school gates. As you read this collection of essays, I challenge you to reflect on what you and your colleagues can do to create opportunities for contribution, nurturing belonging and truly engaging those around you as purposeful thinking partners in supporting our schools and communities.

# INTRODUCTION

## LET'S COMMIT TO A LIFE OF RESPONSIBILITY AND ACTION

Dr Sebastien Chapleau

*'It's not hope that leads to action. Rather, it is action that inspires hope.'*

Neil Jameson CBE

Albert Camus's *The Plague (La Peste)* was first published over sixty years ago. It focuses on how citizens from Oran, in Algeria, react and adapt to a pandemic. It's about how society shapes their response to the crisis but also how their response shapes society as it evolves and moves forward.

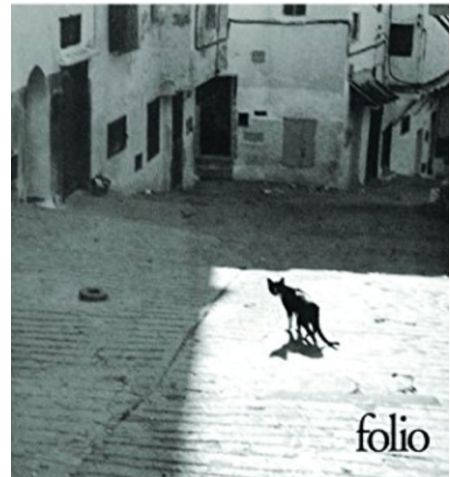
As I write this, there'll be thousands of people blowing the dust off their copies of Camus's classic, seeking refuge in his vivid narrative: one punctuated by despair but, ultimately, culminating in hope.

Recently, I came across an article about how citizens in Oran responded and adapted to the pandemic they found themselves involved in.

In the article, the following struck me and made me think about some of the questions many school leaders have been wrestling with for a while:

*As Rambert gets increasingly involved with citizens who are trying to salvage life in Oran, he acquires a deeper and more enlightened understanding of obligation and love. Through commitment and self-sacrifice, he attempts to halt the deadly march of the disease and, gradually, his private, romantic love for his partner evolves into a public, civic love for the city and the people of Oran. By the time he is reunited with his lover at the end of the novel, he is worried that when he looks into her eyes, he'll be looking at a stranger. Rambert, in other words, transcends the narrow [...] confines of eros for the love and obligation to the polis. Camus' point is that like Rambert, we are all exiles—alienated from each other and the world writ large until we commit to a life of responsibility and action.<sup>1</sup>*

Albert Camus  
La peste



With the Covid-19 pandemic that has just hit our world – throwing in the air many of our assumptions about life and what society is about – *we too have an opportunity to commit to a life of responsibility and action.*

\*\*\*

Peter Hyman and Liz Robinson often talk about the need to move the educational system from what they call Paradigm A to its almost polar opposite Paradigm B.

As Liz Robinson puts it, '[t]he current paradigm does a great job at certain aspects of 'knowledge transfer', the passing on of the 'the best that has been thought and said' (Matthew Arnold). We believe that this is an

<sup>1</sup> See [www.democraticfaith.com/home/why-albert-camus-the-plague-matters-to-us-now](http://www.democraticfaith.com/home/why-albert-camus-the-plague-matters-to-us-now).

important aspect of what an education should involve, but that is it not enough – it is necessary but not sufficient.’ And she continues, saying that she is ‘concerned about the ever-increasing pressure on our young people to achieve exceptionally within our high stakes testing and examination system. The implications of this can be seen from the narrowing of what is taught, both in terms of the actual subjects (with a squeeze on the arts and other less ‘purely academic’ subjects), as well as a greater emphasis on the accumulation of knowledge above all else within subjects. I am concerned about increasing mental health issues, anxiety and stress amongst our young people, as well as a sense that their youth is being seen in one-dimensional terms as one long slog to get to the end point of a transition into university.’<sup>2</sup>

In Robinson’s footsteps, I would argue that there is an increasing need for schools to be defined – and (re)-designed – taking into account the way society has been shaped and the way it could – and, perhaps, should – be shaped. Leora Cruddas, at a roundtable hosted by the Centre for Education and Youth and Ambition Institute in response to the Covid-19 pandemic<sup>3</sup>, talked about the academic sanctity of schools. The primary purpose of a school, she posited, and as most will agree, is to ensure that children receive the academic knowledge and skills that they need in order to succeed as they grow up and as they navigate their way through an ever-changing world.

What we have seen, going through the Covid-19 pandemic, is another role schools play, or can play, as institutions placed at the heart of their communities. This is the other side of the coin Leora Cruddas talks about when, through the work of the Confederation of School Trusts (CST), she encourages educational institutions to see themselves as needing to play a civic role within their communities.



## School Trusts as New Civic Structures

A Framework Document

PUBLICFIRST

In CST’s *School Trusts as New Civic Structures – A Framework Document*, key steps are detailed as to what schools and trusts can do to map out the relationships they can establish with parents, carers, the local community, and other local schools, as well as local governmental partners, and wider civic partners in an area.

Whilst this argument isn’t new for many of us in the world of community organising, it is certainly a role that has come to the fore in the Spring of 2020, in response to the extreme needs many of our school communities have been facing.

As many communities seemed to crumble, schools have organised themselves in ways which would have seen foreign to many a few weeks before. We saw an incredible amount of school leaders doing whatever it takes to ensure that children – particularly in many of our most vulnerable families – didn’t go hungry over as schools prepared to close. Food parcels were prepared and delivered. Schools worked collaboratively to ensure that many weren’t left behind.



Many schools and trusts are now asking themselves ‘What next? What should our communities look like now, in a post-Covid-19 era?’.

We have, crudely and for the purpose of agitation, two options:

1. Business as usual. We forget and move on. We wake up from a bad dream and we dust off the bad memories.
2. We embark on the slow and arduous process of reshaping society for what it ought to be: a society based on the many glimmers of hope we saw as we got closer to our neighbours and where the State and the Market were seen to engage with – and on many occasions respond to – our needs in unprecedented ways.

Day to day, I fight so that the latter option prevails. In terms of how schools have organised themselves in response the crisis, it is the many actions we have seen across the nation that give me hope. Not only have schools worked together to quickly establish system to support many of our communities but they’ve also

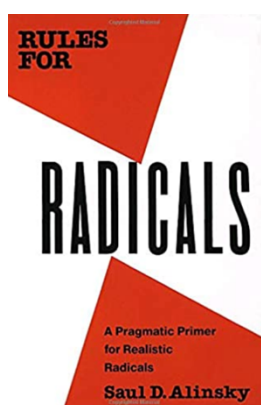
<sup>2</sup> See [www.bigeducation.org/2019/01/31/what-is-a-big-education](http://www.bigeducation.org/2019/01/31/what-is-a-big-education).

<sup>3</sup> See [www.cfey.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Supporting-Vulnerable-Young-People-through-Covid-19.-Menzies-L.-2020-3.pdf](http://www.cfey.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Supporting-Vulnerable-Young-People-through-Covid-19.-Menzies-L.-2020-3.pdf).

realised that the State and the Market have a part to play, thus bringing meaning to the notion of democracy, whereby elected officials and business leaders are there to 'serve' the wellbeing of their citizens.

Moving forward, we have a unique chance to design and/or redesign what our core purpose(s) is/are, as an educational system. We're a system that is viscerally connected to the communities we are rooted in and serve. This means that, one of our core purposes should be to deliver our schools' sanctimonious goal in ways that help build relationships of trust with other parts of civil society, in ways that enable us to reweave the often-damaged fabric of society.

Emerging from such a worldwide crisis will take time to truly digest. Over the coming months – perhaps years – we will be reacting to the situations we now find ourselves in: a world in debt like never before, with levels of fear like we've never experienced, a world where most countries' resilience has been put to the test. Amongst all the noise, the tears, the pains, and the sleepless night, I urge us all to dig deep into our shared grief to resurrect the drive that the majority of us still have within our hearts. Let's not suppress our pains: rather, let's make them public and let's talk about our shared hopes. Let's reconnect to the very reason the majority of us became educators in the first place: a holistic view of what education and schools can do to make society a much better place than it is, one where, in the end, we don't play eternal catch up and where we constantly firefight. Rather, a society where relationships are strong and where collaboration is such that the demands of our communities are heard and taken seriously. This view of the world – Paradigm B – is one which is possible even more so now than ever before.



Saul Alinsky, often described as the founder of modern Community Organising, once wrote, in his *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals* that '[a]s an organiser, I start from where the world is, as it is, not as I would like it to be. That we accept the world as it is does not in any sense weaken our desire to change it into what we believe it should be – it is necessary to begin where the world is if we are going to change it to what we think it should be. That means working in the system.' Clearly understanding what kind of society we live in will be crucial for us to deconstruct it and reshape it in ways which better meet the needs of our communities. For too long, people have been switching off from democratic participation, believing that it weren't within their gift to be in charge of what goes on in their daily lives. As our world prepares for a new dawn, things must change.

It is an organised civil society – with schools playing a crucial role in bringing a broad base of people and institutions together – that will lead the changes we want to see. When Matthew Taylor, Director of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA), argues that many will see 'the tragedy of COVID-19 [...] as an obligation to try to create a better world when the pandemic is under control'<sup>4</sup>, I completely agree.

As Taylor suggests, to be taken seriously, we will need to:

- Develop new and broader alliances
- Co-design practical solutions and realistic models of implementation
- Aim to go with – not against or too far beyond – the tide of public sentiment.

Let's be clear, change will only happen if an organised civil society is prepared to lead. Otherwise, the millions of voices calling out for change will remain whispers of hope – hopeful whispers which will be barely audible as the brouhaha of society kicks back into action in the coming months.

As Taylor concludes his blog: 'let's not let the crisis go to waste.'

To ensure that our schools – as 'civic institutions' – play a key role in educating young people to play a real part in what is their futures, we will need to be much more intentional about building power in our communities. For it is powerful communities which can control what ought to happen next.

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<sup>4</sup> See [www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/matthew-taylor-blog/2020/03/change-opportunity-covid19](http://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/matthew-taylor-blog/2020/03/change-opportunity-covid19).

We are currently at a crossroads between heading back to what has bothered us for generations or what could come to define what a brave new world could be.

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The essays that follow, written by a range of school leaders and community organisers, demonstrate what can happen when school communities take themselves seriously. They all focus on the need to understand that change can only occur when power is built – through relationships and partnerships – and clear tactics are developed. This is what organised communities do: they build relationships to develop their power and they devise tactics which are rooted in what Alinsky called ‘the system’ and which can lead them to victory.

All the case studies you will find in *Schools in their Communities: Taking Action and Developing Civic Life* are focused on the need to take action. As Neil Jameson (who brought modern-day community organising to the UK) once said, ‘[i]t is not hope that leads to action. Rather, it is action that inspires hope.’

All the essays herein focus on what could be described as ‘micro-organising’, that is the work that can be developed on our doorstep, by involving parents/carers, students, and teachers in our schools. That’s because people care about what directly affects them, on their doorstep. But, sadly, and because of the way people have forgotten about civic participation, politics, in many ways, has become something remote from our everyday lives. Brexit is something most of us have felt powerless about – however angry it certainly made us. Poverty is something we’re all angry about but feel unable to really challenge. Most of what is discussed on the news concerns us, but seems increasingly out of our reach, when it comes to influencing debates.

It is clear that there is a lot is going on in an increasing number of schools which can give us hope. From students taking action on issues of street safety, to classes organising campaigns to hold local councillors to account on issues of recycling, to schools negotiating with large institutions like Transport for London on the regularity of buses on certain routes, at certain times, lots of neighbourhood-level work is shaping up. And students/schools, by being focused on winnable issues, are bringing about real change.

Our challenge is to make this the norm and ensure that, as part of their learning – and, therefore, as part of our teachers’ training – students learn more about how power is organised in society, how to manipulate it and, eventually, how to claim it back.

A final note to conclude and to say that you will notice that the stories shared here are quite raw: they may come across as messy, sometimes rather organic in the way their narratives and arguments are developed. This is because politics is messy. We are often told that politics is for experts and that it belongs to politicians. What this collection of essays demonstrates is that politics is not – and should not be – a domain for experts. Rather, politics is something which belongs to us all. It is an essential part of us all. And it is by getting stuck in what many describe as our birth right that we can shape – or reshape – our lives for what we’ve always dreamt them to be.

*Rochester, June 2020*

# PROVOCATION

## WHY ACADEMY TRUSTS SHOULD EMPLOY COMMUNITY ORGANISERS

Neil Jameson CBE

*'We should not, must not, dare not be complacent about the health and future of British democracy. Unless we become a nation of engaged citizens our democracy is not secure!'*

**Lord Irvine of Laird, Lord Chancellor**

(quoted in 'The Crick Report' or *The Advisory Group on the Teaching of Citizenship and Democracy in Schools*)

In a blog, 'Academy Trusts at the Heart of their Communities', Michael Pain of Forum Strategy, set out the new narrative for academy trusts.<sup>5</sup> In it, he says:

*There is an enormous opportunity for the Academy Trust sector to finally find its place in the world in the coming decade, to find its reason for being, and to lead the way, with trusts defining themselves as community- focussed organisations'. He ends with: 'Academy Trusts have a choice to make. They can become the caricature that seems to have stuck a little- distant, removed, obsessively focussed on growth, bigger numbers and what the 'powers that be' define as successful – often seen to be working in spite of our communities. Or do something more profound, with a spirit of partnership, looking outwards to the passion, knowledge, capacity and aspirations of those around us – within and beyond Trusts – to find the best way forward and to achieve sustainable success together.*

### VISION STATEMENTS

This think-piece is intended to complement Forum Strategy's new narrative by offering one radical suggestion for taking it forward: the employment and use of Community Organisers within academy trusts.

Since many Trusts often have a few more resources to draw on than individual schools, and more freedom to decide how to spend and allocate those resources, this should allow the Board with the executive team to set and review their vision statement in line with the narrative. Once this has consent of the key stakeholders of the institution, it follows to then review the staffing, talent and specialisms needed to achieve that vision. I believe Community Organisers are essential to this narrative for the system.

Vision statements have their place and most businesses, NGOs and other such organisations all have them. However, it is often in the process of crafting of that statement that the real work is done. The more people and stakeholders that participate, debate, argue, challenge in that process and finally even vote for it – the better. This 'ownership' of the purpose and vision of the institution, and actually spelling it out in grand terms, is crucial to its implementation. If the vision is going to be sufficiently ambitious, we need everyone in our communities' help in making it a reality. This is why using Forum Strategy's narrative as a basis for your visioning discussions and development with stakeholders could be so helpful; it relates to what communities – including pupils, parents, and staff – are most concerned about, so is a relatable and engaging starting point.

A vision development process that encourage wide participation and involvement will make it easier to build awareness of, and buy in for, the trust's work. It will provide a firm foundation upon which community

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<sup>5</sup> This reflection piece was first published by Forum Strategy and you can find it at [www.forumstrategy.org/why-academy-trusts-should-employ-community-organisers](http://www.forumstrategy.org/why-academy-trusts-should-employ-community-organisers).

organisers can draw on the social and professional capital that exists in our communities. Avoid developing your vision in isolation.

## **APOLOGIA**

I should explain that, although I am a qualified teacher and have limited experience of teaching in schools and colleges in the UK and in Africa, I was never in a senior position so I have no experience of managing a large school or Academy and little experience of the many challenges which the Heads, Principals and CEOs of Academies must face. In 1988, I became the UK's first, modern-day Community Organiser and founded Citizens UK. At its best, Citizens UK is an educational institution, and many have called it a 'University of the Streets'. Citizens UK is known as the home of Community Organising in Britain. The classrooms we teach in are church halls, street corners, community centres and youth clubs. Our students are diverse, all ages and with many different backgrounds and life experiences. Many are refugees with limited English and quite a few have retired from full time work but whose interest in public life and change has not diminished. Most seek ways of making the world a better and safer place. They enjoy learning alongside their neighbours and often, in the process of action, strangers can become friends. But I have never worked in an Academy or had to make the very difficult choices that have to be made in that sector. Since 1988 I have always had to raise my own money from membership fees and trust and foundations.

I do know quite a bit about certain aspects of learning and also the allocation of the precious resources that are needed for deep and life changing education. I also understand how important it is to regularly review resource allocation, to be sure they serve the mission, vision and objectives of the organisation. Especially in a rapidly changing world!

## **RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND POWER ANALYSIS**

Returning to the challenge of ensuring Academy Trusts are at the heart of the community, it follows that you have to regularly review the allocation of resources so that you are taking forward that vision.

This can be even more difficult if you are overseeing a multi-academy trust and the buildings are widely spread and serve different neighbourhoods. This may involve two different approaches one for the building/school rooted in a community and one for the wider group. Good, when you start to do a 'power analysis' in both situations. The accusation that academies are often aloof from their neighbourhoods and relate only to the Department for Education and its agents, is a real one and can only be challenged by your actions 'speaking louder than words'!

From your 'power analysis' you need to meet and relate to the other players in your communities – think about the institutions particularly – the shops/traders association; the faith institutions (don't forget the Mosque); the sports clubs, local employers, health centres, voluntary associations and even the gangs. Consider how you can use your scale, money and time in order to nurture and sustain these relationships. Who do you need to meet with regularly (not always the local police)? As a trust CEO, what are you and your board doing about regularly meeting the local community and youth leaders, the CEO of local businesses, the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Dean of the local university, and the CEO of the local health care trust, for example? Do you ever invite them into your trust, do you offer your sports fields or Halls for community use, do you share your understanding and knowledge about the challenges, needs and opportunities facing pupils and their families? Do you ask how they can help? Given that it is estimated that school age children spend only 15% of their time in schools – what happens to them and who influences them when they are not with you matters and needs some resource allocation.

The main stakeholders, apart from your staff and students are, of course the parents and families of your students. You need to see them as co-teachers and, ideally, they need to see you and your trust as warm, welcoming and as interested as much in the self-interest of them as their children. It makes sense that, if you have a positive relationship with the parents and families of your students, they will reciprocate in the way they also teach values and positive behaviour to your students. What resources to you allocate to this challenge? Who is responsible for looking out for and supporting the families – hopefully not the truancy

officer? Is there a culture of home visits and if there is do you talk about more than the student? Does your board hear about some of the struggles of living in the area – the violence, the poor job opportunities, the poor housing?

If so, what do you do about these challenges and what resources do you put into trying to help?

### **APPOINT A COMMUNITY ORGANISER**

I would not blame you if some of you were sighing at the above list of things to do and responsibilities to add to your already lengthy list of responsibilities, especially ensuring that your Academy exam results are improving, and discipline is maintained.

As well as building strategic external relationships as a CEO, I am suggesting that you seriously consider appointing at least one Community Organiser to your staff team, if you are a Multi-Academy Trust then you may need two or three!

You may already have a person with the skills and aptitude to organise on your staff team, possibly a local person or from your non-teaching staff? They need to be innately intelligent, optimistic, have a sense of humour, understand the politics of the common good and really, really like people and life in all its diversity! Ideally evidence of this is that they are already active in a local institution – parents association; mosque; sports club; campaigning organisation, even a book club. Really good if they are not just in the group but they play some formal leadership part in running it and not just turning up.

They have a very important job so should not be required to cover for absent colleagues, be a truancy officer or organise the annual fete (unless this helps build the power and recognition of the Academy). Their job is to organise your Academy genuinely into the heart of the community by building relationships with the key institutions and institutional leaders who are vital to the success of the vision of your trust – this includes having a plan for the parents, the school Council and even the Trustees.

At their best, your Community Organiser should be like the most brilliant football manager – seeking, training, supporting, praising and occasionally offering friendly criticism when the team plays. Rarely on the field apart from half time but as critical and inspiring as the whole team, junior team, training team etc. Their job is to look for authentic leaders and potential leaders in the neighbourhoods around your Academy and together ‘reweave the fabric of that society’.

If successful, this will make your trust, its schools, and its wider community of stakeholders, that much more powerful and effective – and more able to live your vision. This will make the allocation of time and resource one that provides a significant return on investment.

### **SOME EXAMPLES**

#### **1) [Addressing mobile phone theft:](#)**

Set up a Citizens Commission to stop mugging for mobile phones; a diverse mix of 60 parents, students and neighbours were the Commissioners and held three public Hearings with ‘witnesses’ from police, gangs, the Council and academics.

External result: 5 more police allocated to neighbourhood, school negotiated an extension to their playground and the lighting improved on streets around school plus published the first ‘safe routes’ to school map by whole school participating and then presenting it to local Police Commissioner at an Assembly of 1,000 people.

Internal result: over 200 people participated, spoke, gave testimony and learned democracy in practice; positive media coverage; school results improved, as did the waiting list to attend the school.



## 2) Responding to knife crime:



Following an out-break of stabbings of students in several neighbourhoods around three schools, students, parents and staff organised 'neighbourhood walks' to understand and map the neighbourhood and then build 'City Safe Zones ' by persuading traders to become 'City Safe Havens', put a sticker in their shop window offering sanctuary to any person being chased, increased police presence and eventually persuade the Mayor of London (then Boris Johnson) to make City Hall a Safe Haven.

Result: slightly less violent street crime in areas around the schools, much stronger relationships with local shopkeepers and hundreds of children and their parents learned democracy, new relationships and leadership skills.

## 3) Commonwealth games land use:



In December 2018, Birmingham was announced as the new location for the 2022 Commonwealth Games after plans for it to be held in Cape Town ended. Several schools in membership of Citizens UK in Birmingham organised a Public Assembly of 650 people soon after in March to celebrate the news at the Town Hall with a mass choir. Here, together with faith and other community institutions they launched a concordat of Citizens Guarantees calling for social rent homes to be built on the Games sites as well as free after-school sports activities in every neighbourhood. The Leader of Birmingham City Council, Cllr Ian

Ward (pictured here) attended and agreed to the Citizens Guarantees.

Result: Citizens Guarantees pledged by Leader of the Council. 500 children and parents involved, learned about leadership, compromise and democracy; Ofsted commended the schools.



### LESSONS FROM THE USA

Community Organising is still a very new vocation and career in the UK, with only 30 years track record. In USA there are many more years of this practice. The largest and most impressive example of school involvement in Community Organising was in Texas (under Democrat control) when the State invested in a programme called Texas Alliance Schools. This meant that many schools employed their own Organiser or shared one with the help of State funding topped up by Foundations. Sadly, this funding ceased when the Republicans won the State and the cross-State programme ceased. However, The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University produced an impressive Research Report in March 2008 called 'Organised Communities, Stronger Schools'. The research focussed specifically on school improvement and results – following involvement with Community Organising.

The key findings were:

- *Data suggest that organising is contributing to school-level improvements, particularly in the areas of school community relationships, parent involvement and engagement, sense of school community and trust, teacher collegiality and teacher morale.*

- *Successful organising strategies contributed to increased student attendance, improved standardized test score performance and higher graduation results and college going aspirations.*
- *Our findings suggest that community organising efforts are influencing policy and resource distribution at the system level. Officials, school administrators and teachers reported that community organising influenced policy and resource decisions to increase equity and build capacity, particularly in historically low performing schools.*
- *Data indicate that participation in organising efforts in increasing civic engagement, as well as knowledge and investment in education issue, among adult and youth community members. Young people reported that their involvement in organising increased their motivation to succeed at school.*
- *Our research suggests that organising groups achieve these schooling and community impacts through a combination of system level advocacy, school or community-based activity and the strategic use of research and data. Continuous and consistent parent, youth and community engagement produced through community organising both generates and sustains these improvements.*

## CONCLUSION

Last words to my friend Sir Bernard Crick who, twenty years ago, concluded his report on Citizenship, with this eloquent and powerful challenge;

*We aim at no less than a change in the political culture of this country both nationally and locally; for people to think of themselves as active citizens, willing, able and equipped to have an influence on public life and with the critical capacities to weigh up the evidence before speaking and acting; to build and to extend radically to young people the best existing traditions of community involvement and public service and to make them individually confident in finding new forms of involvement and action among themselves. There are worrying levels of apathy, ignorance and cynicism about public life. These, unless tackled at every level, could well diminish the hoped-for benefits both of constitutional reform and of the changing nature of the welfare state.*

Crick's challenge was also a warning that if we did nothing then cynicism and apathy would grow – leading to populism and a withdrawal from public life by millions, particularly young people. The recent knowledge that the Climate Chaos really is an Emergency has given rise to more youthful participation and concern but by a generation that has rarely been taught or experienced the necessary tools of politics, democracy and negotiation – compromise, power, relationships and leadership.

Schools which aspire to be at the centre of their community could pick up this baton and start by appointing a brilliant Community Organiser or two to help lead the way.

# THE ESSAYS

# RUTH (AND) THE GIANT

Emmanuel Gotorá

*‘Every child, by the time they leave school, should have worked with others to craft, and win a campaign that has made their life, and that of their community, better.’*

**Sebastien Chapleau, Founding Headteacher, La Fontaine Academy**

The end of the school year is always a hectic time, especially for primary schools. In Forest Gate, east London, the excitement reaches fever pitch as a group of energetic 10 and 11-year-olds at St. Antony’s Primary School put their finishing touches to letters to Newham Council. They are writing to the Planning Officer, objecting to plans for a development proposed for the Boleyn Ground, home of West Ham Football Club. The stadium is up for sale and a massive housing development is planned when the club moves to the Olympic Stadium. However, the developer has not made any provision for affordable homes in an area of greatest housing need in London.

The children chat excitedly as they prepare to march to the Upton Park stadium to protest about the lack of affordable housing planned for the development. However, don't let their age or size fool you. These pint-sized citizens can pack a punch when it comes to creative action. Instead of simply posting the letters, the children are highly motivated to take action on the Local Authority, who up to now, have been largely silent on the issue. The children are angry about the lack of affordable housing for their families and friends. Theirs is a ‘cold anger’ which comes from personal stories of loss. In one term, seven families from their school have been moved from their homes overnight because they can no longer afford to live in the area.

One of the children, a girl called Ruth, tells a story of how her best friend’s family was moved out of the area. She is angry that she did not have a chance to say good-bye to her best friend. She has no idea where her best friend has gone, and she worries if they are alright. Until this point in the workshop, Ruth had been shy and had had listened patiently as others told their stories. Unable to contain her anger, she finally plucked up the courage to share her own story. Hers was the first story of palpable anger from the children sitting around the table that day.

Another girl, Frances, is concerned about her grandmother who lives near the proposed development. Since the sale of the stadium was announced, her grandmother has seen her rent increase sharply. Frances is also worried that her grandmother will be evicted if she cannot afford to pay her rent, and that she may be moved far away from the rest of the family she loves and depends on for support.

I first met the children at St Antony’s Primary School during a leadership training workshop I was delivering for their School Council. Their Head Teacher, Mrs Angela Moore, had a simple – yet powerful – vision for the school’s involvement in our community organising work: to give the children meaningful and real leadership experiences. In the workshop, we talked about what they liked about their homes. Their responses were thoughtful and positive, and faced with the harsh reality that other children in their school do not have the same safe, warm and secure homes, they instinctively wanted to do something about it. At the end of the workshop, the children were set a leadership assignment – a listening exercise which would see them speak to their classmates, parents, and grandparents, and extended families about their experiences of housing.

Mrs Moore is a formidable leader in her own right. An inspirational Jamaican woman who goes over and above the call of duty to educate young minds, she took on the helm at St Antony’s in 2011. At the time, the school was underperforming. In the seven years she’s been Head Teacher, the school is now totally transformed. Mrs Moore has been invited by the Department for Education to join a national task force



focusing on school improvement, as well as a London-wide schools improvement board run by the Mayor of London. In 2019, St Antony's was recognised as the top State Primary School in the country. As a Governor at the school, I am personally proud of this well-deserved recognition. This achievement levels the playing field and rewrites of a narrative of poverty and poor education for the children, staff, parents and guardians in the school who all work very hard.

However, in my many one-to-one meetings with Mrs Moore, she expressed deep dismay at the removal of seven children from the school and the disruption to their education caused by the housing crisis as families who could no longer afford to live in the area were forced to move away from their families, neighbourhoods, and support networks. However, instead of just complaining

about this injustice, she and the children are ready to do something about it.

The children's anger is shared by the wider community. Father Pat Mossop, Vicar in the nearby Anglican Parish of the Divine Compassion, was first to raise the issue. St Martin's is one of the churches in his Parish and is just half a mile from the development. It is a tight community of Polish, Nigerian, Ugandan, and Irish congregants who face serious housing challenges and could benefit from affordable housing in the area.

Monsignor John Armitage, then Vicar General in the Catholic Diocese of Brentwood and Priest in the Catholic Parish of the Royal Docks (now Our Lady of Walsingham Parish) searched the church's archives to see whether legal documents from the sale of the land by the Diocese to the football club in the 1950s contained legal clauses which would have given the church first refusal to buy back the land. We were prepared to fight for the land on all fronts but such clauses didn't exist. So, we focussed on strengthening what was within our control: our relational power.

Sr Una McCreesh, an Ursuline Sister and former Head Teacher at St Antony's Catholic Primary School, also played a vital role, reaching out to St Edward's Catholic Primary School and Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic Church. The stadium is sandwiched between the two institutions, and through Sister Una, our team learned that the developer was already doing deals with them. Sister Una, Fr Pat and Fr John and the rest of our core campaign team met with other clergy in the area and build a broad alliance with the other groups campaigning for affordable housing on the same development.

Our core team met regularly to evaluate progress and plan. In one of the meetings we reflected that the development had become contested space with all the separate groups vying for political and media attention. We had an honest assessment about what makes us different and what our unique contribution could be. Fr John guided our team to reflect on how we could position our campaign to bring something different that could add pressure on the developer. It's great to have someone on your team who is prepared to challenge and agitate everyone else. Fr John always asked really good probing questions: "Whose voice are we missing, and what else can we bring to the table?" Responding to Fr John's agitation, our team recognised that only adults had publicly voiced their objections to the Boleyn Ground planning application. We realised that the children's stories and creativity were missing and agreed that they would bring a unique voice to the campaign.

The children from St Antony's were invited to speak at a Delegates Assembly of the local alliance, with members from institutions from across Newham meeting to discuss their collective priority for change. However, the assembly was in the evening, and the children needed to convince their parents to bring them to the event. Only Ruth managed to do so – she brought her mum, dad and younger sister to the Assembly and shared her story about the housing crisis and its impact on her friends and her school. She looked so tiny on stage as she shared her testimony about her friend being forced to move home, far from her family and friends. As she stood there, she had everyone's attention. She didn't let the crowd phase her. "I miss my friend, and I don't want this to happen to anyone else. Please stand up if you are going to join me to make

sure that no more families are forced out." All three hundred people in the hall rose to their feet in agreement, clapping their hands. Ruth smiled shyly as she stepped nimbly off the stage, down to where her family were seated in the front row. Her mum and dad beamed with pride. Ruth felt powerful.

A few weeks later, Ruth and her friends used their Persuasive Writing lessons in school to write some powerful letters from their listening exercise. Just as well they were all written in pencil because we had to censor some of the words used to describe exactly what the children thought! Reading a few of their hand-written letters, it was clear that the children care about their community, and that they feel it is being torn apart by many challenges including crime, gangs, and parents not being able to provide for their families. The tone of their letters ranged from anger, to sarcasm, and disbelief. The children were also concerned about the impact of rising housing costs on their own education. Unselfishly, they also worried about disruption to other children's education in the school right next to the stadium.

10-year old Sefora's letter is punctuated with a sense of indignation over the treatment of three groups of vulnerable people she feels have been badly let down by the situation on the Boleyn development – immigrants, single parents and parents with 3 children or more. She makes a persuasive argument for affordable housing and cheekily admonishes the council, saying, "I hope you have listened to my wise words and consider my statements. Please make hundreds of lives better by making houses affordable for all."

11-year old Daniel worries about the ability of families to make ends meet: "Furthermore, many in Newham cannot pay bills and while also looking after children, buying them important things such as school uniforms, stationery, books, and much more. Therefore, how could they ever be able to afford an expensive house and be able to pay bills?"



11-year-old Hermione's letter displays a mature understanding of what is at stake: "Avaricious landlords will predictably purchase those properties and rent them for a ridiculously large price!". She also asks some searching questions: "Will I be able to live here? Will it be too expensive for my family? Will I have to move out of Newham and be forced to find a whole new life somewhere I've never been to?"

The sentiments in the 60 letters which were hand-delivered to Newham Council, are best captured by 11-year-old Maven: "Imagine a world where only the rich can afford houses!"

Not if these young citizens have anything to do with it!

On this particular last day of term, the children gathered their props for a public action – bright red heart-shaped balloons, a dozen roses, and a box of chocolates to present to Newham Council, along with a huge red envelope containing their 60 handwritten letters urging the Council to reject the planning application due to lack of affordable housing. BBC News jumped at the chance to cover the story and followed the children on the march from the school to the football stadium. The children were in fine voice as they marched through the streets of Forest Gate towards the stadium. One of the older boys led the children in a spontaneous chant. "Who are we?". The children responded: "St Antony's!". "What do we want?". "Affordable Housing!". "When do we want it?". "Now!". This was unprompted and unplanned but the association between the chant and what you might expect to hear in a football stadium made sense. The children had real – and spontaneous – ownership of the issue.

BBC News interviewed Sephora and Julina, and children had a lot of fun that morning. The story was aired briefly on the lunchtime news, but the coup was that it was on the early evening news too, watched by tens of thousands of Londoners. A longer version of the story featured the most powerful reaction we could have hoped for. The Mayor of Newham, Sir Robin Wales, was asked to respond to the lack of affordable homes on

the development from the children's action earlier in the day. For the first time, he publicly condemned the developer, demanding that they provide the minimum of 300 homes our campaign is calling for - a massive victory for the campaign!

The work of community organising is often a race between hope and fear. When fear wins, people withdraw, lash out, or freeze. All three are reactions of powerlessness. When hope wins, people are open to new possibilities as they collectively imagine an alternative future. However, hope isn't just an intellectual abstraction but is more like a muscle that you need to exercise. It is not something you *talk* yourself into but something you have to *act* your way into because hope is something you do. In this way, it is not hope that leads to action; it is action that inspires hope. Action builds public life, and it is important to develop the political muscle of ordinary citizens, especially those on the margins of society – migrants, homeless people, low-paid workers, and other disadvantaged communities – to act more often and more effectively on issues which impact their lives. By taking action and learning how to do it better next time, ordinary folk can develop social courage to act together in 'the world as it is' to bring it closer to 'the world as it should be'.

Following the action outside the football stadium, residents from Caritas Anchor House (CAH) joined the campaign and our team doubled in number. CAH is a homeless shelter in the heart of another new housing development in Canning Town. Run by Keith Fernet, an impressive leader with over 30 years' senior management experience, CAH is a cutting-edge, national award-winning organisation that provides accommodation and employment support for residents who would otherwise be unable to access them.

Residents are trusted with an electronic card system which they use for entry and to run electricity in each room. Every room is equipped with Internet and television. So high are the standards at CAH that one may be forgiven for initially mistaking it for a mini Holiday Inn. Residents range from refugees, people with substance misuse problems, women fleeing domestic violence, and others who have become homeless through financial difficulty. However, you will not find residents loitering on the streets, and you will not see them drinking publicly as at many other places which run similar services. In fact, residents get a notice to quit on the day they arrive! They either stick by the rules which will help them recover and regain control of their lives or go back to social services. It is a *quid pro quo* arrangement – supported heavily by professional workers – that has only seen a couple of drop-outs from the service. In the first year, residents share communal kitchens and living space. As they make progress in addressing their issues they are given more independence. Those who recover enough to return to work move up to the top of the building, into 'penthouse' suites before they move on from Anchor House. Monsignor John Armitage also happens to be the Chair of Trustees. Alongside him, Keith Fernet, Fr. Pat Mossop, Revd. Paul Regan, and Sr. Una McCreesh, and Julina Johnrose lead our various delegations to meet with Senior Council Officers. This goes on for the next two years, and we use every given opportunity for our team to act on the Council. We show up at the Council offices every time there is a consultation.



Our campaign set out to win 300 permanently affordable homes which local people could afford to buy or rent based on local median income. After an epic two-year campaign, the developer finally conceded 25% of the site for affordable housing and the Council somehow found £18m to fund another 10%, seeing our campaign win 35% of the 842 homes for affordable rent at 50%-80% of market rent for residents!

A campaign initiated by primary school children from St Antony's Primary School and residents from Anchor House won 300 homes worth over £100m to the developer. Ruth stood on stage once again to share the victory at another Assembly – the London Citizens Mayoral Accountability Assembly – with the two front-runners for Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan and Zak Goldsmith, at the Copper Box Arena on

the Olympic Park. This time, Ruth spoke in front of six and a half thousand people. Among them, were over one hundred children from her school. It was another proud moment for Ruth and her school. One she stills says she'll never forget. Ruth will forever feel powerful.

# HENDON SCHOOL: YOUTH-LED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND THE MENTAL HEALTH SOS – STAMP OUT STIGMA – CAMPAIGN

Noelle Doona

*‘Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it.’*

**Marian Wright Edelman**

Hendon School is in the London Borough of Barnet. It is a large and diverse comprehensive school with 1,250 students and over 130 staff. 47% students are in receipt of the pupil premium grant, 68% students have English as an additional language. 37% of our students are on the SEND register and we have two resourced provisions, for hearing impairment and autism. A significant number of our students live in areas that are in the top 10% most deprived in the UK (top 5% most deprived in London). Like many schools, we face a range of challenges, but they do not prevent us from wanting the best outcomes for all our students.

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Nothing else to be said, job done, or so it should be! This is a mantra that I believe as educators, we would like to leave as our legacy. It is often easy to recount stories of inspirational young people who appear to go the extra mile to accomplish the things that they are passionate about and make a real difference. However, for many of us, where success is measured almost exclusively by academic standards – with the immense pressure on resources and a lack of adequate funding – it can prove difficult to hold on to, and safeguard, the role that schools can play in the wider community.

Henry Morris, who was Secretary to the Cambridgeshire Education Committee in the 1920s, once wrote that in the village school there should be no ‘leaving school!’ As a local school, it should be able to enhance the quality of life for the community it served. It should not be an escape from reality but, rather, provide enrichment and transformation for those within the community. This idea still resonates almost 100 years later. Schools are an integral part of any community. Understanding the opportunities and tackling the challenges that can come with serving a diverse community are central to a school’s success. Schools and communities are intrinsically linked and we can’t expect students to leave their baggage at the door and collect it as they leave.

We have a range of social issues in our community replicated across the UK: homelessness, overcrowding, drugs, gangs, domestic violence, hate crime, and high levels of childhood poverty, to name but a few. These are issues we and many schools deal with on a regular basis. As schools, we should be educating for life. A school cannot successfully teach its curriculum if we are unable to take a more holistic approach to the needs of the student and their family. Real education and school transformation can only effectively take place where there are strong community connections that work together to take action to improve. Where this happens, students are more likely to develop a responsible attitude to school and the community. They are more likely to achieve, stay in school, have a better sense of well-being and play a more active role in society. However, the reality can be more difficult to achieve.

The introduction of a national curriculum for citizenship was an important development as far as linking schools to their wider communities was concerned. Schools were encouraged – if not asked – to educate for life. Sir Bernard Crick, who was appointed to head up an advisory group on citizenship education, said about the group’s final report in 1998 (report which then became known as the Crick Report, and which led to the introduction of citizenship as a core subject), that ‘Citizenship is more than a subject. If taught well and tailored to local needs, its skills and values will enhance democratic life for all of us, both rights and



responsibilities, beginning in school and radiating out. A noble thought, but more than 20 years later, the subject still fights for parity on the timetable and an adequate number of trained, passionate staff to deliver it effectively. In my own school, this too is the case and something we are working to change. However, Crick's words have always resonated with me; they exemplify my passion for making a difference. I want students to develop the skills to be empowered to lead the change that they want to see in their own communities. Developing young committed citizens who know why they should, and how they can, make a difference, underpins my work.

How many of us have witnessed lessons where students have been set the task to write a letter to the Headteacher, a local Councillor, or the Prime Minister about an issue they are being taught? Have these letters stayed in books or have students been encouraged to send these, thus actively engaging with the issue. This is an easy way for students to understand that they have a voice and are encouraged to use it even at the simplest level. Education is about teaching students the skills and supporting them to be active participants in society, enabling them to be successful and in charge of their own destinies. There is no better way to do that than to get them to explore their hopes and fears and look at how they can effectively, and positively, challenge the world they live in. For students receiving a response from a letter there is a sense of joy and acknowledgement that someone has heard their voice, even if impact is low. In return, this can help to develop the idea of civic engagement. We know that most students enjoy participating when it is a topic that they are interested in. Huge numbers regularly take part in School Council elections, mock elections, and social action in a variety of local and national campaigns. The hunger for this type of engagement is there but schools tend to be constrained by overcrowded curricula, a lack of resources, and the necessary training to develop this effectively in the classroom and beyond.

Schools are ideally placed for students to work together to explore issues. Together students, parents and staff can identify themes that want to see changed (developing the skills of communication, negotiation and compromise). As a result, they collaborate, develop roles, leadership skills, and take action on something that they care about. These community action campaigns should be a fundamental right for all, engaging young people in campaigning on the issues that they care about. Students learn the importance of being engaged citizens, understanding that they have power and a part to play. It is up to each school to ensure that it provides the opportunities for young people and staff to engage and this should be encouraged.

At Hendon, we provide a range of opportunities but these, in the past, have been without any wider community involvement. We realised that we were doing our projects *to* the community rather than engaging *with* the community. Resulting campaigns were weak and often didn't succeed as we lacked the effective power to be successful. In 2008, a fortuitous email arrived: I was introduced to the idea of Community Organising. The message that reached me reflected the type of work and engagement that I really wanted to develop in our school.

As a school, we adopted a model championed by Staples and Delgado, which focused on youth community organising. We have used Youth-Adult collaborative partnership organising and our most successful campaign used a Youth-Led with adult allies supporting approach. Introducing these ideas into the school was not without the critics: many said it couldn't be done.

Youth community organising is a relatively new, but rapidly growing, approach. It gives young people the ability to build on their lived experiences and priorities, exercising power to affect change that directly impacts on their well-being and sense of belonging. As a student's time at school is relatively short, critics question the sustainability of this approach. I believe it is, if young people are meaningfully connected to the community this will often continue when they leave school. In addition, students new to the school can see that they really can make a difference and are keen to participate. Students are starting to embrace the idea of life-long community participation.

There is much written about schools developing citizens and leaders of the future. As a society, I believe, we cannot expect young people to play a vital role in their community if we neglect what they can offer today. A lack of engagement in the community can create visible challenges in the future. If young people feel disenfranchised from an early age, it becomes more difficult to engage them in playing a positive and active role later on in life. There have been a number of initiatives to try and encourage schools increase engagement. I believe that in delivering a high-quality citizenship programme with a clear active community

engagement component, we can do this. Everyone has the ability to be an effective citizen if encouraged and supported properly: supported to develop their own social capital and the confidence that their voice will be listened to. As a school we have to empower children to grow and develop their leadership capacity and to express it practically.



Our school values are “Believe, Achieve, Lead and Belong” and student leadership and participation are at the heart of what we do. The aim for all students is that they believe they have the ability to be what they want and can achieve whatever they set their minds to. Students are effectively able to lead and should understand that they belong not just to the school, but also a range of local, national and international communities.

All students in our school are members of Student Voice, it is their school and they

should be able to share opinions and shape what happens. Each student experiences democracy for themselves through negotiation and compromise as they listen to, and debate, different points of view. As a group, they work together to make decisions about how they should use their vote. Where students want to tackle an issue, they are supported to find others in the school who have similar interests and set up action teams to tackle these. I believe we should never say no to an idea. Students should be encouraged and supported to undertake change on the issues that they are passionate about. There is still important learning taking place if their idea is not successful or has unintended outcomes.

A tragedy rocked the school, in August 2014, when our Headteacher sadly completed suicide. This loss, and the community’s associated need to recover from this tragic incident, were the catalyst to create the mental health and wellbeing team. None of us could foresee the long-lasting impact that this community action would have on all of us.

As the school came to terms with what had happened, one student took the lead in terms of how we could respond. The need to do something was immense but it took a long time before the community could effectively engage in responding to what had happened. The student set about talking and listening to how his peers and the staff wanted to respond. He identified six students who were passionate to take action. They conducted a campaign and identified that they wanted to raise awareness of mental health and reduce the stigma that people faced in speaking about their mental health challenges. The SOS – Stamp Out Stigma – Campaign was born. Soon after, fate seemed to intervene, when we learned about an opportunity to apply for funding for a social action project and the idea for (the first) student-led mental health conference took shape.

The students held a number of listening campaigns. Hosting a range of different events in school, as well as reaching out to other schools, listening to over 1,500 people. Common themes identified from personal testimonies included long waits, a lack of provision and the difficulty in navigating what support was available in the area. The team then spent time researching, identifying self-interest, building power within the community and developing relationships along the way. Initially, the decisions were taken by the adults with the students suggesting ideas and being guided as to what they had to do.

As the team developed, it was clear that they were able to make more of the decisions and extended their work across the community. It took courage initially to let the students lead, but they rose to the challenge and never failed to impress those that went on the journey with them.

In the first year, there were many highlights:

- Students met with the local Council’s Voice of the Child coordinator to discuss issues around mental health and made a film to be shown at CAMHS highlighting current issues that young people faced.

- Students negotiated, and regularly met, with the Chief Executive of the local Mental Health Trust to raise issues. They gained funding for a local mental health app and secured their signature for the youth mental health charter.
- The Chair of the local Council's Health and Wellbeing board publicly supported the work. She helped with introductions to other power players.
- Students attended the annual Council meeting – the first students to do this – where they were able to submit questions, discuss ideas with the council, whilst also receiving positive responses.
- Students also secured an agreement from the leader of the Council and the opposition to prioritise mental health. They agreed to a number of areas that they were willing to focus on. By working together and holding them to account, the Council went further than many of their initial commitments.



If it appears that everything went smoothly for the team, frankly, it didn't. It was in these moments when some of the best learning took place. Nothing fazed the team as they worked to overcome numerous obstacles. The signing of the Charter was the most problematic issue that they faced. The Charter was to be the centre piece of the first conference, but the Head of the local Mental Health Trust would not agree to sign the Charter. Undeterred, the students undertook many trips to her office with flowers and cakes, finding solutions to every concern she raised. Still, she would not agree to sign. Then, with just a few days to go, she said that she was unable to attend the conference! The students organised another cake trip and negotiated that she would attend for just 30 minutes but not sign the Charter. To ensure she did not change her mind the students

immediately tweeted and emailed all delegates confirming that she would be attending. On the day, again undeterred, some of the team spent an hour negotiating with her (she told them she had freed up her diary for the afternoon) to encourage her to sign; just 10 minutes before the launch, she finally said yes! The students' resilience and ability to engage led to her later attending their second conference, offering the support of her team and contacts from the Mental Health profession. She also paid for the development of a mental health app and some funding for the second conference.

The first conference was an overwhelming success. One delegate wrote *"I just wanted to congratulate you on a wonderful conference today. It was a privilege to come and speak. It's brilliant to see how motivated young people are to better understand mental health and make a difference - please do not underestimate the impact you've had not only on your generation, but the younger children following in your footsteps. The charter signed today will save lives, of that I am sure."* **Rachel W**

It was this evaluation that ensured that team went from strength to strength.

Initially a one-year project, the team had numerous individual and group successes. This spurred them on to continue. They knew that they had made a difference across a variety of communities. The students talked about being fortunate to have an opportunity to take part in such an important campaign. They were excited that they had been able to develop a range of skills and felt that many students their age would not have the same opportunity. The literature in this field suggests students who are actively engaged are more likely to succeed and remain active citizens; we can see this within our team.

They have had an immense impact. Over 40 students have been members of the team, giving over 4,000 hours of volunteering. They've hosted three student-led conferences and a summit. They also have a voice in local and London-wide mental health work.

The team started with two simple aims

- 1) to get people talking about mental health and
- 2) improve the facilities in the community.

They have made a real difference in these two areas. The team have earned a reputation for themselves and have achieved eleven awards (local, national and international). These are the icing on the cake! However, these awards have helped the team to get the “power players” to take them seriously and work collectively to tackle the issue. Twelve of the team are actively engaged with community work outside of school. The students are positive about their experience and being part of the team. Here is what a few of them have had to say:

“The second mental health conference for me was absolutely amazing. I'm so grateful to have been a part of the event and been given the opportunity to lead... I'm glad to see change happening, to see the effect our work and what raising awareness has done for us as students, the team and our school - it's truly a phenomenal and fantastic team to be part of and I'm happy to say that I'm part of it.” **Chika**

“Being part of the team is an exceptional opportunity to learn amazing lifelong skills!” **José**

“At first, I joined the mental health team as I wanted to start community work. I soon realised that mental health was a big topic and I wanted to be one of the people who would kick start a conversation.” **A'mari**



“This student led project has made a significant impact on our local community. As a school we have made a continuous effort to destigmatise mental health. We have gained transferable skills that can be applied to a variety of situations. As young pupils it is vital for us to gain exposure to these sorts of things before we enter the workforce. Mental Health is something very close to my heart, being able to do something about this issue has changed my life and I would like to think I have done something to support others.” **Soufia**

“Being part of the mental health team has given us as much back as we have given towards the cause.” **Eddie**

The students continue to tackle issues through the SOS – Stamp Out Stigma – Campaign. They consider themselves the guardians of the legacy left by the tragedy. They believe and can talk about their own experiences and are advocates for the role young people can have in being catalysts for change. The team are all leaders in their own right. Having been on a journey of self-discovery, we can see the shoots of a lifelong commitment to community engagement. Many of the early members of the team, who have left Hendon are still involved in community organising and mental health work. Others are actively pursuing a career in mental health.

Community engagement is vital for the success of schools. However, it has to be acknowledged that it is not easy to achieve. Even when a school values the importance of whole school engagement, has staff who have community awareness, are passionate and ready to support, there are still many barriers to overcome. Support, time, money and resources are essential to the successful implementation of community action. However, I believe all school can find ways to increase engagement, even with small changes to current practice.

I am passionate about the fundamental need for schools to play a more active role in their communities. I believe that community engagement should be the core purpose of all schools and as educators, we must find ways to rise to this challenge. It is possible, although not easy, as we are seeing it happen in a variety of schools across the UK. This approach to community engagement must, however, be met with the desire for change, sufficient resources, including training and recognition from central government. There needs to be large-scale research, not anecdotal case studies into the impact on educational achievement and behaviour in the UK. Currently, much of the research is US-based or on a micro-scale. Research also into how community engagement in a wider context should also look at a community joined up approach to tackling wider social issues. Schools are increasingly expected to independently tackle these social problems, and this should not be the case. However, in partnership with others, we can build power, and take action. We can develop sustainable engaged citizens with the skills to be agents of change. If successful, this type of community approach could bring about the start of a revolutionary change in education and beyond the school gates, as a result I believe that all our communities will be in safe hands.

# #LOVEESOL: ACTION FOR ESOL AND MULTILINGUAL CITIZENSHIP

Dermot Bryers

This is the story of how a group of parents from Streatham have influenced ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) policy in London and, beyond the city, impacted the national debate on language rights, integration and multilingualism. This chapter examines the connection between pedagogy and community action and the role played by the school in fostering an ‘action-rich’ as well as a ‘language rich’ environment.

Henry Cavendish Primary school, nestled between Streatham High Street and Tooting Common in south London, has been home to an English for Action ESOL course since 2013. ESOL is English language training for adult migrant and refugees living in the UK. In that time the group has achieved an enormous amount. The students, for the most part parents of children at the school, have taken action on a range of social issues, participated in the life of the school and learned new skills and language that have enabled them to thrive at school, at home, at work and in the community. We focus here on the work the group has done to campaign for ESOL and, simultaneously, to make the case for a ‘multilingual citizenship’<sup>6</sup> where languages others than English are valued and not seen as a barrier to integration.

To begin with, what is English for Action (EFA)? English for Action is a charity providing participatory, action-orientated, ESOL classes with community partners in London. Inspired by Paulo Freire, the organisation believes that ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) one of the key stones of social justice in a diverse city like London. It’s crucial, not only because learning English helps migrants and refugees to participate in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the city, but also because ESOL classes, with the right emphasis, can function as a springboard for the kind of migrant-led community organising and campaigning that can bring about a fairer city for all of us. EFA partners with community organisations to run ESOL courses for two main reasons. Firstly, it helps make ESOL accessible to people who might not otherwise come across it. Not everyone knows there is such a thing. Some people are excluded from formal, FE (further education) based provision because of their immigration status, their childcare needs, their work schedules or because of the negative connotations they have of formal learning. The second reason is that another key influence for EFA, in addition to Paulo Freire’s pedagogy, is Alinskyite broad-based community organising, of which Citizens UK are the leading proponent here in the UK. By working with and inside community-based institutions we can reach people who might otherwise be on the margins of those institutions and connect them to their institutions more deeply, enable them to access (and challenge) the power that exists within them and in turn make the institutions themselves more democratic and more deeply connected to their members. Around 80% of EFA’s courses are with schools or children’s centres. Typically, parents drop their kids off at school, attend a class where they develop their language skills, get to know other parents, teachers and other members of the local community and get the support they need to take action on the issues they care about.

## PARTICIPATORY PEDAGOGY

At English for Action, community action is always grounded in classroom discussions and classroom learning. The action the Henry Cavendish class took to defend their language rights – both the right to learn the language of their new country and the right to speak their heritage languages in the community - stemmed from classroom discussion and our participatory pedagogy. We work with generative themes, such as health, housing, migration etc. and, over a series of lessons, move slowly from sharing experiences and opinions on the topic to delving deeper into a particular element or problem that emerges to organising, taking and

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<sup>6</sup> See Cooke, Bryers and Winstanley’s “Our Languages: Towards sociolinguistic citizenship in ESOL”, chapter in *Brokering Britain: Educating Citizens*, ed. Cooke and Peutrell.

evaluating action. Language as a theme proved to be particularly generative. The class enjoyed sharing their language biographies, the languages in their families and the languages in other parts of the world they knew well. One student, Safiya who previously self-identified as speaking Indonesian and a bit of English, revealed that she actually spoke three Indonesian languages, passable Arabic in addition to the 'bit of English' (she was being modest). She hadn't shared that before because she didn't really think of her Indonesian languages as languages and she didn't think Arabic really counted because she wasn't proficient. Because we took a repertoires approach to language (thinking about the entirety of our linguistic resources) she was transformed from having only her 'native' language and deficient English, to a multilingual expert who realised she could effortlessly switch between a range of languages, dialects and registers.



After a couple of lessons along these lines we progressed to talking about the languages in Streatham – renowned as one of the most multilingual neighbourhoods in one of the most multilingual cities on earth. We discussed where you hear/speak/read/write different languages in Streatham. Students focussed on the different domains, the Somali cafés, the Polish delis, the Algerian restaurants, the bus stops, the school gates etc. There was a short silence and a Polish student, Aga, said: “some people don't like it when you speak your language”. There were several nods of recognition. She continued: “my friend was speaking Polish to her daughter and a man told her to ‘speak English’”. A sub-topic had emerged.

We explored this issue, we can call it ‘linguicism’ or ‘language racism’, at depth in the next lesson, using a technique created by Paulo Freire, called problem-posing from a code.<sup>7</sup> The process is to draw a picture (or source one) that represents a problem. The facilitator then focusses the group on the picture, in this case a drawing of a woman and a child in a supermarket and a man saying “speak English”. The problem-posing takes five stages<sup>8</sup>:

### 1 – Describe the content

This is to make sure everyone understands the picture. It can also help generate the words and phrases needed for the ensuing critical discussion.

### 2 – Define the problem

Make sure everyone understands the problem and agrees that it is a problem. For example, in this case, if half the room thinks the problem is the Mum and daughter speaking Polish in the supermarket and the rest of the group think the problem is the racist telling people to “speak English”, the rest of the discussion won't work. You could have a perfectly good discussion (or argument) about what the problem is, but it wouldn't be ‘problem-posing from a code’. To do problem-posing from a code you need a collective problem that everyone agrees is a problem and the divergence is on the causes, consequences and solutions.

### 3 – Personalise the problem

The group shares experiences and anecdotes relating to the problem. At this point it becomes possible to see how keenly felt the problem is, how willing students are to talk about it, how motivated people are to do something

### 4 – Discuss causes and consequences

This stage can take a long time and at this point people might have very divergent ideas. This is fine. Problems have multiple causes and multiple consequences. Agreeing some causes is helpful however, as this can lead to action that gets to the heart of the problem.

### 5 – Discussion possible solutions or action that can be taken

The degree to which the group takes responsibility for taking action will depend from group to group and whether taking action is within the bounds of the educational experience. At EFA it's very much part of our

<sup>7</sup> As defined in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

<sup>8</sup> See Elsa Auerbach's *Making Meaning, Making Change*.

remit. That much is made explicit in our name and in discussions we have with students when they join. There is no obligation to take action of course and the agenda is not pre-set but it's very much a possibility and clearly one the teachers would like to encourage.

The discussion revealed that a surprising number of people had either directly experienced, or had friends who had experienced, this kind of discrimination. Two students had been told by supervisors at their job (in retail) that they weren't allowed to speak Polish to other Polish colleagues, even during breaks. Another student said she had these kinds of 'speak English' comments almost on a daily basis on the bus to and from work when she spoke on the phone to her Mum. The extent of the problem, in one of the most multicultural, multilingual areas of London was surprising to some of the students and to the teacher. What was the cause of the problem? The class agreed, pretty much unanimously, that it was about racism. It also seemed worse for the Muslim women of colour in the group, than for the white Europeans. We had no men to compare with, but some students suspected that it was also a gender issue; men were less likely to be targeted than women.

## ACTION FOR CHANGE

What could we do about it? First of all, we developed strategies for dealing with the comments when they arise. To do this we used forum theatre, a method developed by Augusto Boal who was a contemporary of Paulo Freire in Brazil in the 1970s and 80s. Forum theatre is a form of political theatre. Actors are ordinary people affected by social injustice, or oppression in Boal's terms. The audience are 'spectators' and intervene in the play, replacing the protagonist in order to disrupt the oppression and experiment with creative solutions to the problem. The Henry Cavendish students created small plays bringing to life different situations where they had experienced this kind of discrimination. They practised various solutions, ranging from engaging members of the public in their defence to challenging the offender directly. It is a playful but powerful way to develop solidarity between members of the class and rehearse interventions or direct action in a safe space.

There was also a more systemic response. During this series of lessons, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Integration, coincidentally chaired by local MP Chuka Umunna, was writing the final report to conclude their work. The APPG was kicked off in 2016 after a review into integration by senior civil servant Dame Louise Casey. Casey's report produced the following headline in the Daily Express: "If you stay – SPEAK ENGLISH: gov advisor says migrants should be forced to learn language." Whilst the report itself was of course slightly more nuanced than the headline, nevertheless multilingualism was very much couched as a problem, a barrier to integration, and the suggestion was that large numbers of migrants were unwilling to learn.

We brought the work of the APPG into class, through quotes from the interim report and through newspaper articles detailing its work. The class were quite shocked to see their MP and other politicians using the kind of language and recycling the tropes that ultimately fuel the kind of behaviour exhibited by the supermarket racist. The vast majority of migrants want to learn English; of course, they do, it's the key to life in the UK, earning enough money to live well, supporting family and participating in their communities. Our class felt it was better to talk about the right to learn English however, rather than focus on it as an obligation, which implies people are reluctant. Moreover, we need to talk about the cuts to ESOL, around 60% cuts in real terms from 2010 to 2018, that are preventing people from learning. How unfair to talk about the reluctance to learn when there are waiting lists for courses across the country, fees preventing people from accessing free classes, eligibility criteria for publicly funded courses that prevent people with certain immigration statuses and a lack of childcare that systematically excludes many of the women (in particular) the Casey report identified as living segregated lives.

The APPG was collecting evidence to feed into the final report. The class decided to submit evidence in the form of letters expressing their concern with the tone of the work of the APPG so far and especially the Casey report. They described their experiences learning English, the barriers to learning posed principally by government cuts and above all, the experiences that many in the class had had of language racism (otherwise known as linguicism) and how politicians had a responsibility to consider the consequences of their language. We also found out that Chuka Umunna was hosting an event in parliament as part of the APPG process. Two students attended the event and heard Umunna say that he regretted the interim report had produced such



a headline in a newspaper renowned for its anti-immigration stance and more care would be taken to create a more positive message regarding immigration. The final report, headlined “integration not demonization”, was much better. The impact of government cuts to ESOL was highlighted, there was more emphasis on racism as a barrier to integration than scapegoating of migrants themselves and the discourse on learning English had moved significantly towards reinforcing its importance rather than the more negative “learn it or else” message of the earlier work. Our class was happy – along with others who had responded to the APPG – we had shifted the debate.

We also made it onto the radio. As the debate on learning English raged, Radio 4 commissioned a documentary called “On speaking terms” to examine language use and learning in the UK. A researcher found EFA’s website and read the letters our students had written in response to the APPG. He got in touch and asked if he could visit the class and interview the students. Our class discussed the invitation and felt they would like to participate and that it was another opportunity to reach a larger audience with our message about language rights. Several students did interviews, focussing on their experiences both learning English and the often negative experiences they had had using languages other than English in public spaces. We made the cut; the documentary was aired and more people knew about ESOL and the struggle many migrants (and non-migrants) face using their heritage languages (or mother-tongue) in the community.



The action didn’t stop there. On the European Day of Languages in September 2017, EFA students including eight members of the Henry Cavendish class, and allies from across London met at City Hall for multilingual picnic and to send a message to the Mayor of London that we need better ESOL provision in the capital. Around 100 people attended and created a huge, multilingual banner that we delivered to the Mayor. Within a week we got an invitation to discuss ESOL policy with a senior policy officer from the refugees and integration team. We attended with an EFA teacher, a student from our Henry cavendish group and two allies from community alliance London Citizens for whom ESOL is an increasing priority. The meeting resulted in a commitment to work with us in future and for City Hall to host the next #LoveESOL event inside the building the following year.

## CREATING AN ACTION-RICH ENVIRONMENT

The support provided by Henry Cavendish has been an integral part of this story. We are grateful to all our partner schools. Many of them provide space at a time when, as all teachers will know, space is at a premium. Some contribute to the costs, others support with recruiting students and perhaps help with the issues that come up in the class, such as problems at school or even outside of school. Henry Cavendish provide all of this and more. We even have a learning support teacher from the school who joins the class and helps out when there are large numbers of students.

It's not only the practical support that has helped, the school's values are communicated loudly and clearly. Lots of schools would claim to be, or aspire to be, local community hubs. The way Henry Cavendish has supported their EFA class shows the school put this into practice. Whenever the headteacher talks about the EFA class, she mentions proudly that it's not only for parents at the school but it's also for members of the local community. The whole class are invited to school events, like International Evening and Home Languages Breakfast. There is a clear commitment to multi-lingual pedagogy and multi-lingual citizenship; parents and students are encouraged to use the full range language repertoires in their learning and in their participation at school. This is evident from the activities and resources used to support the children with English as an Additional Language. You can hear a variety of languages used in school with children and parents. Office staff and support staff speak Spanish, Polish, Portuguese, Urdu and other community languages. The advice from school staff to parents is unequivocal: use your expert languages at home (and elsewhere) with your kids. Children will learn English at school in a flash and what they need at home is authentic, quality language input in any language. The parents feel comfortable chatting and joking in their 'home' languages with other parents and their kids, but happily mix with parents with other languages. This coherence with EFA's values has benefitted the group and helped to create a context for our language learning and celebration of all our community languages.

As we have seen EFA's pedagogic approach, we call it participatory ESOL, is also a critical factor in creating a basis for community action. The students know that the class is their space to discuss the issues they care about, however thorny them might be. They bring their lives into the classroom and the teacher builds language learning around this content. An important element of participating ESOL is the learning process, as described above.<sup>9</sup> It's really important that students have the time to get their heads around the theme, to own it. This means the analytical discussions that proceed are based around their interests and existing knowledge. Students are better able to deal with texts and 'expert' voices more critically when they have developed their own ideas first. The other important part of participatory ESOL is that when students share things that are unjust, we challenge and support them to take action.

If participatory ESOL helps us to bring the outside into the classroom, community organising helps us take the inside out. Community organising methods and the relationships we develop through it, makes action a reality and not just an aspiration. First of all, community organising develops a critical understanding of power. We ask question such as:

"Who has the power to change this situation?"

"How much power do we have?"

"How can we become more powerful?"

It also encourages deep listening. Teachers and students use these listening skills to find topics, pick up on issues and develop relationships. Community organising teaches how to conduct an effective one-one meeting where we identify common interests and find out what makes our classmates, neighbours, fellow activists tick. Using these skills, we can build alliances and take action strategically, picking our battles and acting creatively. The teachers and students at EFA learn these skills and they were crucial in every stage of the story I have told here.

English for Action has worked with scores of schools since its creation in 2006 and the best results are always when the values of the host school and the values of English for Action closely align. At Henry Cavendish, these shared values centre on celebrating and reinforcing linguistic and cultural diversity, placing social

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<sup>9</sup> See Cooke, Bryers and Winstanley's *Whose Integration?*

justice and equality at the heart of education and a commitment to building strong communities with the power to effect change. These values, together with EFA’s participatory pedagogic and community organising methods, helped create an environment where the parents were able to take action that has had an impact far beyond the boundaries of the school.



# POSITIVE IMAGES: HOW YOUNG PEOPLE ORGANISED TO CHANGE POLICY AND BUILD BETTER RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE POLICE

Claire Arkwright

Notre Dame Roman Catholic Girls' School, in the London borough of Southwark, has been a member of Citizens UK for almost a decade. As a school, Notre Dame has been engaged in multiple campaigns over the past few years. In 2018, students started engaging around the issue of youth violence. This case-study will explore the story of a young person who has been on a journey of developing herself as a leader through building a campaign, taking action on what she really cares about, negotiating and, ultimately, winning, thus bringing about change in her local area. I will begin by telling the story of this campaign to then unpick what was learnt and what benefit this can have for other schools and their students.

Following Community Organising methodologies, and before starting any campaign, a listening exercise is carried out. Four schools, three churches and a few charities organised a 'listening exercise', speaking to over 2,000 people within their institutions. Each school had a group of up to 20 young people trained in how to carry out a listening campaign. A listening campaign is not just a data collecting exercise. First and foremost, it is a relational activity where you encourage the whole school community to start talking about the issues that their community are facing which means that not only are issues being brought to light but everyone within the school is being brought into the process of deciding the campaigns. Those carrying out the listening are seeking out new potential leaders who could be involved in emerging campaigns as well as trying to develop relationships within their institutions.

Once this large listening exercise had been carried out, we held a 'delegates meeting' where representatives from each institution came together and voted on the area that was most important to them. Youth safety came up as a priority and, within the large problem of 'youth safety', the more of used issue of 'relationships between young people and the police' came up as something that people wanted to work on. This process was really important not only to identify what they were going to work on, but also to build relationships between the different institutions – you have church members, people from charities, parents, students and teachers all debating and deciding together what was going to be their shared priority. A space was created, whereby no one person had more authority than the other. Rather, we worked to make sure that all voices were heard to ensure that a true democratic consensus was reached. This process of working with people from a variety of institutions gave students a raw understanding of how democracy can work and a real flavour of the skills of negotiating with others to reach shared decisions.

After this meeting, a smaller youth safety team met in one of the secondary schools. At that meeting, we had secondary school students, teachers, church members, and parents from a local parents' association. This meeting was chaired by Tehillah, from Notre Dame Girls' School:

*'Chairing this meeting was an opportunity I thought I would never be capable of. The meeting gave me confidence and an assured hope for my community. It emotionally touched me to see the power we all held when our community came together as one as well as seeing the impact this meeting had to achieving future needs.'*

It was fundamental to the campaign that young people were leading it from the start. They received training on how to break their concerns (relationships between the police and young people) into even smaller, more tangible, issues. After bringing together different ideas, the group decided to work on getting the police in Southwark to stop posting knives on social media. The group went through online posts where there were pictures of zombie knives (often with blood on them and with captions like 'Teen caught with this knife', etc.). From this activity – part of their research – the young people felt that there should be a more positive representation of teenagers and that these images posted were not helping the problem but, rather, potentially glamorising it and encouraging people to find bigger and more dangerous weapons.

Tehillah collected the opinions of the young people and composed a letter to the Evening Standard that was later published.<sup>10</sup>

## The Reader: Met photos of blades are fuelling 'knife arms race'

Have your say

Twitter: @ESTheReader

Email: [thereader@standard.co.uk](mailto:thereader@standard.co.uk)

Tuesday 16 July 2019 10:04 | 0 comments



Following this early campaign success, bringing the issue to a wider audience, Tehillah was then able to get onto ITV News with another student called Josephine.<sup>11</sup> They talked about the issue and their campaign.

*"I am so please that I got the opportunity to express my opinions and thoughts on the negative impact of police posting deadly weapons and the effect it has on young people today. It is wrong. It is futile. I am grateful that ITV News helped me and Tehillah get this across."*

Tehillah and Josephine started a hashtag campaign called #TeenCaught to reverse the negative stereotypes inundating social media. Both Tehillah and Josephine and students from other schools started posting pictures of themselves doing good things within their community, i.e. #TeenCaught doing their homework.

Capitalising on these early steps, the schools involved – Harris Academy Peckham, Oliver Goldsmiths Primary School, St James the Great Primary School and Notre Dame Girls' School – wanted to build more momentum around this issue and see if they could meet with the Borough Commander for Southwark to get his team to stop posting pictures of knives on social media and start posting more positive images of young people. Leaders from Oliver Goldsmith Primary School, in Peckham, agreed, as an institution, to take at least one positive action every week for a duration of two months. These actions would be documented to then show to the police once they had been able to get a meeting. The students had ongoing training on how to take action which started with a community walk to look out for positive things they could do within the area. They spoke to local people, brought all their ideas back together to decide what actions they were going to take. They decided to go to different places within Peckham to thank people for their hard work. They made cards for the local healthcare centre, they brought cupcakes to the local fire brigade, etc. When the general election was called, they had a workshop on democracy and the importance of voting. Posters were made posters and leaflets given out to parents and neighbours, encouraging them to register to vote.

*'Training helped pupils to understand how their positive actions can change the community's image of what young people do. They saw the need to engage with the local community more and most importantly to have the local police show these positive actions instead of negative images on their twitter feed. The campaign also opened a door for future dialogue between young people and the police.'*

One of the key actions Oliver Goldsmith Primary School organised was to meet with police officers. To show collective support, 30 people from across the local alliance of institutions involved gathered to meet with police officers. The aim was simple but very effective: to show gratitude to the Police for their hard work and to tell them about their campaign. Not only was it to thank them, but there was also a political demand: students, parents, teachers, and others involved in the action asked to meet with the Borough Commander.

<sup>10</sup> See [www.standard.co.uk/comment/letters/the-reader-met-photos-of-blades-are-fuelling-knife-arms-race-a4190996.html](http://www.standard.co.uk/comment/letters/the-reader-met-photos-of-blades-are-fuelling-knife-arms-race-a4190996.html).

<sup>11</sup> See [www.twitter.com/itvlondon/status/1154812508575870978](https://www.twitter.com/itvlondon/status/1154812508575870978).

Unfortunately, the police did not really engage with this process: they were an hour late and then proceeded to ignore the young people involved, only facing the adults while discussing the work they were doing around youth engagement.

This was an important moment. Such reactions, it seems, crystallised what so many young people are used to: being ignored by adults in positions of authority and highlighted the issue at hand of the breakdown in relationships with the police.

One of the lessons, from this experience, was about power: we teach the people we organise how they can build power in order to be able to affect change and have their voices listened to. Therefore, after the police officers left, it was important that we addressed what had happened so that the students did not go away without processing their emotions but, rather, thought about what could be done to move things on.

Thankfully, not all seemed to have been negative during this action. A meeting with the Deputy Borough Commander was offered. Realising that it is always best to accept a meeting rather than establish unnecessary barriers between ourselves and those we are trying to negotiate with, we accepted the meeting.

We started planning for the meeting with the Deputy Borough Commander: we used the action with the police officers as a learning opportunity and acted out what had happened. We asked the students to re-enact how they thought it should be when the Deputy Borough Commander came to visit: how we would ensure that he knew that it was a meeting run by the students, rather than the teachers or other adults in the room. This was invaluable practice as we got ready for our next steps.

The Deputy Borough Commander came and visited Harris Academy Peckham a few weeks later. 80 of the young people planned the whole event. Students chaired the action, presenting the positive things they had been doing and showcasing why they thought the Police should not be posting images of knives on social media.

One of the asks at the event, put to the Deputy Borough Commander, was for regular meetings to be organised. This is because we know that negotiations are easier when ongoing relationships are built and developed positively. It was agreed to meet regularly with the young people and to get them a meeting with the Borough Commander who could have the final say in terms of our campaign asks.

Meetings were agreed, but a decision was not yet reached as to whether the Police in Southwark would stop posting images of knives.

The Deputy Borough Commander insisted the knives had to be posted to show that they were doing their jobs and that members of the public wanted to see the weapons. He argued the position of the police giving many reasons to justify these images and it looked as though we weren't going to get anywhere. Then a young boy from Harris Academy Peckham said that he understood what the Deputy Commander was saying and he understood all of the reasons but that they were talking about how young people received it and how young people felt seeing these images and that he could not deny this experience. Not only did this start to shift the conversation but as we noted in our evaluation it was an amazing example of a young person respectfully but firmly negotiating their position in the face of authority.

The action was published in Southwark News and the Borough Commander was quoted saying that the posting of images was necessary.

One month later, a smaller group of students, a teacher, and a local vicar finally met with the Borough Commander. They had worked on writing an open letter which influential people within the borough of Southwark had already put their names to. The negotiating team decided to use this letter as part of the meeting, demonstrating the wider influence they had managed to build over time for, after all, it is power that would compel the response that we require in such times.

Tehillah chaired the meeting with the Borough Commander and once she had finished explaining the campaign he said ever since the action with his Deputy, they had stopped posting images of knives on social media. The Deputy had come back and said that they should think about stopping. At the meeting, the Borough Commander agreed to sign the open letter to encourage other boroughs to follow Southwark's lead and stop posting images of knives on their social media outlets. The team was now ready to hold a celebration event with all of the churches and schools also involved.

Here are a few reflections, from the work undertaken throughout the campaign:

Sandra Schloss, from St Luke's Church Peckham, one of the key church leaders involved with the campaign:

*Winning this campaign, demonstrated how listening to those involved in issues is so important. The young people were listened to and in supporting them, we also helped the community. It felt great to win this campaign and demonstrated that speaking to the people who make the decision is necessary if we want to make a difference. I believe this also helped to build confidence in the young people especially Tehillah who led on this issue. Hopefully will encourage her to continue to use the skills gained to inspire her in whatever she goes on to do.*

Tehillah:

*It was amazing to see the support ranging from the students to church vicars who all shared the same passion and rage as me towards the issue of weapons being posted on the Metropolitan Police social media. I would like to thank everybody for the support and congratulate everyone for winning this campaign.*

Josephine:

*I am extremely grateful for the platforms and organising opportunities that I have been exposed to. Through organising, I have grown in confidence and I have become more responsible. Thank you to everyone who supported the campaign and a special recognition to Tehillah, for her non-stop hard work. Lastly a big thank you to our Community Organiser Claire for all her mentoring and support!*

# THE STORY OF SCHOOL 21'S COMMUNITY CHOR

Emily Crowhurst

*'[The Community Choir] is a fantastic way to feel part of the school community and to become more involved in our children's life at school. We love singing the songs and talking about them at home. A very positive experience for us all round.'*

**School 21 Parent, 2017**

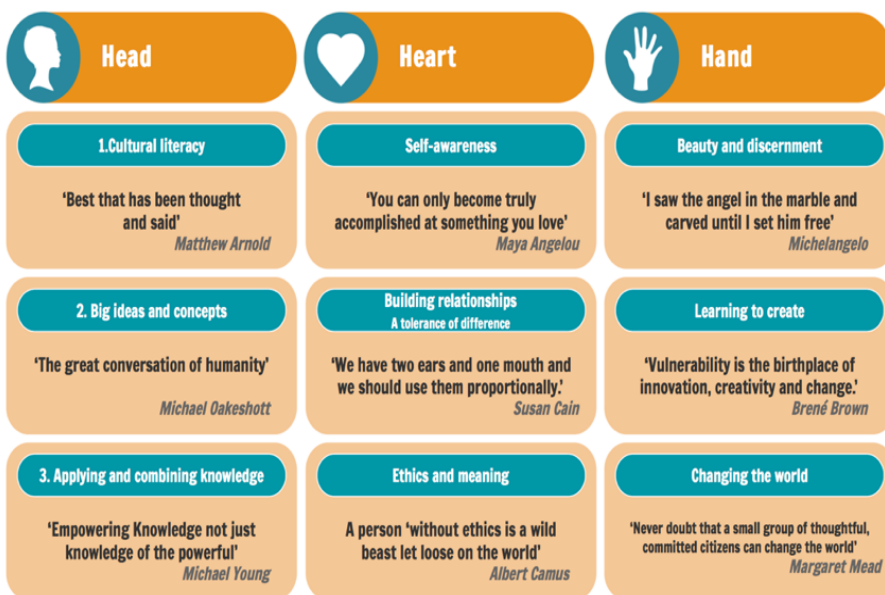
## THE COMMUNITY CHOR: SHIFTING THE POWER DYNAMIC

Setting up our School 21 community choir has been a life-affirming endeavour. Friday afternoons in our school hall are an embodiment of our school value of *community* and model the power of music to promote (amongst other things) non-hierarchical social cohesion, build relationships and provide a vehicle for social action. The existence and celebration of our community choir also reflects a more expansive view of education and the role of school beyond examination success. A typical rehearsal captures some familiar snapshots of family and school life; a father bouncing his pre-school child along to the music, a mother and 12-year-old daughter singing out from opposite sides of the choir (because it's unfashionable to be seen with your parents at that age), a handful of teachers rolling in to expend their last drops of energy, a 9-year-old stood next to our Headteacher, helping him clap in time to the beat, and enthusiastic middle school choir members modelling the joy of singing without inhibition, and leading warm-ups and pieces with increasing confidence. This creates an altogether different dynamic for interacting with our families and students, devoid of power plays and one-way interactions more typically experienced by parents and students in schools. A *done with*, rather than a *done to*, venture. But why should we bother with such endeavours? And what possibilities does it open up for our schools?

## SCHOOL IS ABOUT THE PRESENT, NOT JUST THE PAST AND THE FUTURE...

Traditional models of schooling tend not to value 'in the moment' or 'real-world' experiences that do not obviously or directly link to improved academic outcomes. Experiences like being part of a school musical, where students work as a *company* with directors and choreographers, professional scores and scripts, and as part of an authentic process of rigorous rehearsal over a 3-6month period. Experiences like completing a 12-week work placement during GCSE curriculum time, collaborating with professionals in sectors from law to media, solving live problems that the students are held accountable for. Experiences like attending the after-school hip-hop brass band, working weekly with professional musicians and performing in concerts. But, ask the music and drama teachers in your school how many times their students' participation in a concert or show has been threatened or even stopped because they're falling behind in science, or they've been repeatedly disruptive in geography lately, and you'll notice the tension. These activities are too often seen as frivolous extras or distractions from the 'actual' role of school – uploading content into our students; content that is mostly influenced by exam specifications, in order to prepare them for the future, or specifically, SATs, GCSEs, A Levels and, ultimately, the world of work. We must not neglect this, of course, but in isolation, this view of education confines students to holding pens for the future, rather than encouraging and empowering them to create work of value *now*, be part of collaborative endeavours that are important *now*, and make a difference to the world and indeed *their world right now* too.





At School 21, we believe in providing an education of the *head, heart, and hand*, which means our curriculum, core pedagogies and values promote a holistic education centred around the child. We believe that the power to craft, to explore, to make a change; to speak eloquently, understand yourself and others better, and actively grapple with the big challenges of our society, are of equal importance, and complementary, to building subject knowledge.

Our music curriculum is similarly expansive, built around five core values/practices (ensemble, mastery, community, creativity, and flow), which we believe embody a rich 4-18 music education and enable our students to experience music authentically and meaningfully, without neglecting their right to access the very best exam grades and future opportunities in the field and beyond. The two, in fact, go hand in hand. One of these core five is *community*, because we believe in the social power of music to connect people, to bring authenticity and accountability to music making, to tell stories, break down barriers, share ideas and make a stand. And, by building our curriculum from values such as this, rather than fixed content, every year we can be responsive to what's happening in the world and our local community right now. One way we consistently live out our value of community (and others) is through our annual Festival of Light event, which celebrates the curriculum music project outcomes of *every* child (including GCSE/A Level music classes) in

our 4-18 school, in a month-long programme of four concerts, in which 900 performers (including the 50 strong staff choir!) will share their work with the local community as part of a number of ensembles. Projects are rigorous in process, designed to be authentic and driven by an enquiry question and end project goal. The outward community lens is a core part of this, providing accountability, and connecting the knowledge and skills they acquire during the 12-week process to something and someone real, in a setting that allows the students to exist and be seen in a different way. But this does not need to be just the students' experience... Here's the journey of our school's community choir so far, and the opportunities it gave us to exist and collaborate in a different dimension with its participants.



### GETTING STARTED...

We set up our community choir in October 2017. It had been something I had wanted to do for years, but like many ideas that spring up in a busy teacher's brain, turning thought into action took a little time. At the start of the new academic year, we promoted our idea by displaying posters on the outside of our primary and middle school classroom doors to encourage conversation amongst parents and teachers during the school drop-off/pick-up. We handed out flyers to students, advertised the choir in the newsletter and texted out to all our parents, with the added promise of free tea and biscuits. We didn't know what the appetite would be (for the singing, not the biscuits), or how well our proposed time and day would work for our

families, but on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> October at 16:00 (we would later move to Fridays) we got the hall set-up and waited expectantly.



Much to our excitement, parents and children started coming in, a variety of ages and backgrounds, and our resident middle school choir, who we continue to invite along as ambassadors of the choir, greeted their parents and carers or offered to make tea for members of the community they were meeting for the first time. A handful of teachers, including our Headteacher, also arrived, and our community choir was officially launched.

We had thought carefully about the way we would run the rehearsal and the repertoire we would choose initially, and we knew we were onto something when, as the weeks went on, more people joined us than left. In the coming weeks, we would see students leading warm-ups and giving short performances, parents stepping forward to take solos and teachers making the time to come and sing with their students. Before long, parents started sending emails suggesting songs we could perform, some which represented cultures in our local community often overlooked and asking to collaborate with the community choir on work based projects dealing with local issues; teachers wanted to build the community choir into extra-curricular projects, and student composers wanted to use the community choir to workshop their GCSE coursework, and perform/lead it authentically. We had created a new context for students, parents and teachers to collaborate regularly that was not explicitly linked to academic progress, but not at odds with it either.



And like our music curriculum in 2014, our community choir would make its first public stand on the Festival of Light stage, performing both as a distinct ensemble, and as part of our grand finale amongst 300 other performers. That year's finale was a song called 'Umoja', from the South African musical of the same name. Umoja, aptly, is Swahili for 'unity'.

From here, more project opportunities emerged...



## PROJECT 1: WOMEN & WORK

'Dear Ms Crowhurst,

*I am Ava and Dara's mum and have been in the community choir. My practice just won a public art commission for the Olympic park... The commission is about Women and Work and the £1tn women give to the UK economy a year through care, domestic labour, volunteering etc... we would love the choir, if possible, to deliver the music of the parade.'* – Torange Khonsari – Community Choir Parent & Project Manager of Women Work, 2018



The community choir has value and meaning in and of itself, but soon into its existence came an opportunity for it to use its voice in another way. The *Women Work* project enabled us to collaborate with a number of School21 parents (particularly women who, project manager, Torange had deliberately sought to collaborate with) and local artists in Newham, discuss issues surrounding women in the local community and beyond, and finally connect with the public on these issues through a performative parade.



After an initial meeting with Torange about the contributions we could make, we co-presented the vision to the choir members, commissioning them to devise six musical pieces to be performed at relevant landmarks along the parade route. The first, an abandoned plot in Bow, where we would create a marching drum line to accompany the vocal stimulus "Why can't we just switch positions?". The second location, beside a giant mural of Sylvia Pankhurst, a performance of Nina Simone's *Chain Gang* would take place. Another, a poem, *She's being judged*,

written by a Year 10 student, would be set to music and performed outside a modernist housing association. The final stop was to be opposite an old mint factory at which 90% of people employed were women, where we would create and perform celebratory samba music, also played whenever we were on the move.

During the project process we collaborated with the other artists involved in the project, who had also engaged other students in the school to be involved in the parade from a design perspective.

The process was enriching and empowering, and for those who could attend the event itself, a vibrant experience, captured beautifully through the photography of another School 21 parent, Monika Szolle, was shared and the role of community was clear to see. This was an opportunity to stand up with and for others and deepen our relationship with the local community.



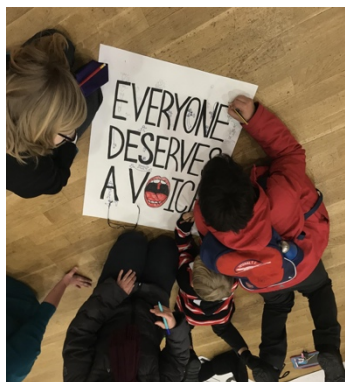
## PROJECT 2: HAIRSPRAY

School21 has just delivered its fifth annual musical, an auditioned extra-curricular project open to all students between the ages of 9-18. In 2019, *Hairspray* was the chosen work, a vibrant toe-tapper set in 1960s America, where the battle for civil rights is a central theme. Over time we have developed a strong culture of excellence and creativity in our musicals, but the content of this particular show provided an additional opportunity for social action.

*There's a dream  
In the future  
There's a struggle  
We have yet to win  
And there's pride  
In my heart  
'Cause I know  
Where I'm going  
And I know where I've been*

*I Know Where I've Been* is a seminal moment in the show, in which a protest march for equal rights and integration is staged around a rousing song highlighting the battle and journey ahead. As the song progresses, increasingly more cast members join the stage with their placards calling for 'integration not segregation'. Whilst an important and powerful moment in and of itself, many of the sentiments of tolerance and equality being actively fought for at that time are still present in issues surrounding today's society. Here was an opportunity to promote empathy for the past, through the lens of the present, with, and for, our community.

In the community choir rehearsals building up to the show, adults and children collaborated to decide on local/national/global issues they were passionate about and possible slogans/designs they would create to make their point.



They learnt the rich three-part harmony and dynamic contrasts that brought the lyrics to life, and eventually rehearsed with placards in hand. The emotion and sense of meaning in the room was palpable, even in the preparatory sessions. The performance itself, where the community choir arose from their seats during the scene in the middle of Act 2, surrounding the audience with banners and passionate singing, left us all in tears. As we battled through the live accompanying music through bleary eyes, singing at full blast ourselves, the atmosphere in the room was intense. We were here, as a community, with our community, singing for our community, and other communities that had used their voices to make a stand.

### PROJECT 3: A RECORD FOR CHANGE

Climate change, and more specifically the single-use plastic crisis, is one of the greatest challenges facing our global society today. But never fear, music teacher Pippa Wall was here to unite our community in speaking (or rather, singing) out about this issue. Originally born out of a 2018 Year 8 curriculum music project exploring how the idea of sound could be taken to its limit, *5p Plastic Bag – The Musical* emerged in full form the following year, through the creative work of 75 Year 4 students in their music lessons with Miss Wall. It entered its third iteration in February 2020, when it was learnt and recorded by the community choir, after they had seen it performed with such passion at the previous Festival of Light concert.

This project aimed to not only make a stand on a global level, but to bring in new members to the community choir, including our wonderful Year 4 advocates and their parents/carers, who were especially encouraged to come and along and share their message with a wider audience, having invested so much already.

Through a community choir parent contact with the Green Party, we also had the genuine possibility of reaching a National audience. We believed we could make a difference, and were driven by this, as we discussed and devised our strategy, with plans for an accompanying video, and public launch all in formation.

The week after our first draft recording session, another global challenge took hold, and so plans and ambitions for this project were put on ice. But momentum was built, and the relationships formed amongst the community choir would hold until we could come together and drive the project forward again. In the meantime, the power of music would be vital in helping our school and wider community connect amidst the



Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst many students were robbed of their opportunity to demonstrate an aspect of their academic abilities in end of year examinations, our school vision and culture ensured they still had learning experiences and important achievements born out of endeavours like this that were also of value, both for their present, and in preparation for the future. And the wider community could be with them on this, too.

### CONCLUSION

When we lead from values, when we think of how we do things *with* rather than *to*, when we see joining a community choir, engaging in a local project, or being in a play as of equal importance to other educational aims, we promote deeper thinking about our curricula, build stronger relationships with our community, and explore and celebrate the many ways schools can empower students, parents and teachers to make a difference to their world, not only in the future, but *today*.

# 'YOUR ACTIONS HAVE SHAMED US TODAY!'

Meeta Dave & Heidi Shewell-Cooper

## 'YOUR ACTIONS HAVE SHAMED US...'



So said a local neighbourhood ward councillor in the summer of 2019 to an assembled group of Year 6 students, parents, and wider community representatives gathered in a small community park area, directly in front of Radford Primary Academy, inner-city Nottingham.

The students had shared the results of their research into the experiences the children and their families of local parks. Surveys for families, visits out to all the nearby play areas and conversations with their peers confirmed their views; they felt unsafe, not valued, and wanted to play in a bright and clean

environment. Only a few weeks before they had photographed the broken bottle on the baby swing, overflowing bins and poorly maintained equipment, and called out the local council urgently to remove the dangerous items.

These children were proud of their school and this area, literally on the way to the school entrance, did not make a good impression at all – something needed to be done. On cue, moving from presentation to the park with local councillors, housing patch managers, PCSOs and environmental officers, the Police had to deal with an inebriated man lying in the middle of their play area as they shared stories of the anti-social behaviour that made them fearful to play out.

A team of Year 6 pupils, together with a small group of parents had grasped the opportunity to hold local decision-makers to account and made direct requests for change in their park. People turned out, the action got a reaction – a clean-up was instigated, the Anti-Social-Behaviour patrol car came by more regularly and there were promises of using the consultation, led by the pupils, to support funding applications, better security and environmental repairs. Year 6 passed on the baton as they left and the new Year 6 students have been working on their negotiation skills, ready to call their local councillors back to hold them to account for the promises made and not yet delivered. This is an ongoing project and still some work to be done but the leaders know the pupils are a force to be reckoned with.

High deprivation, gang culture, and substance misuse are some negative terms from a long list associated with Radford. Therefore, it is not surprising that most people have a very negative impression of the area and community. This was reflected to some extent in the school about 12 years ago when our work in the area of social action started. We realised we needed to devise a curriculum which would address some of the



underlying issues our pupils and families faced if they were going to succeed academically. At that time aspirations were low; pupils were not thinking about their futures and meaningful parents who wanted the best for their pupils were not sure how to go about it. The curriculum at the time was very much a “done to” model where there was little pupil involvement or very few – if any – links with the community. The school council had little impact.

On the surface, we could see that we were covering all the statutory requirements: we had a fantastic staff team who wanted the best for the pupils however, digging deeper, we could also see we were not preparing our pupils to be active global citizens as stated in our school vision. It seemed then that our pupils believed the negative headlines that were associated with Radford and therefore they had little to offer. This was the one major change that had to take place. We had to develop character, leadership skills, and make sure pupils were taking responsibility not just for themselves but also for others.

Initially, this was in small steps, within the school, where pupils were driving changes that mattered to them. Because of them, the school lunch system was changed, the behaviour policy (including sanctions and rewards), and even some aspects of the school uniform. Pupils were taking more and more responsibility in a meaningful way. They could see that they could influence change. In a snowball effect, we witnessed that the more success the pupils had, the more action they wanted to take. They began planning and taking assemblies on issues that mattered to them or felt needed to be addressed in school. They took responsibility for helping other pupils with their learning, or those that struggled at playtimes. They helped in the dinner hall, spoke to the pupils who had had “Time Out” and discussed the impact of their behaviour on themselves and others – the list grew and grew.

It was clear then that the pupils were at a stage where they were ready to start thinking about the impact they could have in the community. They had certainly built the skills and believed no challenge was too great for them.

At that time, we came across “Sewa Day” which is an international day of volunteering – and the strap line was one of Mahatma Gandhi’s quotes: “Be the change you want to see in the world”. Although quite deep, we shared it with the pupils and asked them in what ways they could make a positive difference to the quality of someone else’s life. Initially, they could only think of raising money as that is what charity meant to them. It took much discussions and exploration until they understood that this work could also be done through

public service. Eventually every class decided on an action they wanted to take. Because they had taken the lead role and planning of their work, it was personal to them and they were keen to help others. What they didn't expect was what they got back in return. After the actions, they explained how it made them feel good about themselves. They felt the appreciation and gratitude they received far outweighed their efforts.

This became the catalyst for further social action work in the community but also an integral part of the curriculum. **'Lead, Empower, Achieve, and Drive'** are the four key principles that drive all the work in our school and Trust. Opportunities to build character and develop these skills and attributes are embedded in the curriculum as we believe that this is what will support pupils not only to become successful in their lives but also understand justice and equality and their responsibility for others so they can be active citizens. Therefore, the development of this work was easily woven into the curriculum in a meaningful way. It was unique to our school because it was intrinsically linked to our community and more importantly it was the pupils who were driving the initiatives which meant that it was relevant to them. We were able to easily link the work to our PHSE curriculum and there were many opportunities to discuss some of the questions in our Philosophy for Pupils sessions. Developing communication was a priority for our pupils and this work gave pupils opportunities to debate, present, take part in formal meetings and hold leaders to account. The content of the tasks was no different to those that had been planned in the curriculum before. The only difference this time was they had a *real purpose* linked to our context which the pupils related to.

The work developed further when the school joined Nottingham Citizens. The systematic process of listening campaigns, planning, and taking actions was followed at a school level. Pupils collated information from parents, businesses, members of the local community and groups. They identified loneliness, the environment, and homelessness as the main concerns of the community at that time.

They organised themselves into groups and planned actions to address these areas. Over the following two terms they started to implement their action plans in authentic ways. They organised a visiting scheme where groups of pupils regularly met with OAPs at the day centre. During the time of the listening campaign the pupils had heard that many of them did not have much contact with young people and had little company. A rapport was built easily between them and an hour each week passed quickly while they shared experiences and stories and helped each other to complete tasks. Again, the main purpose had been to make a positive difference to the lives of our community members, but we were able to link the visits to some of our history and science objectives. It was another opportunity for pupils to develop their confidence and their social and communication skills.

Also, to address loneliness the pupils organised a community dinner and invited members of the community that were experiencing loneliness. These groups ordinarily would not come together and were isolated for a variety of reasons. Using the partnerships that the school had made the pupils were able to source the ingredients, free of charge, from local businesses. They organised help from a nearby charity who were experienced in cooking on a large scale and held the necessary food and hygiene qualifications. Since the food was going to be prepared during the day the pupils realised that they needed to involve other adults. Therefore, they explained the cause and its importance to their parents and managed to get a group to volunteer their time and support. The pupils were great hosts, serving food, socialising and building relationships. People were brought together to have a meal and make friendships. This event was very well received from some of our most vulnerable community members. We also found that aside from the main purpose of community action there are always other benefits. On this occasion we were pleased that the pupils had shared their plans with their parents so that they too were involved. Some of them attended the meal and offered to make the next meal for the community. This had become an event organised by the community, for the community.

As time has gone on, more and more people, including staff and parents have joined in the work and there is strong sense of community who believe in action for the common good. There has been a gradual, but noticeable, change in the way the way pupils think and behave. They have no hesitation in taking responsibility or action whether in school or the community and beyond. The curriculum supports these principles and has developed too where pupils are able to take control of their learning. It is now very much the model we aspired to "done with and not done to". This has not been at the expense of valuable curriculum time or attainment. In fact, quite the opposite. This year the school celebrated being in the top 3% of schools nationally for the progress from Key Stages 1 to 2. What the school is just, if not prouder of, is



that we can confidently say that our pupils are active global citizens. They will explain the reason for their actions, in a very matter of fact way – that it's not because someone is watching, not for reward but just because it's the right thing to do. We believe education really can, and should, go beyond the school gates.

# SURREY SQUARE: WHY COMMUNITY IS KEY

Matt Morden & Fiona Carrick-Davies



Surrey Square is a school at the heart of the community it serves, meeting not just the educational needs of its pupils but also responding to the plethora of social issues facing local families. Surrey Square is one of the 9 schools that serve the Aylesbury Estate in South East London. The estate, which is currently undergoing a vast regeneration programme, is the largest in the country, and the high-rise blocks can be a foreboding sight. Surrey Square is a non-selective state school for children aged 2-11 years. The number of pupils on free school meals and with special educational needs and disabilities is almost double the national level and the number of pupils with English as an additional language is significantly above. The school serves ‘the global majority’, since 90% of pupils are from non-white British heritages. A large number of our families hail from West Africa, and we also serve communities from Bangladesh, Somalia, Algeria, Peru, Columbia, Poland, Jamaica, Lithuania, Sierra Leone, and many other places! We are immensely proud of our community that works and learns together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance.

We have a clear mission of “*personal and academic excellence; everyone, every day*”. This drives everything that we do. The “and” is critical for us as we believe that whilst excellent academic outcomes are a prerequisite for success at secondary school and beyond, we also know that in our modern world we need to equip our children with much more than this so they thrive in life and contribute to society.

98% of our families sit within the lowest 40% on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). Despite these challenges, the children leave us achieving above national results in the core subjects which we believe is due to the emphasis we place on “personal excellence” whilst children and their families are a part of the Surrey Square community. In our school mission, the “personal” comes first – this is essential, as children’s basic needs have to be met in order to enable them to access their academic learning to the best of their ability. If something in a child’s home life is affecting their ability to learn then we see it as our duty to address this first.

The “personal excellence” aspect of our mission has 5 key elements:

- Everyone taking the time to listen and notice
- The pastoral team enacted to support the most vulnerable in our school community
- Part of the core curriculum – explicit teaching of the core values (responsibility, enjoyment, respect, perseverance, compassion and community)
- Adults seen as role models of the values
- Identifying relevant causes and campaigns in order to support our specific community



Our personal excellence framework hangs on our core values of responsibility, enjoyment, respect, perseverance, compassion and community, all of which are vital in enabling our children to be positive and active members of our society. The values have been developed into characters. Chief among these is Col Community (see picture) who reminds the children of the value of inter-cultural understanding, the importance of listening, learning about other cultures and sharing stories about our own. His tag line “small but mighty” shows the children that anyone has the power to make a difference to the world around them – one small act can indeed make a mighty change.

At Surrey Square, we are proud of our community work which goes beyond the borders of our school making that bigger change. There is absolutely no question as to why we do this – it’s an instinctive and unequivocal response to what our children and their families need. The first item on the personal excellence list states “everyone taking the time to listen and notice”. This goes beyond the classroom, into the playground, into families’ homes and beyond. What is it that our families need in order for children to learn? What are the current issues in our ever-evolving community that affect children’s lives and what practical actions can we put in place?

We have a number of strategic teams built around the personal excellence part of our mission including our Pastoral Support Team and Community Leadership Team. Our Pastoral Team meets without fail once a week – discussions focus on our most vulnerable pupils, parents and indeed whole families and sometimes the wider community. The team consists of members of the senior leadership team, SENCO, Designated Safeguarding Lead, Family & Community Coordinator, Place2Be School-based Manager, alongside visits from outside professionals. Class teachers are welcome to attend for their own professional development, or to contribute about a particular child. A team approach is vital so that a shared responsibility is undertaken, expert knowledge is shared, workload distributed, and all key staff are fully-informed. This meeting is NEVER cancelled and is an essential safety-net for each member of the team, where accountability is shared and mutually understood.

Fiona Carrick-Davies is a key member of the Surrey Square team. Her role as Family & Community Coordinator is absolutely critical to our work and is shared with parents through a leaflet that goes out to all new families at the school. Fiona leads on supporting our most vulnerable families – building trusting relationships, identifying current challenges, and finding ways to ease the burden of these and resolving them where possible.



#### WHAT ARE THE NEEDS OF OUR COMMUNITY?

Deprivation is a huge challenge for many of the families we serve. Because almost all of our families sit within the lowest 40% on the IDACI, hunger, poverty, and housing difficulties are common. Specific causes of poverty for our families include unemployment, low wages, welfare delays or changes (e.g. Universal Credit) and high immigration fees. This leaves families in a constant state of insecurity and unable to afford basic food, shelter, bedding, and clothing, which are included as an absolute baseline of human requirements in the lowest layer of Maslow’s hierarchy of need.

Consequences of this on families include:

- Inadequate housing, e.g. multiple occupancy properties, sofa-surfing, very poor hostel accommodation, displacement.
- Inappropriate shelter – e.g. Church Halls, Night Buses, Police Stations (if evicted).
- Cycle of high immigration application fees and NHS charges.
- Lack of access to welfare entitlements.
- Hunger and poor nutrition.
- Job insecurity.
- Lack of adequate and affordable childcare.
- Deteriorating health (both physical and mental).

## WHAT DO WE DO AS A SCHOOL TO SUPPORT FAMILIES THAT ARE IN THIS DESPERATE POSITION?



Hunger: We address hunger through our free daily Breakfast Club. This is supported by the wonderful charity Magic Breakfast. There is no stigma to our Breakfast Club; it is open to all – parents, grandparents, older siblings on their way to secondary school. It is a community in itself and allows families to socialise, play, and exercise before the school day has even started. In the most acute of cases, the school works closely with local food

banks in order to provide vulnerable families with food vouchers to enable them to ensure that the whole family is fuelled, particularly essential during weekends and holidays. We also work with various local providers, such as Mercato Metroplitano, Central Southwark Community Hub, and the Salvation Army who provide specific activities aimed at tackling Holiday Hunger.

Lack of enrichment: Free clubs are allocated to those children in need. Holiday referrals are made in association with organisations such as Free to Be Kids to enable children to enjoy a stimulating range of experiences during the longer holidays.

Housing: Fact-finding, advocacy and referrals play a key role in this. The school will support families with writing letters or emails to the local authority, lobbying local politicians, and signposting to local and London partners in order to ensure accommodation is adequate and appropriate for our families. The school will seek donations and apply for grants for bedding and furniture in order to ensure families have access to funds to ensure, for example, that their children can sleep on beds rather than the floor or have a table to complete homework on.

Depression, anxiety and poor mental health: The school-based counselling service Place2Be plays a key role in ensuring that children and their families' mental health needs are addressed. During Pastoral Support Team meetings, children and families are discussed and appropriate support put in place. Place4Parents enables us to refer parents to counsellors based within the school premises – we see more parents taking these spaces up as they have a trusted relationship with the school and thus feel safe. Weekly coffee mornings are held at school to ensure that parents have opportunities to informally support and connect with each other.



'It's like family to me': the school feeding its poorest families  
Surrey Square primary in London provides meals - and even clothes - for pupils' families most in need

## A KEY CASE STUDY – CITIZENSHIP CAMPAIGNING

### Why citizenship?

A key part of the community work that is done at Surrey Square involves listening to the needs of our community. We must constantly address the evolving challenges that our families are facing – it isn't up to us to decide what the priorities are, but instead we rely on the knowledge and viewpoints of those with lived experiences. Since the 2013 Hostile Environment policies

came into force, immigration and citizenship became an increasingly visible challenge for our community. It was clear that this was having a damaging effect on our families in many ways. The huge fees of applying for Leave to Remain, renewing those papers or applying for British citizenship are crippling for families already in a state on poverty. British Citizenship for children of parents with irregular immigration status costs £1012 per child. These children have a right to register as British Citizens if they were born here and have spent 10 continuous years in the country, but the cost is prohibitive as most of these parents are in low-wage employment or are actually unable to work due to their own immigration status. Some of these families might also have No Recourse to Public Funds (this is a restriction the Home Office can place on someone's Leave to Remain) and this can have a devastating effect on families. Families are desperate for their children to gain citizenship, so they resort to extreme measures to pay the fees, including taking out pay-day loans, borrowing vast sums of money from family and friends or going without basics in order to save the money.

Over 40 of our pupils in the past 6 years have applied for citizenship, each time at great, and rising, cost to their families. Part of our curriculum is based on the theme of identity as we see that this enables children to build self-esteem and confidence in who they are. It includes the explicit teaching around what it means to be British and exploring different beliefs, backgrounds and cultures within the framework of our core values. Children without their citizenship do not feel the sense of belonging that they deserve, thus damaging their self-esteem and hindering their ambitions for the future as without their citizenship, many doors would not be open to them. These are tangible doors, such as not being able to access higher education without paying unaffordable overseas fees and as adults, finding securing permanent, stable employment very challenging.

### WHAT DID WE DO ABOUT THIS?



Seeing first-hand the damaging effects that this was causing our families acted as a catalyst for us to initiate building a campaign about reducing citizenship fees. It was important that the strategy for the campaigning involved all school stakeholders from

governors, senior leaders, to the whole school community. Trust was critical. Families had to feel that they could share their knowledge and experiences with the school and feel safe to do so – we had to ensure that families felt that they could trust us with their own very personal stories. Numerous parents contributed to

this process, all of whom had already built a relationship with our Family & Community Co-ordinator who had supported them with their particular situations. We had been a member institution of Southwark Citizens for many years (a chapter of Citizens UK) and they worked closely with us to help shape what we do as a school in this area. There was now the opportunity to expand this campaign and in order to do this, networking was key. Useful partnerships needed to be nurtured – politicians, non-profit organisations and journalists all played a part in helping our families and children to have their voices heard. Our local MP secured an interview with a journalist from The Guardian, highlighting the effect of immigration restrictions on families. The use of media enabled the conversation to open up to a much wider audience. We were then approached by a number of outside agencies and other organisations who also saw this as an issue and had been campaigning for years, such as PRCBC (*Project for the Registration of Children as British Citizens*), *Coram Children’s Legal Centre* and *Project 17*. This led to our involvement in a House of Lords roundtable discussion with Amnesty UK and PRCBC and then several pupils and their families were invited to the House of Commons to speak to MPs about their personal experiences. This garnered further media coverage, with staff, pupils and their families being interviewed and filmed for TV programmes such as *The One Show* and local BBC London news.

### WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?

Being involved in community activism and campaigning has empowered both children and their parents to find their voices and be the experts – they can see that through their actions they are making a difference. PRCBC took the Home Office to court over the citizenship fees in October 2019. We contributed to this class action with a witness statement and children and their families went to the Royal Courts of Justice on the day of the hearing to protest outside. The court case was won by PRCBC – the citizenship fees were found unlawful, which is the first step in getting justice for these families.



We have also been involved in a joint project with Citizens UK and Coram Children’s Legal Centre, the Immigration Action Project. There are two branches to this project, which is still ongoing. Firstly, parents were invited to attend Community Leadership training run in conjunction with both these partner organisations, with an aim to learn about community organising skills and put those into practise by continuing to build a campaign to raise awareness about citizenship. These parents have subsequently led on educating other parents about the issues. Secondly, our parents were offered free, confidential and reliable immigration advice by a specialist immigration lawyer, something that is invaluable in this current climate of fear and mistrust.

The relief for families once their children gain their citizenship is palpable. By supporting 40 children through this process, despite the monetary obstacles, we know that we have helped them become more established in society and that doors that would have been closed to them have now been opened. We are an inclusive school and so, for us, belonging is essential. Once these children gain their British passports, they bring them in to show us, feeling proud as, at last, they can legitimately belong to the only country they have ever called home.

# REACH ACADEMY & REACH CHILDREN'S HUB: A SCHOOL AND CHARITY PARTNERSHIP WORKING TOGETHER TO PROVIDE COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND TO ENABLE COMMUNITY ACTION

Luke Billingham

The story of Reach Academy and Reach Children's Hub demonstrates the significant role that schools and partner organisations can play in both *providing community support* – addressing the difficulties and complexities in students' and families' lives beyond the school gate – and *enabling community action* – galvanising and facilitating the activities of local people to support one another, lead new projects, and pursue social change. Having set out thinking mostly about community support, our experience working in Feltham over the past few years has brought home the power that community action can have for a local neighbourhood.

## THE ROLE OF A SCHOOL IN ITS COMMUNITY: NARROW OR BROAD?

Schools are unique: very often, they can be described as 'universal' institution. *Everyone* has to attend full-time education, by law, for at least 13 years, and the vast majority will do so in schools. No other institution in society has that level of reach into the population. This basic fact creates countless forms of contention, of course, about what all our children should be taught, the extent to which parents should have choice over schooling, and so on, but it also presents an opportunity: schools have unique potential for both community support and community action. Schools educate their students and induct them into society, but they are also, more simply, institutions that have an unrivalled degree of influence on the lives of a community's children, young people and families.

Debate rages about how schools should use this influence, and about how narrow or broad their objectives should be. At one extreme end of the spectrum, some schools adopt a rigidly narrow view of their role, and appear to stand aloof from their community: seeming to view themselves as fortresses of good order in a hostile neighbourhood, they strictly limit their influence to the provision of education, aimed at helping their students "escape" from their current surroundings. On this view, schools are pedagogical institutions that should provide high quality education for their students (treated as individual units of human capital), and nothing more.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are schools that adopt a broad view of the role that they can play: woven into their local neighbourhoods, they invite the community into the school and reach out into it at every opportunity, and try to maximise the positive impact that they can have on children, young people and families, supporting them far beyond the provision of education. From this perspective, schools are not just for education, but institutions that have an unmatched ability to address the social, cultural, emotional and economic complexities and difficulties of its young people, and of its local community.

## REACH ACADEMY, AN INNOVATIVE NEW SCHOOL

Reach Academy, opened in 2012 in Feltham, South West London, was founded on the belief that schools can play this wider role in the community without losing their focus on providing high quality education and pursuing the best possible results. Indeed, the *only* way to develop the academic potential of all who come into the school is to broaden what the school provides: if it is to achieve the best possible results, the school has to support its students and its families through the complexities and difficulties of life, as much as through the curriculum, because the former can prove a formidable barrier to the latter.

Two key features of the school's structure are especially important enablers of this broad remit – it's all-through, and it's small. This allows staff to build deep, trusting relationships with students and families, which are consistent throughout the school, without the often-jarring transition from primary to secondary



education (which, in too many cases, is a transition from family-oriented and community-focused primary to more distant and impersonal secondary).

Alongside the school's structure and its focus on relationships, it has always provided extensive family support and in-house counselling (through Place2Be<sup>12</sup>), available to students of all ages. The results that the school has achieved is a testament to this breadth of provision, as much as to the quality of teaching and learning: the school leaders draw a direct line of causation from the depth of relationships developed with students and families to the results achieved by the students.

## THE ORIGINS OF REACH CHILDREN'S HUB: BROADENING OUR ROLE SUPPORTING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Reach Academy's founders and leaders (Ed Vainker, Rebecca Cramer, and Jon McGoh) always envisioned the school as a hub for the local community, meeting as many needs of local families as possible. Inspired by Harlem Children's Zone in New York<sup>13</sup>, they could see the potential of schools as anchor institutions for a range of connected community support initiatives.

The first few years of running the school confirmed the need for this wider provision. Two early observations were particularly powerful motivators: the extent of the gap in abilities seen on students' entry into nursery, and the extent to which complex difficulties outside of school formed significant barriers to learning for students of all ages.

The conclusion from these insights was that schools are *necessary but not sufficient* for young people to flourish, even if this flourishing is defined narrowly by academic success. High quality education is essential, but it has to be supplemented by broader support for the student as a person, and for their family, especially in the early years – the child's first few formative years are fundamental.

I joined the Reach team at the end of 2016 and set to work listening to local people in order to help shape our vision for a community hub organisation that could support children, young people and families beyond what is possible for the school. We knew that we wanted the organisation to complement and expand the role of the school in the community, and we had some initial ideas about what the organisation could look like, but we needed to hear from the experts: those who are living, working, and growing up in Feltham.

We involved three Reach Academy students to assist me and ran round the neighbourhood speaking with as many people as we could. We ran workshops for parents, interviewed and focus-grouped students, held meetings with Local Authority professionals and local community groups, undertook surveys, and co-developed a questionnaire which we then used with local residents on the High Street, where Reach Academy is located.

Alongside this local consultation, we travelled the country to learn from other organisations and schools who are undertaking broad-ranging community support and community action activities, such as Manchester Communication Academy, Pembury Children's Community, North Camden Zone, and West London Zone.

The result of all this, after analysing and mulling over the findings as a team, was a clearer vision for what this complementary organisation could do, and how it could work to support the local community. After piloting some initial activities in 2017 and gaining support from early funders who saw the potential of our vision, we built a model of how the school and Hub could work together to provide cradle-to-career support for the children, young people and families of the local community.

## A CRADLE-TO-CAREER MODEL OF PROVISION FOR LOCAL CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

Reach has been approved to open a second school, neighbouring the first. Our long-term vision is to have a campus of institutions, formed of the two schools and Reach Children's Hub, in a separate building which will

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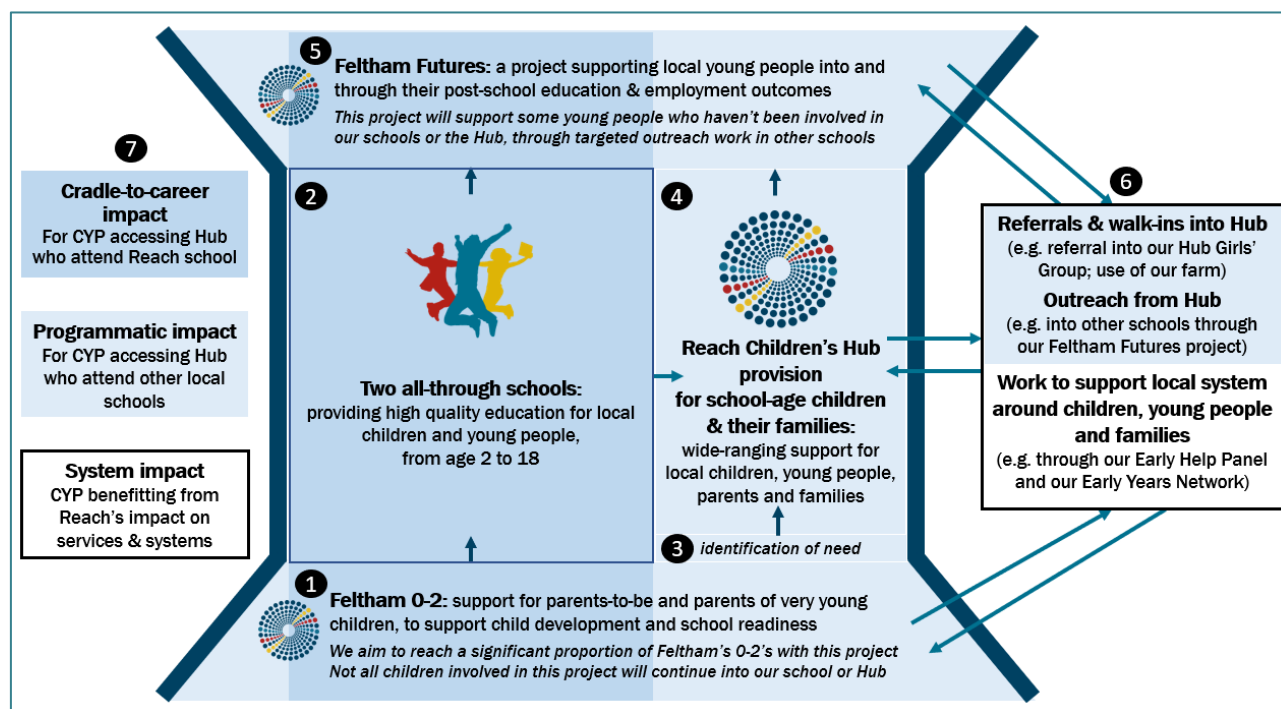
<sup>12</sup> See [www.place2be.org.uk](http://www.place2be.org.uk) for further details.

<sup>13</sup> See [www.hcz.org](http://www.hcz.org) for further details. See, also, Paul Tough's account of the history of the Harlem Children's Zone in his *Whatever it Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America*.

neighbour the schools. Together, the schools and the Hub will form a cradle-to-career model of provision, as illustrated in the diagram below.

The guiding principle of this model is that the schools and the Hub are mutually supportive and co-dependent: there are no better institutions around which to build wider community support than schools, but schools cannot provide the very best education for all without the wider community support provided by the Hub, to address the complexities and difficulties of students' lives beyond the school gate.

Beneath the diagram, I describe each numbered component of the model, including the projects and activities that Reach Children's Hub has delivered so far and is currently delivering.



### 1: Feltham 0-2

We recognise the vital importance of supporting families from the earliest possible stage of their children's lives, and the Hub has its most extensive provision at this "cradle" (and "pre-cradle"! ) point in the pipeline. The Hub is working closely with a range of partners to deliver this provision. Through collaboration with local midwifery and health visiting, we are now offering free antenatal education for new local parents, as well as a support group for young mums in the local area. This builds on a peer support programme delivered by the National Childbirth Trust through the Hub in 2018 and 2019, which we continue to support. We have also developed an innovative and wide-ranging project with Save the Children, the Feltham Early Learning Community, which includes a range of activities to support families' home learning environments in their children's earliest years, such as Peep and Family Links programmes, as well as supporting the system around local families, as described in (6) below.

### 2: Reach schools

Many of the children supported through the Hub's early provision will then attend one of the Reach schools, at which they will benefit from the schools' support for wellbeing and parental engagement, and at which they also have ready access to the Hub programmes for school-aged children. Through close collaboration with the Reach schools, we will be able to track the progress of the children who benefit from our 0-2 provision into their school years, both to assess the impact of that provision and to identify the need for further intervention. To support parents at the start of their child's education, the Hub delivers a number of informal support groups for families with children in our nursery, complementing the school's established practice of undertaking home visits before children first join.

### 3: Identification of need for further support for those who progress from Feltham 0-2 into other local schools

Not all children supported at the 0-2 stage will go on to attend a Reach school. Among those who go on to other local schools, we will identify the need for further support from the Hub, and will closely coordinate this support with the child's school. This may take the form of access to group programmes for school-aged children based in the Hub, support for the family or the school to access other local support services, or, where need is highest, could involve ongoing keyworker support.

#### *4: Hub provision for school-age children and young people*

Reach Children's Hub will run a range of activities to support school-aged children and young people. This will include both universal provision, accessible for any eligible student, and targeted provision, aimed at those who require additional support. Our Girls' Group is an example of the latter, providing group support and personal development for Secondary-age female students identified as vulnerable or at-risk. Once the dedicated Hub facility is built, we hope it can house a range of charities, organisations and services which can provide wide-ranging support for local school-aged young people.

#### *5: Feltham Futures*

The Hub's Feltham Futures project provides wide-ranging guidance, advice and support to maximise the quality of local students' post-school outcomes, and to support them through their post-school destinations. This includes both group and 1:1 support, aimed at helping students to identify the best pathway for them, to put together successful applications, and to flourish in the first few years after school. So far, as well as direct support for students, the project has involved large-scale community careers fairs, partnerships with local businesses and with charities such as Spark and Career Ready, and a pre-university preparation weekend, which gave local students information and guidance on everything that university entails, just a couple of weeks before they started there.

#### *6: Referrals and "walk-ins" into the Hub; outreach from the Hub; the Hub's role supporting the local system*

As a hub of resource and provision for the local community, Reach Children's Hub provides support for children, young people and families who are not involved in Reach schools, through a number of means.

Firstly, other schools or agencies are able to refer individuals or families for support through the Hub. New members from other schools can be referred into the Girls' Group, for instance. Self-referrals have also provided access to Hub provision, such as local people signing up for the Adult Education courses we provided through the Hub in 2017-2019. Once the dedicated Hub facility is built, we will also be able to support people via "walk-ins": reception and community café staff will be able to triage people into the most appropriate programmes or services for them.

The Hub has also begun engaging in a range of outreach activities, such as Hub staff delivering programmes and 1:1 support in other schools as part of the Feltham Futures project. Through close collaboration with other local schools, we have begun to identify areas of university access and careers support where our Feltham Futures staff can make a difference to their students.

Lastly, the Hub has begun to play a role supporting local systems and services for children, young people and families. We host an Early Help Panel, through which local professionals meet to coordinate support for local families below social care thresholds. As part of the Early Learning Community project, we convene an Early Years Network, which provides free training, support and networking for local professionals working in nurseries and primary schools.

#### *7: Three levels of impact*

Throughout the cradle-to-career model, the schools and Reach Children's Hub can together achieve three levels of impact, with differing amounts of directness and depth:

- Cradle-to-career impact – we will have the greatest and deepest impact on those children and young people who benefit from the whole cradle-to-career pipeline, starting with their parents receiving antenatal support, continuing through their time in a Reach school, and then on into their young adulthood. Our work with these children and young people will be "doubly holistic": working with them both across time and across different aspects of their lives.

- Programmatic impact – each individual programme and activity is designed to achieve significant impact within a well-defined set of specific outcomes, regardless of whether children and families are accessing only that one activity or a wide range of activities.
- System impact – the Hub’s work supporting local systems and services will indirectly benefit a large number of children, young people and families in the local community. Through the free training provided by the Early Years Network, for instance, local Early Years professionals are enhancing their practice with local children in other settings.

## DIFFERENT FORMS OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND COMMUNITY ACTION

Working together, then, the school and the Hub provide extensive community support, delivering projects and activities to meet a variety of needs and address a range of difficulties experienced by children, young people and families in Feltham. What we didn’t anticipate when embarking on the Hub project was the extent to which community *action* would become central to our approach, and we certainly didn’t realise the many different forms that community action through the school and the Hub could take.

Community support is, relatively speaking, the easy part: schools and partner organisations can support the local community by delivering new provision, by bringing existing provision into the neighbourhood, and by effectively convening and coordinating services to the benefit of local families. Any school can engage in this form of community support, in some way: most schools are, to a degree, engaging pro-actively with local services or bringing in existing organisations to support students and families. Many have developed breakfast and after-school clubs, support groups, food banks, and other forms of additional provision which can make a huge difference to families (and which are, in many cases, evidence of failings and injustices beyond the school gates). Through Reach schools’ collaboration with the Hub in Feltham, we hope to push the bounds of the community support it is possible for a school to provide, maximising the role that a school can play in helping a local neighbourhood to flourish.

What we have found through the first few years of Reach Children’s Hub, though, is that community action can have even greater potential. Defined broadly as activities which enable local community members – rather than staff – to be the agents of change, the leaders of activities, or the providers of peer support, community action can transform a neighbourhood. We’ve seen the seeds of this already, across all aspects of the Hub’s work. Our Girls’ Group members have led International Women’s Day events, driven a local campaign against domestic violence, and are planning a project to address mental health issues locally. The NCT’s Birth & Beyond Community Supporters programme, harnessing the abilities of local mums to support new mums in difficult circumstances, has shown us the power of peer support to reduce social isolation, build confidence, and weave vulnerable parents into their local community. Lastly, we’ve seen how projects and groups for parents, however informal, can form the basis of extensive parent-led provision: our parents have created their own activities, trained to deliver support programmes with other parents, continued group mutual support far beyond the “official” end of particular projects, and helped one another in countless small-but-significant ways. We’ve seen how our school and Hub staff can galvanise the collective agency of students, parents and the local community, and the difference that this can make in the area.

## THE POTENTIAL OF SCHOOLS AND PARTNER ORGANISATIONS FOR BROAD-RANGING COMMUNITY ACTION

These examples are all particularly inspiring for me because I’ve seen so many uses and abuses of the term “social action”. The concept is in danger of becoming a fad, whose popularity exceeds its usefulness. As well as working for Reach, I work for a youth and community organisation in East London, and I’ve witnessed a number of “social action” initiatives which follow a similar pattern: local people are brought together, they discuss the pressing problems of the community, they develop some potential solutions, and then the facilitators of the process suggest one particular next step, depending on their leaning as an organisation – the residents should develop a new social enterprise, or do an awareness-raising campaign, or try to influence decision-makers. Often, these organisations have a theory of change based on one particular form of change, and one particular method. At worst, they bounce between communities offering simple ideas for resident-led action, without providing any support for those residents to develop that action.

Building broad community action around a school has two very significant advantages over this narrow form of social action. Firstly, the work is built on long-term relationships and long-term support, so the school can continue to help local people to develop and enact their ideas over many years, if needed, rather than galvanising their sense of agency and then leaving them adrift. Secondly, rather than leading the community action from the standpoint that there is one way to achieve change, based on the philosophy of one specific social action model – be it social entrepreneurship, social media campaigns, or political lobbying – schools can work flexibly with the community to address different local issues in different ways. Some community action initiatives might need a single, focused piece of political campaigning, led by local residents. Others might require the development of a new social enterprise, run by parents but with extensive support in the early years from school staff (or, in our case, Hub staff). In our approach to community action, we hope that the school and Hub can work together to act nimbly and efficiently to support whichever community endeavours local people are developing to support children, young people and families. To enable this, we have recently formed a partnership with Citizens UK, who are helping us to listen deeply to the local community, and to act democratically with and within it.

Reach Academy was founded on the principle of maximising the community support that it could provide, and the development of Reach Children's Hub has expanded this remit substantially, particularly through the expansion of community action activities. But any school, regardless of its circumstances, can consider its influence in the community, and explore the ways that this influence can be used to both support local children, young people and families, and to galvanise their collective agency.

Even viewed as a purely educational endeavour, community action is an enormously enriching experience for young people, parents, and communities. There are few better ways of learning about society, politics, and history: community action is a way of testing the vulnerability or stubbornness to change of different norms, institutions or practices. My fear is that, without engaging in any kind of community action, people can become complacent about what ought to be continually defended, acquiescent in the face of what ought to be continually challenged, and ill-equipped to judge the difference.

# FROM CLASSROOM TO BOARDROOM: YOUNG CITIZENS LEAD THE WAY

Dr Jamie Kesten & Dr Matt Scott

Sometimes it takes an organised group of young people to accomplish what powerful adults cannot. Indeed, there is power in it being young people who ask about and act on local issues that often remains untapped or unrecognised. This case study is about a group of young people from Riverside School in Barking, East London who have begun to recognise their individual and collective power to act and have generated a tremendous amount of change and positive recognition in a very short space of time. They are called the Young Citizen Action Group (YCACG) and we reflect here on the significance and impact of delivering leadership and community organiser training to young people within a school environment in the context of one of Europe's largest new housing developments.



## THE LOCAL CONTEXT

A decade of austerity has not been kind to the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, with over 60% reduction in its budget and a growing population the council sees its future in 'inclusive growth'. Thames Ward, the largest of seventeen in the borough, with some of the highest rates of childhood obesity in the country, is the site of both Riverside School and Barking Riverside, one of the largest growth areas in Europe. As with many other developments across London, Barking Riverside is constituted primarily of flats rather than houses, with starting prices many times over the average salary range of most Londoners. With London predicted to rise from a

population of 8.6 million to 10 million over the course of a few decades housebuilding is back on the agenda and Barking & Dagenham has some of the cheapest land in London and a planning department whose oversight capacity has been dramatically reduced in recent years amidst cuts, restructuring and pressure to build new homes.



Riverside School opened as an 11-18 mixed academy in September 2012, serving one of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the country, with an intake whose prior attainment was significantly below the national average at KS2. The school motto, 'Excellence for All', reflects the school philosophy: a belief that intelligence is incremental, not fixed, and that everyone can be successful by working hard, being resilient, and collaborating effectively. Maximising achievement is the number one priority, and an inclusive approach means that, by working together, the school genuinely seeks to support every

child. There are over 1,200 students in the new £45 million state-of-the-art building, which opened in September 2017, situated in the middle of the planned new development of Barking Riverside, which will eventually grow to a full capacity of 2,000 students. The facilities include a sports hall, four multi-use games

areas, a 3G AstroTurf, two dance studios and a large main hall, providing the community with excellent resources never seen in the area before.

### RIVERSIDE SCHOOL AS AN INSTITUTION OF SOCIAL CHANGE FOR THE COMMUNITY

Amidst the building of a new school, in a newly developing area of the borough, the senior leadership team had a vision that went beyond physical regeneration, bricks and buildings. The aim was to be a hub for the wider community, an anchor institution that looked outwards to all residents. The commitment extended beyond providing high standards of education and making facilities available to local people outside school hours, but also to be a positive catalyst for social cohesion and regeneration. The school saw itself as serving the whole community, offering a 'neutral space' where people from different estates, ages, faiths, cultures and backgrounds could come together to build a sense of unity and common purpose in the context of rapid change.

However, community organising at Riverside School did not come out of nowhere. Years of careful preparation were required to lay the foundations. In 2014 the local MP, Dame Margaret Hodge DBE, mindful that the partial and divisive effects of regeneration elsewhere in London might be visited on her constituency, worked with Riverside School to secure funding for a community project to ensure a more balanced, resident-led approach to the wave of development about to sweep into the area. In June 2016 the school secured support for a 6-month project, funded by 'Power to Change' to do outreach and develop support for a longer-term three-year programme of work. The school line-managed a part-time Community Organiser post to conduct the initial research, with outreach work led by pupils alongside wider engagement with residents. A group of Year 10 students at Riverside School led on further outreach work and undertook several environmental and local history activities. They listened to residents and took action on issues like the poor quality of the environment and a lack of access to green space and leisure facilities (a plot of land next to the new school site was set aside as land for a Community Garden, more on that later). They cleaned up Ripple Nature Reserve and worked with partners to make it safe and accessible for the community to use. They undertook litter-picks and produced publicity to improve the 'face' of Thames Ward, as well as planning a local history project that connected young people with the elderly and with more recently arrived families.

The outcome of the 'Power to Change' funded work was an overwhelming endorsement of a school-led approach to community organising. Residents were thrilled to see young people getting involved and rallied round the school in what was identified as a 'cold spot' that had traditionally lacked the forms of community infrastructure other areas can access. Over 75 residents indicated a willingness to be directly involved with the project and a further 300 residents agreed to join a database of contacts.

The 'Power to Change' findings highlighted 5 key themes:

- A divide between the older estates and new developments
- Services under pressure as the population expanded
- A lack of communication and little information about existing activities
- A lack of activities for young people
- Tensions between different groups as they struggle to promote their activities



### THAMES WARD COMMUNITY PROJECT

At the end of the 'Power to Change' project a recommendation was made to seek long-term funding to support community workers who could act as honest and independent brokers between young people, local residents and other partners (Council, Developers, etc.) and thereby strengthening community capacity, voice, resource and business. This process took over a year and eventually led to a successful bid for £300,000 from the Big Lottery Reaching Communities Fund in July 2017. In this bid the school made clear that '*... the scale and pace of the Barking Riverside development requires a more ambitious approach*'. Given past experiences of regeneration

there were concerns that *'decisions [would] be taken without involving [the community], thus exacerbating divisions rather than bringing people together'*. The project's ambition was to support and develop leadership from within the community to address the asymmetries of power in order to *'... provide a strong community voice in relation to the 'development juggernaut' that could so easily ride rough-shod over this community'*.

As the budget-holder, the school became a focal point for community activity and began to build bridges within the wider area. In other places such a role might have been picked up by a voluntary sector group. However, in Thames Ward there was no other community-based organisation in a position to do this, so the project took hold in the school through a mixture of serendipity and intention. In hindsight the match seemed obvious but is still a relatively rare occurrence across London and the UK. The opportunity was thus taken to mobilise the enthusiasm and energy of the whole community, young and old, to bring about positive social, economic and environmental change to a rapidly transforming part of Barking.

The Thames Ward Community Project (TWCP) began in earnest in October 2017 and was tasked with five core outcomes: helping the community become stronger and more cohesive; healthier; more confident and skilled; cleaner and more attractive; and to develop a resident-led Community Development Trust. The Lottery funded two worker posts, both based at the school, a Director of Community Engagement, line managed by the Head Teacher and a Community Organiser post. A key aspect of the organiser post was to develop a programme of work with Riverside School students, building on earlier work conducted and it is upon this aspect of the work of TWCP that this case study intends to focus.

## THE YOUNG CITIZEN ACTION GROUP



With the creation of the Thames Ward Community Project came the inception of its Citizen Action Groups (CAGs) formed of concerned and motivated residents taking action on local issues around key themes of Arts & Culture, Environment & Green/Blue Spaces, Health & Wellbeing, Housing & Growth and Skills & Enterprise. Within Riverside School this approach took the form of the Young Citizen Action Group, better known as the YCAG. This began with a desire to get students involved in community activity such as litter-picking and flower planting but later expanded to a well-established, recognised and respected group of young people who seek to act with and on behalf of their wider local community to achieve positive change in their neighbourhood.



## HOW IT WORKS

The YCAG is a group of approximately 15-20 students from across Years 7-10 who meet after school for an hour once per week to discuss, plan and act on social issues affecting their community. As their school is a founding member institution of their local Barking & Dagenham Citizens Chapter, at the beginning of each school year they all receive training supported by TELCO Citizens. This training focuses first on helping the students recognise themselves as leaders by exploring the qualities of leadership and the importance of having a following. It also develops their understanding of the key community organising principles of listening, power and action and how to use these principles to take action to benefit their community. They then decide what the most pressing community issues are and what kind of action they want to take, with support from the Community Organiser from TWCP based in their school.

## THE EVOLUTION OF YCAG

In Year One of TWCP – the 2017-2018 academic year – a lot of time was spent working with students to develop an understanding of what the YCAG should be, what it would involve doing and what it could achieve.



This presented real challenges at first as students struggled with the idea that they were not signing up to do a specific thing but instead would be able to act on whatever issues they cared about most. As a result of this early uncertainty, many of the activities undertaken in the first phase were directed by the Community Organiser as a means of inspiration and recruitment until eventually ideas started to come from the students attending YCAG themselves.

Year Two – the 2018-2019 academic year – marked the first full academic year for TWCP and the first time that the wider student body was engaged with (via a school listening campaign among students in Year 7, Year 8 & Year 9). The results of this listening campaign were used to decide what action the YCAG would take. This initial listening campaign was conducted as a simple hands-up survey by pairs of YCAG students visiting each form during morning registration over several weeks, with the options students voted on decided by the YCAG students themselves.

This process evolved in Year Three – the 2019-2020 academic year – so that YCAG students prepared and delivered short presentations during the assemblies for every year group in the school on their achievements of the following year and the purpose and importance of the listening campaign process. This presentation was followed by students in every year completing open-ended surveys stating the issues in the community that they were most passionate about and the action they would most like to see taken. Doing so ensured that all students in the school would have their say on the actions prioritised by the YCAG.

## LISTENING CAMPAIGN RESULTS AND ACTIONS TAKEN

The 2018-2019 YCAG Listening Campaign prioritised Transport from home to school as the top concern of students, along with issues including Air Pollution, Lack of Green Spaces and Parks, Lack of Health Services, Crime and Litter and a lack of bins.

### TRAVEL TO SCHOOL

Living and attending school in an area that is still under-construction, even students living very close to the school face the prospect of a very long and unpleasant walk to get to school. Routes to school involve navigating areas of ongoing development and roads without



safe crossing points and a high volume of fast-moving construction and heavy goods traffic serving the industrial estate and building sites which surround their homes. As a result, most Riverside School students rely on the bus, causing issues with severe over-crowding at peak times. Students reported waiting for and being unable to board as many as 3 consecutive buses on their journeys to and from school due to overcrowding. This led to significant numbers of students either being regularly late for school and receiving detention or being injured in one of the many crushes that ensued from the daily scums at bus stops, with students suffering injuries as severe as broken arms or legs. The YCAG listening campaign discovered that an overwhelming majority of students at Riverside School were experiencing one of these two issues on a regular basis and were also reporting significant levels of anxiety about the potential of either one taking place, which was affecting their mental health and wellbeing. Parents and carers also frequently complained of the dangers, with younger pupils particularly vulnerable. The YCAG liaised with the school on this issue in the first instance and discovered that the Headteacher had already engaged extensively with Transport for

London on bus overcrowding at peak times but had been told that TFL research concluded there was insufficient need to justify additional investment. Armed with this knowledge YCAG students requested a meeting with TFL representatives. At this meeting, which was also attended by the school Senior Leadership Team (SLT), developer (Barking Riverside Ltd), the bus company (Go-Ahead London) and the local council (London Borough of Barking & Dagenham), the students told their own personal stories of being late to school because of consistently over-crowded buses, being injured, trapped or unable to breathe while on-board or simply being considerably worried or scared in the mornings about either taking place. Their stories were delivered powerfully and persuasively and were able to shine a light on the day-to-day reality and human stories that TFL's research procedures had missed. This intervention by Riverside School students led to Transport for London agreeing to invest an additional £1,000,000 in the route, meaning an extra bus every hour across the EL1 route plus an additional service arriving on time for the start of school each day and another waiting at the end of the school day to cope with the height of the demand.

At this same meeting students expressed concern at the standard of, and lack of safe crossings along, the road connecting their homes to their school. By linking the lack of safe walking and cycling routes to school to the overcrowding being experienced on buses they secured commitment from the local council to install two new zebra crossings on the road leading to their school, which were completed shortly after.

The students were successful at this meeting because they effectively harnessed their power as young people to speak with passion and first-hand experience about the problems they were facing and did so with a focus on what they were 'for' rather than what they were 'against' (something the council and other stakeholders were not typically used to from local residents). They identified not just problems but solutions. With this constructive and disarming approach, they won themselves support for their causes and also allies among adults in powerful positions.



## GREEN SPACES AND PARKS

After experiencing some significant success with buses and road crossings, and having developed their access to – and understanding of – local powerholders, the YCAG turned their attention to another major concern among local young people highlighted in their listening campaign, the lack of accessible green spaces and parks. Aware that the school and

TWCP had been promised the patch of land next to their school for use as a community garden space they pursued its handover with fervour. After over two years of wrangling between the developer, council and school over the legal minutiae of the lease the students took matters into their own hands. They'd dreamed of what the strip of land adjacent to the school might provide, the activities, planting and spaces for tranquillity, only to have the timetable for handover endlessly delayed. Having received guarantees at public meetings they wanted the keys to the site and marched to the developers' office with large banners, giant cardboard cuts outs of keys and other associated props ready to make good on promises made. As Saul Alinsky wrote in *Rules for Radicals*, no politician can sit on an issue if you make it hot enough and sure enough the keys were forthcoming, and a positive news story was capitalised on by all.

## LITTER AND AIR POLLUTION

The YCAG were also successful in persuading the developer (Barking Riverside Ltd) to tackle the problem of litter directly outside their school by installing bins at their school bus stop and along the private (and as yet unadopted) road that their school is situated on. They did so after several meetings and a keen ability to

secure a commitment to act and then to hold the powerful to their word. As if that wasn't enough, they also installed air pollution monitors to detect the levels of NO2 in the atmosphere in their neighbourhood and were able to establish that while the levels in the majority of the area are safe, the homes next to the main A13 motorway exceeded the EU legal limit. They presented these findings to both residents and stakeholders at one of TWCPs Resident Growth Summits.

## CONCLUSION: THE POWER OF COMMUNITY ORGANISING IN SCHOOLS

In short, the Young Citizens Action Group at Riverside School is getting used to winning, in fact in recognition of their incredible achievements the YCAG from Riverside School were recently awarded 'Secondary School of the Year' by TELCO at their 2020 Annual General Meeting & Awards Evening. With all this success and recognition comes a new sense of collective confidence, determination, civic duty and pride that was not there before. They have become acutely aware of their own individual and collective power to 'move the needle' and 'make change happen'. Their energy, commitment and numerous wins, as outlined above, have become a source of pride and inspiration not only for themselves but for the wider student body, the school as an institution and for the wider community. Students now write messages to the YCAG on their listening campaign surveys like "please act quickly" and "we need your help urgently!". Teachers have acknowledged the leadership role taken by the YCAG on the school travel plan and empowered them to take this issue further, rather than staff acting unilaterally. The wider community, local resident associations and voluntary groups in the area embarking on their own social justice missions, have come together and begun to act in a more organised way, inspired by the example of collective leadership set by the YCAG. Where previously there was a high degree of apathy among many local residents who had a historically paternalistic relationship with the local council and felt that their concerns were often ignored had begun to take a more organised and strategic approach to their efforts and found it to be more fruitful.

Community Organising and leadership training delivered to students in Riverside School by TWCP and TELCO has been one of the biggest contributing factors in connecting young people to their wider community. It has given young people the space to have their voices heard to be at the heart of change in their communities and created intergenerational connections with wider residents. It has built confidence among young people to be aware of and make use of their individual and collective leadership skills and encouraged young people to think of themselves as active citizens connected to the wider community and world around them and not just as students.



## WHAT'S NEXT?

The results of the most recent 2019-2020 YCAG Listening Campaign prioritised the lack of youth clubs and facilities and activities for young people locally, the lack of green spaces and parks, concerns over crime, the lack of local shops, litter and the state of the local environment, air pollution and housing. They plan to focus on how to improve the provision of facilities and activities for young people and to continue to support the development of their community garden site as well as the opening up of the local nature reserve and other disused green spaces in their neighbourhood – watch this space!

# EDUCATING YOUNG CITIZENS THROUGH A HABIT OF ACTION

Paul Amuzie

My joys, over the last eight years as a Community Organiser, have come from exploring, and engaging with, what organising looks like in schools and further education organisations. I have, over this time, started to see how, and why, organising has been so impactful on my life. In the early 2000s, thanks to the organising work that was embedded throughout my secondary school experience at St Bonaventure's and St Angela's, in Forest Gate, in East London, I was fortunate to see the impact that civic action could have on my life and the lives of my friends.

I fondly remember the experience I had at an inner-city boys' school, where I was encouraged to think that there were no limits for a young man if they worked hard. My friends and I were told about careers in banking, about prestige, about success. Yet we lived in the epicentre of poverty, disadvantage, and struggling communities.

Until I was 14, my eyes were closed to my community in many ways and the disadvantages that surrounded my school were things I didn't notice much. However, my body and mind were being suffocated by the effects of these disadvantages. I was the son of a mother who was a 70-hours-a-week working teacher. My mum raised three boys and a daughter alone, living in a council home, in Newham. As a family, we moved eleven times in seven years. Fighting poor housing conditions became part of me, whilst growing up. Fighting unsafe streets, fighting non-existent childcare and support services: all of which had a toll on me as a young person and even started to get me to disconnect from the constant rhetoric of being able to flee my East London home for the pastures of private sector and economic successes.

This was a part of me that my teachers couldn't understand and couldn't work out. They worried when my grades deteriorated and when my attitude started changing. Gangs descended on our school. Two of my friends got stabbed. Suddenly, the disadvantage that was a part of me could no longer be blocked out; the need for action and the need for leadership kicked in. I felt I needed to step up and come up with solutions.

My school did lots when it came to conventional things like running vigils when some of our peers got stabbed. I felt this wasn't enough. I started to think critically about how those that had been affected by this could take action on this issue. More and more of us wanted to be part of the solution. This was crucial for me as a student who felt massively unsafe in my neighbourhood. I started to feel that the safe bubble that had protected me so far had been burst.

As students, we were encouraged to talk to each other about the particular issues we faced in our lives. Our teachers created spaces for young people to share stories and to think about the challenges we faced.

We were brought together with members from the local mosque and church to start building a team to take action on the issue of knife violence and to start building power and optimism about the changes that we could make as the people directly affected in our local area.

To think that we were able to build a team across schools, across faiths, and across generations was something I'd never considered. The impact of this organising effort at the age of 15/16 was invaluable teaching about my community and about the role I wanted to play in society.

Community Organising started making my education real. It developed me in a way that I had never experienced at school. What became apparent later on was that this had been planned intentionally by school leaders. They'd planned for this to happen so that my friends and I were explicitly taught to think about, and address, the issues we faced in our daily lives. Our teachers had a plan for us.

Our teachers planned projects for students to develop the skills and experiences needed to thrive in a world that was full of difficult issues. They developed learning opportunities where people from different

backgrounds and cultures got together to try to work together in an ever-changing society, getting us all to realise that we could all learn to listen to each other and work together on issues of shared interest. Our teachers enabled us to become active citizens.

I am eternally grateful to Sir Michael Wilshaw, my Headteacher at the time, and to Delia Smith for the vital parts they played in making this happened and for the way they placed a huge emphasis on this kind of work.

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### ARK ACADEMY'S BUS CAMPAIGN

Organising had moved me at school and this experience was one that fuelled my focus organising in educational establishments. Delia Smith, an experienced educator with over 40 years in education, paved the way for how organising could be, and should be, a pillar of the culture in schools. She spent her time in East London as a founding member of The East London Communities Organisation (TELCO, the founding chapter of London Citizens). She was the first headteacher to go from UK on the Industrial Areas Foundation 10-day National Training. The impact it had on her quickly became very clear: it shaped the way she wanted to develop young people and shape her school community.

At St Angela's – Delia Smith's first headship – I had the privilege of learning about how she had morphed the Ursuline mantra of 'Serviam' and how she had created a culture that was embedded in the spine of the school: one of service to community. She established ways to grow young people with a stronger sense of community. She was intent on making sure students played a vital role in their community. She ensured students were taught to listen, understand, and act.

'Serviam' was the driving force for getting the students of St Angela's to address the common issues we all faced across our neighbourhood. A deprived area that lacked skilled work opportunities and living wages. Many of the young people from St Angela's were – and still are – from Black African and Caribbean descents and were not in need of work and a good wage yet but such issues certainly affected their families and neighbours. This therefore became something interesting to think about in terms of how the Ursuline motto of 'Serviam' could be brought to life.

I was privileged enough to work with Delia Smith again but, this time, as an employee. Delia had moved to North London to embark on a new journey. As she became the Founding Principal of Ark Academy, Delia Smith had the opportunity to build a new school – and its culture – from scratch. Initially, this new school was promised to students of the massively deprived communities of Church Road, St Raphael's, and Stonebridge, all located in one of the most deprived areas of London. However, as the Department for Education couldn't find a site for the school, it eventually got located in the heart of the bustling – and much more affluent – Wembley, home of the National football stadium and next to a brand-new housing development.

Delia set out again to lay the groundwork to enable her to bring in the cultures and principles of organising into a language that teachers, parents, and students of this new school community could understand without any prior knowledge of what this was about. Using what she had learnt and developed at St Ursula's, she created a new 'Serviam': one that was secular and shaped to be accepted by all. 'Civitas' became the key work, one that would embody her vision of what citizenship would look like through the school and its community, as well as the structures that would enable the development of active citizens to take place. 'Civitas' became the basis for all members of the school community to commit to actively participate in civic life: to be actors in a society and create positive change.



As the school was intended to serve an area located over two miles away from its actual site, it soon became clear that some clear logistical challenges would surface. In 2014, as we did a large listening campaign, involving 90% of the school community, we started making a list of the issues we felt needed to be addressed.

With a wide range of results, it became clear that there was a lot we could get involved in: poor housing and overcrowded homes, a lack of jobs and living wages on the Wembley development, worries of unwelcoming environments for the large number of new migrants coming and living in Brent, and many other issues.

Amongst all these issues, the one that connected all the different parts of the school community was the lack of adequate transport provision: there were not enough buses and when buses did come, they were always congested. This led to students being delayed in the morning, or arriving home late, impacting home life – not to mention homework time!

We built and trained a team of over 25 students and started to embark on whether this issue affected other schools in the local area. Unsurprisingly, it did. Crest Academy, not far from Ark Academy, also got involved. As well as facing the same issues, students from both schools realised that such poor transport conditions led to conflicts between them.

This issue was very specific, it was unifying, and, if resolved, we felt it could really improve outcomes for students constantly getting in trouble. Our next step was to get hard evidence. We had to research the issue further and get more facts. Our team of 25 students met weekly for a hour: that gave us plenty of time to properly carry out our research.

Samir, Victoria, Sammy and Anab led our group: for six weeks, we went out to the bus stops and counted the amount of pupils getting on and off the bus. We timed intervals between buses and counted how many students were being left to stand – sometimes for hours – at the bus stops after school.

We sought to show teachers and parents how arduous bus journeys were: we came up with a 'show a teacher your journey' strategy. Ms Hourri, a Mathematics teacher who didn't understand, at first, why Sammy, who lives on the St Raphael's Estate was so late in the morning, soon realised that there were reasons why that was the case. Ms Hourri became involved and, seeing the other side, she was also committed to getting other teachers to understand and get behind the campaign.

Buses 182 and 206 were the main offenders! They were the ones we needed to sort out. The 206 bus went all around Brent and therefore took over ninety minutes to get from the estates to school when, if it had been more direct, would only have taken about twenty-five minutes. Bus 182 was a double decker, but went

past too many schools and, therefore, was constantly overcrowded at the beginning and end of the school day.

Both buses were operated by Metrolink and our team decided we should go to the Willesden Bus Garage where both buses originated. We wanted to meet Mr Steve, the Metrolink Manager.

We planned and organised a day of action. Students, during their Tutor Time, at the start of the day, spent some time drawing hands and writing inside about their experience of buses in Brent. We stuck 500 hands on a huge red bus that we made out of sugar paper. We then made our way to Willesden in the afternoon. 60 students and 10 teachers met Mr Steve and his bus drivers. We held conversations with all of them, and shared stories about our experiences on the buses. Two members of our team strode into the garage office to presented Mr Steve with a letter with our findings and our asks. The pride on these students' faces, as well as the enjoyment of being listened to by the bus drivers that drove them to school and back home every day, was palpable.

Sadly, nothing changed straight after this action: Mr Steve had no power to do anything. We went back to the drawing board after months of research. The crucial lesson, through this process, was that you don't always win: not every action leads to the desired conclusion. What we'd managed to do, however, was to build our capacity to take action. We'd also built loads of relationships and, as such, increased our power.

At this stage of our campaign, I remember Samir (a young leader who had been involved in this work from its inception at school) revealed to the team that we should focus on Boris Johnson. 'Boris is the man!', Samir kept saying

We started doing our 'power analysis' more carefully, working out who controlled the transport system we wanted to influence. We now knew that the man who ultimately had the power to affect change on issues relating to Transport in London was its very Chairman: Boris Johnson, the then Mayor of London. We had to work our way to Mr Johnson: thus, we started to build relationships around him, getting closer and closer to him. We did more research to find out that the person who could help make decisions on this was Leon Daniels, the Managing Director of Service Planning for Transport for London.



We weren't powerful to get to Leon Daniels by ourselves, so we built relationships with other young people across London struggling with buses. We worked with a sixth form college in South London (SFX) and they helped us make a video letter to Leon Daniels personally. Our video polarised the issue: we wanted to make it clear that Leon Daniels could either be in complete agreement with us or in complete opposition. Making things clearly polarised help build some useful tension. Teaching our team of young people about how to you personalise an issue to get a response from a human person rather than an organisation, we made it clear that this was no longer about Transport for London and its buses. Rather, it was about Leon Daniels. It was about Leon Daniels being responsible for making young people travel late in the dark winter months, when all they wanted was to be home in time to eat and do their homework.

We sent our video letter to Leon Daniels. He didn't respond for months!

The students and the schools were hugely disappointed: they had taken a month to make their 7-minute video and they had failed to get the reaction they were looking for. I will never forget Sammy and how angry he felt, every week, as he came after school on Thursdays to our session. He'd be greeted with to chorus of 'Sammy, Leon Daniels still hasn't responded!'. This led to Sammy shouting and stomping around. He was so angry. His anger was real. He lived in St Raphael's and wanted change.

The team soon wanted more action. We started to plan for another attempt. We felt it was time we went to Transport for London's head office.

The team lobbied Delia Smith and Carla Haslam, one of Delia's Smith's Vice Principals. 'Could we get 100 students across London to Southwark and take our asks directly to Leon Daniels?' was our request. The answer, thankfully, was a resounding 'Yes'.

We redoubled our efforts and came up with the slogan 'We are tired of waiting, Leon!'. And we were! We were tired of waiting all evening for buses and waiting for Leon Daniels to respond and do something about the situation.

Our team shared the message with the school community, along with our plan which included to go to Transport for London's Head Office wearing pyjamas! We had been on this journey for 15 months by then, and we were not going to give up. Many students wanted to join this action. It was the hottest ticket in town. Everyone wanted to be part of the team that would descend on Boris Johnson and Leon Daniels, ready to pack a metaphorical punch. The day before the action, we were able to get on BBC London News at 7 o'clock in the morning. Ms Haslam and Victoria, a Year 9 leader part of our group, told the story and gave the threat of action to 2 million London listeners: 'We are coming today to tell Leon Daniels that we are tired of waiting!'. By the afternoon, Transport for London had tweeted the school: 'Don't come. Instead, we will have a meeting at your school to discuss solutions.' They had finally responded. We had them in our grasp.

The next day, we still decided to go: we had to show them our power. Sammy was ready. We were all ready.

100 students and 20 members of our alliance in Brent were ready. One of our local Councillors – Cllr Robert Johnson – was ready. A local vicar – Reverend Maggie Hindley – was ready. Together with our young people, our united neighbours were ready to make a stand. We travelled on the train: so many fellow passengers asked our young people what they were doing and everybody was astounded to realise they were taking action. People were impressed by the students' seriousness, tenacity, clear vision, as well as their sense of anger. We reached Bermondsey Station and we got off. We decided to stop one stop early so we could march to the Head Office with our megaphone and the chant we had prepared.

'Why are we waiting?... We are tired of waiting!... We have homework to do and parents to see!... Why are we waiting?...'



## Transport for London

We finally arrived at Transport for London's Head Office. Our 100 citizens were met by security guards at every corner. The team was shocked. We are here in pyjamas and we were met by security guards, refusing to let us in. Finally, after minutes of confusion and refusal to go away, Leon

Daniels emerged in the flesh. We had a delegation ready to greet him and shake his hand. Soon, students shared their well-rehearsed testimonies. To our surprise, Leon Daniels decided to invite everyone in.

As we got inside, Samir and Anab shared our work, more testimonies, as well as our asks. Leon Daniels gratefully received the message and agreed to make the changes necessary. He agreed to send his Head of Bus Operations to meet with us at school to discuss the exact details of what should be done. We set a date and took pictures.

Six weeks later, after a few sessions evaluating the work we'd carried out, we felt we could celebrate.

We had increased the frequency of buses at peak school times for both routes and it was agreed that a new shorter route would be devised in the coming year.



We won. After almost 18 months of listening, research, team building, actions and evaluating, we had won! This story is part of the fabric of the school. The journey for those that were part of the team was invaluable and the change for the school was clearly noticeable.

The important thing, though, was that this was one of the many stories that shaped the culture of the school. A habit of action became part of every student's education.

# COMMUNITY ORGANISING IN NEWHAM: A DIVERSE FOUR YEARS – REFUGEES, HOUSING, AND YOUTH SAFETY

Andy Lewis

## OUR HISTORY AND CONTEXT

St Bonaventure's school was set up the Order of Fransiscan Minor in 1875 in the basement of a Church in Stratford, and moved to its current site in 1877<sup>14</sup>. The school was built before the Church and the Friary, but the community based here became one of the largest Fransiscan friaries in the UK. The Fransiscans opened the school to improve the lives of young men living in East London and improve their life opportunities. This concern for those in need is something that remains important to the school community today.

It was a student at St Bonaventure's who said to his teachers that he didn't get to see his mother anymore.



Upon investigation, it turned out she was on such a low wage, that she worked incredibly long hours and was not seeing her children. She was the cleaner in the office of one of the senior executives at HSBC – the lowest earner working with one of the highest earners. This story was part of the inspiration to Monsignor John Armitage, parish priest at the time in St Anthony's church next to the school, to help start the Living Wage campaign in 2001. This formed part of Listening Campaign and TELCO retreat at The Royal Foundation of St Katharine.

TELCO gave a single share to another cleaner, Abdul Durrant, who worked in Canary Wharf, and he went to the AGM. He spoke up at the meeting saying *'Mr Chairman, you and I work for the same company but live in very different worlds.'*<sup>15</sup>

This had a profound impact which led to the chairman coming to a church in Plaistow to meet with local communities. In addition, local Catholic Sisters and parishioners with their trolleys filled with pennies from candle money and collections from the church were taken down to a HSBC branch in central London and paid in on one of the busiest days of the year. They delayed the functioning of the bank and secured a meeting with the CEO to negotiate over better wages for their workers. HSBC was one of the first businesses to introduce the Living Wage - and the fact it came from the lived experience of one of our students remains key in our involvement in community organising.

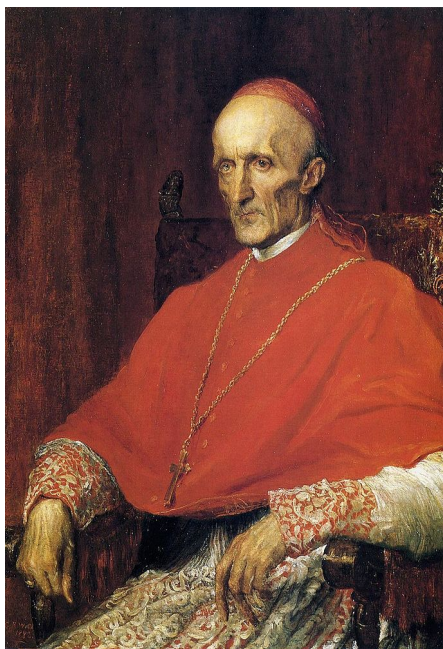
It is also worth noting when understanding our context, that the school was in part funded by Cardinal Henry Edward Manning, the second Archbishop of Westminster after the Catholic Emancipation. Two key things that Manning is fondly remembered for is the prioritization of building Catholic schools (like St Bonaventure's) in largely poor areas to help improve life chances of young people, and also his involvement in the London Dockers strike. The docks are one short bus ride away from our school, it is the part of Newham where a very high percentage of our students now live too.

The communities of our students and their families are the same communities where the men who took part in the Great Dock Strike in 1889 lived and worshipped. However, there are no longer ships, but there is a

<sup>14</sup> Thanks to: Alistair Rooms (TELCO Organiser), Chris McCormack (current St Bonaventure's Headteacher), Joanna Sangster (Deputy Headteacher, Sarah Bonnell School), Monsignor John Armitage, Paul Halliwell (former St Bonaventure's Headteacher).

<sup>15</sup> See [www.standard.co.uk/comment/comment/rohan-silva-i-pay-my-workers-the-london-living-wage-so-should-you-a3684036.html](http://www.standard.co.uk/comment/comment/rohan-silva-i-pay-my-workers-the-london-living-wage-so-should-you-a3684036.html).

whole new financial sector. The fight for today's Living Wage is still inspired by the fight for the 'Dockers Tanner'.



This strike is an area of expertise of Monsignor Armitage, *"The Cardinal stayed with the strikers often acting as an intermediary and thereby ensuring that the dockers tanner was won. Many tried to intervene between dockers and management without success. The only one who stood by the dockers right through was Cardinal Manning... He knew his people. He knew how important it was for the men to maintain their dignity."*<sup>16</sup>

Manning is also seen as being key in promoting a modern Catholic view of social justice. The papal encyclical *Rerum novarum* issued by Leo XIII reflected these views, which marks the beginning of modern Catholic social justice teaching. Some refer to Catholic Social Teaching (CST) as being the "Best Kept Secret in the Catholic Church", but that is not the experience of those who visit or get to know St Bonaventure's. Manning's legacy is lived out by students and teachers alike, we regularly raised in the region of £20,000 each year for charitable causes. This is particularly impressive when you understand the students live in an area of some of the worst economic deprivation in the UK.

Students at St Bonaventure's are sometimes surprised to learn about Catholic Social Teaching, because it is something that is part of who we are and what we are about, our ethos, our culture. The ongoing generosity and kindness of staff, students and their families has grown into a characteristic of the school, and is certainly a key attribute of a 'Bon's Boy'.

Education is about drawing out from young people that which is already there, teaching is about learning skills and subjects. Education draws out that which is most important in a person, something that they already possess. It is the recognition that they are loved, and for that love to grow you have to share that love with others, with the ones you love, but also the members of your family and community who are most in need.

Catholic social teaching, which can be manifest through community organising, must be at the heart of any Catholic school. It teaches our young people that to find yourself you have to live for others, especially those most in need. We are proud that the communities from which St Bonaventure's draws its pupils, is part of the story of the struggle for a living wage in the 19th century, and that today we are still inspired by a life changing social theory called Catholic Social teaching.

The school was a founding member of TELCO, The East London Citizens Organisation. This was one of the early chapters of Citizens UK, which is now an alliance of over 80 members. To understand the history and charism of St Bonaventure's can help understand why community action remains at the heart of life in the school. Our Catholic faith helps define the school community and see the plight of those who are in need, particularly our neighbours who live locally, as a priority. As the chorus of the school song declares, 'So let us live to change the world, Let us love with all our heart.' At the end of every term, and every Mass, it is sung with gusto.

## 2016: A NEW CHAPTER OF COMMUNITY ORGANISING

Four years ago, I started work as Director of RE at St Bonaventure's. A specific responsibility that I had was to lead the Schools' work with TELCO and so my introduction by meeting Emmanuel Gotor, the lead organiser for East London. He explained some of the work that had been carried out previously by the school including some work around the Safe Haven scheme, and more recently providing gifts at Christmas for elderly people in local care homes. I attended the TELCO 20th Anniversary Assembly at York Hall, Bethnal Green and I suddenly started to realise the scale of the alliance, the enthusiasm for change and the potential

<sup>16</sup> See [www.indcatholicnews.com/news/11388](http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/11388).

benefit for our students to get more involved. Young people know exactly what the problems are, and are ready to fight for change when given the chance and the direction.



A Year 8 community organising team was set up, and they got to work. They got involved in the 'Refugees Welcome' scheme in Newham. An attempt was made to fund a year's rent for a refugee family, and so the boys set to work arranging a basketball tournament (with paid entry), while they sold refreshments. They were supported by Clapton FC Ultras, who heard about the event and provided a banner. They raised £53 and learnt quickly that fundraising can be hard work!

However, for this group of students they had begun their journey into understanding the real difficulty of housing in Newham. They heard about the success of the affordable homes on the West Ham football ground development and joined various marches and events in Newham.



Alistair Rooms was appointed as an organiser to work more locally with us as a school and this gave us more capacity to help me understand more about community organising, about Citizens UK and develop our students more strategically.

He was able to facilitate a piece of listening by the Year 9 TELCO team who were concerned that a number of their fellow pupils were being forced to leave the local area and that this would have a negative impact on both their mental health and academic performance. They spoke to a variety of students and staff to compile a report with their findings. At a mental health fair hosted by our local sister school, St Angela's, they shared their

report with a variety of different stakeholders with confidence. Members of the Newham CCG and senior staff from Headstart Newham were very impressed and the boys visibly grew in confidence as they realised that the adults in the room were taking their work seriously.

They sent copies of the report to local MPs Stephen Timms and Lyn Brown who both responded and said they would continue to work hard to ensure young people did not need to leave the borough due to housing. Council Cabinet member Terry Paul, a former student of St Bonaventures, agreed to come in and meet with the boys. The Year 9 boys shared their work in a formal setting, and Terry agreed to take a copy of the report to the next council housing meeting to share their findings. It felt like their piece of work was being taken seriously, and that they were being listened to.

Ethan had emerged as the group leader during this process, and by this point part of the Headstart programme. He recommended their Headstart project was focussed on housing issues, and ended up with fundraising and visiting to one of the Crisis centres for London's homeless. His community organising work had a profound effect on him, and was having an impact on many different aspects of his life. His interest in politics – both local and global – continued to grow. Ethan had spent time looking up the different responsibilities of local councillors, how the London Assembly operates (after Mayor Sadiq Khan had visited his grandparents' housing estate) as well as developing a passion for US politics. We discussed the significance of Barack Obama's early community organising in his presidency at length.

The Year 9 boys were invited to visit the Queen Elizabeth Park to discuss the failed promises around housing as part of the Olympic Legacy, and help identify potential sites for Community Land Trusts (CLT) in Newham. The way in which they were able to participate, as the only young people in attendance, demonstrated their knowledge of the issues, but confidence that they had something to say.

As they started Year 10, the boys decided they wanted to pass the work on to a new group of students after two years work. However, in November 2018, Ethan had one last job. In a meeting on the top floor of City Hall, he was to time-keep a meeting about housing in Newham with Deputy Mayor London for Housing, James Murray, and also including Lyn Garner CEO of the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC). Watching him introduce himself, and explain that he *would* be keeping them to time – and he did – it was clear how his journey with TELCO had helped him grow into a confident “Bon's Boy”, ready to hold people to account and change the world. I was immensely proud to see Ethan be awarded a Million Minutes award in 2017 (a national award for remarkable young people making communities and the world a better place).



There have been various other opportunities for the students in this group including a visit to Lyn Brown MP in Portcullis House, after a tour of the Houses of Parliament. She spent over an hour discussing issues such as housing, youth crime and environmental issues with them. The very next day they got mentioned by name in the House of Commons as young people ready to stand up and make a change. Not many Year 10 students would be as excited as our boys were to receive their Hansard report for the day, which Lyn kindly sent to them.

Some members of the group have been involved in a Citizens UK documentary about housing. They were able to articulate the frustrations of the Olympic Legacy and the failure to provide adequate affordable housing in Newham and the direct impact this has on their lives. Ethan also helped chair a meeting with Newham Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz as part of the process of identifying CLT sites in Newham, he was able to take one of the younger 'TELCO' students with him, and shared his expertise of attending such high profile meetings.



*Ethan reflected, 'When I first joined TELCO in Year 8, I was a nervous and timid individual who wanted to make a small change in certain people's unfortunate circumstances. However, as time went on, our focus shifted to a bigger and more locally important issues which is still continuous to this day. TELCO has not just built my own self confidence; it has also shown me the in-depth process of rigorous negotiations between two parties and how the very same negotiations impact people's lives in ways I never fully comprehend. Overall, I am a better, further well-rounded individual because of the work of TELCO and the guidance of its staff and partners.'*

After a day of input on Catholic Social Teaching, a 6th Form team was also formed within the school. This group were deeply affected by two of their friends being shot in an unprovoked attack just before New Year's Eve in 2017. Thankfully they both survived, but the team found community organising provided an outlet for change.

They worked with Community Links to provide insight into what it is like being a young person in East London. They invited in Newham Borough Commander, Chief Superintendent Ade Adelekan, who listened carefully to their concerns, and provided answers to their questions. As a result, students got invited to be part of a new Youth Independent Advisory Group (IAG) and attended various different focus groups. This made them feel they were valued and being heard in the local community. They didn't even know these forums existed before their involvement with TELCO.

Some of these students visited New Scotland Yard and spoke at a TELCO event about their experiences and why they wanted to be part of the solution. They were invited to speak on a documentary on BBC Radio 4 on youth violence, were live on BBC London radio with Vanessa Feltz and one student, Shanea, was featured in a BBC World Service documentary 'The Kids are Alright' focussing on young people determined to be a voice for change.

Shanea had experienced the trauma of finding one of her friends outside her home with a knife wound. She had no First Aid skills and didn't know what to do. She campaigned within school to ensure that every 6th Former was First Aid trained, something the Red Cross provided for free. This is something that Newham are now looking at doing borough-wide. NewVic college did the same as St Bonaventure's, so as a direct result of Shanea, around 700 young people now have the skills to save a life. She also achieved a Million Minutes award, and has gone on to set up 'Your Life More Life', an organisation to give young people a voice to 'speak truth to power' which is already growing within Newham with funding from the London Mayor's Office.

Shanea said, while reflecting on her time at St Bonaventure's, *'I was able to learn, grow and develop as a youth and community leader at St Bons with TELCO whilst studying. Learning how to community organise and strategise gave me the confidence to continue to drive change in my local community and support my peers to heal and thrive.'*

The group did struggle to implement many of their plans, on reflection, as they were still dealing with the fall out of their direct experiences of youth violence. Sometimes it is not about the actions, the outcomes, but the journey that young people are on, and their community organising experience over their 18 months in 6th Form is something they look back on fondly and they have said was very useful for university and future employment.

Two of the 6th form team, Shanea and James, were heavily involved in the Newham Civil Society Youth Commission, led by Newham Citizens. This was a year-long process, and Shanea was one of the co-chairs. James time-kept, and helped the co-chairs. High profile positions, that came with great responsibility.



This Commission was partly the result of some work the 'new' Year 8 TELCO team had started. They decided to conduct a listening campaign in Year 7 and 8 to find out what worried young people in St Bonaventure's. Certain bus routes and bus stops were highlighted. The group attended a 'March 4 Peace' in Stratford, and met Newham councillor and cabinet member James Beckles. They invited him into school and were able to share their findings. This was when they were very young Year 8 students, they

had a story to tell, but at this point weren't able to share it as effectively as they could later on their TELCO journey. James listened, took a copy of their listening, and remained in touch via the Commission.

One victory was achieved by inviting Stagecoach and TFL into St Bonaventure's to discuss one of our bus routes, a schools service that the school had been trying to fix for around 6 years. From the moment, Tomas, a Year 8 student, welcomed them to the room and said he was chairing the meeting, it was clear that a win was possible. The boys had quickly learnt how to suitably prepare and conduct themselves in such a meeting. The bus times were changed so students did not need to rush out of school, and a later pick up was made to ensure everyone got home safely. This was the start of a positive relationship with TfL including a visit to the main command centre in Southwark, and younger students now taking part in the STARS travel ambassador scheme.

Tomas learnt how TELCO and Citizens operated, and attended events connected to other priorities, such as CLT housing events. As a result, many people involved in these different campaigns came to support him at the Commission events. The Year 8s began to understand how relationships work outside of the school community, in the local area, and with the local council. The whole team have got to know Newham Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz personally and they have played a key role in developing the relationship between the Council and TELCO.

One of the recommendations of the Commission was to work at the Stratford Centre to make it a safer place for young people. The boys dedicated many hours to this project, including some work over the summer holidays. They developed a really positive relationship with the girls from local all-girls school, Sarah Bonell and signed up 20 shops to the City Safe scheme. As Year 8/9 students they visited the shops, developed relationships with the shop staff, earned their respect, so they were willing to join up. The launch was a great celebration with the Mayor, local councillors, police and many others from the local community.

Sadly, just 8 days after the launch, one of St Bonaventure's students was murdered just outside the Stratford Centre; Baptista Adjei was just 15.

The day after, in school, I met with the TELCO team. They literally could not believe after all their work in the Stratford Centre, that this was the scene of such tragedy. However, through their tears, one of the boys said, "This is why we were doing the work, because it is not safe to be a young person in East London. This is why we need to double our efforts, this is why we need to do more. We will do this for Baptista."

Later in the day, one of them produced a presentation ready to restart the campaign.



Over the next few days, all of the people we have got to know through our community organising got in touch. The Mayor came to visit the school, and the TELCO team were her tour guides. They have grown to be the public face of the school, and it is their enthusiasm for social justice, for change, and to make Newham a better place that is how the school is known.

I was invited to be part of the Mayor's Youth Safety board, and due to their work, and that of Shanea, James and other young people, the school has a fantastic reputation locally.

The Year 9 team have picked up their work again, ensuring that Mayor Fiaz followed through with her commitment to write to all shops who signed up to the Safe Haven scheme were thanked, and all those who had not yet, to consider doing so. They met with Barry and Margaret Mizen when they visited school to explain their work. The Mizens set up the Safe Have scheme in memory of their son Jimmy who was murdered. They were articulate, passionate and determined.

When the school had their Section 48 (Diocese inspection), the inspectors were a bit confused by their scheduled meeting with 'TELCO Team'. They had not heard of TELCO or the work they do. After the meeting, they were described as 'Mini Fransiscans' who truly lived out the history and ethos of the school. In the final report, the team were highlighted as being '*a significant feature of the school's understanding of the needs of others... pupils have raised the profile of young people who are working to limit the impact of social challenges in the area, such as knife crime and youth violence.*' In a relatively short report, it demonstrates the impact that our involvement in TELCO has on the whole school community.

We have tried to widen the participation of the whole school community with our community organising. A group of Year 10 and 11 students, alongside some of the TELCO team, went to meet with MOPAC and Deputy London Mayor for Policing and Crime Sophie Linden. There was a powerful moment when one student and a police officer were mutually moved to tears by the honest and open exchanges that were taking place.



## 2020: WHERE NEXT?

Organising is at its best a process of action and reflection, where students plan and take an action before reflecting on what they learned. Opportunities for a learning process connected to real life problems and experiences, can sometimes feel limited in schools, but something that organising can help provide. It takes young people out of their comfort zone in a supported way. Young people are not often prompted to reflect on their practical experiences and thinking about what they have learned, but we have found this to be transformative in the case of our current Year 9

(2018-2020) TELCO team. Their journey has been significant, profound and will last a lifetime. From bouncing around with excitement in the classroom with a local council cabinet member, to helping co-chair and time keep a Civil Society Commission follow up hearing in the presence of over 100 local community members including the Mayor in just 18 months. Along the way solving a 6-year-old school bus problem, helping identify CLT sites in Newham and signing up 20 shops as Safe Havens. The problems were all real, and important to the community. These boys are now well known as changemakers locally. I know they will continue to live out our Fransiscan mission, and be a positive change in the world for many more years to come. I also know they will want to keep community organising, they know it works.

After mentioning to the students that Barack Obama was involved in community organising, one went away and did some research and emailed me this quote from his farewell speech at the end of his presidency: '*If something needs fixing, then lace up your shoes and do some organizing... If you're disappointed by your elected officials, grab a clipboard, get some signatures, and run for office yourself... Show up. Dive in. Stay at it.*'<sup>17</sup>

That student has said he is going to be the next mayor of Newham, and if not the Prime Minister, or maybe the President of the United States. My job here is done.

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<sup>17</sup> See [www.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/farewell](http://www.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/farewell).



On a personal level, it has helped me develop the relationships that will be important professionally as I move in deputy headship in September 2020. Education is fast moving and challenging, but it is community focussed. The problems and issues of the community are the problems and issues of the school. They cannot be separated, but crucially, I have seen that through community organising, positive change can be led by schools. We have a student body, ready to be mobilised. We have the parental contact and relationships, ready to work with. We also already have many positive local relationships – with the council, our MPs, various places of worship, community groups, other schools and education settings.



I have discovered that these relationships can be nurtured, developed and grown – and that it is important and beneficial to do so. One example is our work with Sarah Bonnell school – there was never a strong historic relationship between the two institutions, we had very different cohorts (we are all boys, and they all girls for a start!), but working with Deputy Headteacher Joanne Sangster the students have got to know one another and worked closely and passionately with one another on

the City Safe scheme. We have been really grateful and know this relationship will continue to grow going forward.

It has helped me share the good work that goes on within St Bonaventure's. We have invited in MPs, the Mayor, council members – many of whom had never visited before. They now better understand us, who we are, and the kind of young people we are able to grow and nurture. This is our ethos and our mission. Community organising forms a key part of manifestation of Catholic Social Teaching, and through the legacy of Cardinal Manning, of Monsignor John Armitage and generations of St Bonaventure's staff and students being involved with TELCO, this work will grow and develop. We will continue to make a direct contribution to Newham being a better and safer place to live, with our school at the heart. As Peter Block said, *'Authentic citizenship... is to hold ourselves accountable for the wellbeing of the larger community and to choose to own and exercise power rather than defer or delegate it to others.'*

Block's definition of citizenship is one that echoes the true spirit of being a Bonaventurian – they are ready to go out into the world and be that positive change.

# FROM THE CLASSROOM TO REAL WORLD ACTION: HOW YOUNG PEOPLE CHANGE THEIR COMMUNITY

Louisa Searle

Social action education in schools and colleges can seem like yet another thing to add to the list of responsibilities that time-poor teachers, lecturers, support staff, and school leaders must carry out as part of their jobs. It can also seem daunting and hard to manage – where in packed weekly and daily timetables and overcrowded curricula can this kind of learning be delivered? How can we make it meaningful and inspiring rather than simply paying lip service to the idea of charity? Charitable work happens a lot in schools, of course, but students are not always meaningfully involved – they participate in so-called ‘own clothes’ days without really engaging with the cause or where the money is going. They are too often reduced to being bucket-shakers and red nose wearers, often for larger national and international charities. While these are worthy causes, of course, to deny young people the opportunity to engage with the issues that affect them and the world around them, is to lose out on their ability to make an immediate impact and to feel that they can make a difference today, and not only when they are older.

One solution is to provide them with the opportunities to explore these concepts within the classroom. First Give, a charity working with secondary schools across England and Wales, provides all the resources teachers need to guide them through this process, including practical support in planning and designing social action opportunities, as well as delivering assemblies and workshops designed to inspire and upskill students. The key, though, is for teachers and school leaders to guide students to considering what is happening outside the school gates, at home, and in their areas. Students who see the local benefit of their action are galvanised and inspired – the process can be transformative. There are benefits for the school as well: an improved profile and reputation in the local community, a way to positively engage parents as well as connecting the school with charities and their services, some of which might benefit students and staff.

Key to the success of the programme is the way that, despite a uniform scheme of work, differentiation across and between schools is achieved by outcome. The programme’s flexibility and structure allow it to be successfully implemented in almost any secondary school year group and in a wide range of educational contexts and settings.

In the case study below, the impact of the First Give programme as delivered in a secondary school in South Wales will be explored, highlighting how this kind of work can allow students’ learning to transcend the classroom and make them realise their own ability and agency to positively impact their community.

## **MOUNTAIN ASH COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL, SOUTH WALES**

The train line at Mountain Ash, situated some forty minutes from Cardiff, has a single track. One small, two-carriage train can pass the platform that denotes Mountain Ash’s station at any one time. On alighting from the train, you are immediately struck by the beauty of the mountains and the greenness of Cynon Valley. This is true mining country.

At the foot of the valley, is Mountain Ash Comprehensive School (MACS), operating in circumstances which are a fascinating example of how the demise of local industry, austerity, and the quirks of a devolved education can intersect with each other. Child poverty in Wales rose in 2019 and at present sits at 29.3%. The ward of Penrhiwceiber, one of the communities served by Mountain Ash Community School, has the highest rate of child poverty in Wales at 49.4%.

The school has worked in partnership with First Give since the charity launched in secondary schools in South Wales in 2016. The First Give programme prompts an entire year group of students to consider the social issues in their community and asks them to connect with local charities addressing them. Having chosen a

charity to support, each class carries out active citizenship and social action such as fundraising, volunteering, advocacy and awareness raising.

At the end of the programme, each class competes in a School Final that brings together the whole community to celebrate their work on the project. The programme is tightly structured across the length of its eight lessons, each activity building on students' understanding and skill development to support them to plan and carry out real world social action including presentations to report on their project. The philosophy underpinning First Give is that through action, however small or locally focussed, young people can change their world for the better.

In the early summer of 2019, a group of Year 9 students at MACS selected the hyper-local cause, Lee Gardens Pool of Penrhiwceiber village. Decades ago, the local mining community funded the construction and running of this micro-community venture. With the closure of the mines, the pool fell into disrepair and was closed down. In 2016, a group of volunteers campaigned and fundraised to regenerate and reopen this community resource and the pool now hosts community-focussed events and provides opportunities such as formal lifeguarding training for local young people.

Having met with the trustees of the charity, the students set out to raise money and awareness for their cause, supported throughout by their teacher, Mr Church. The students were inspired by Lee Garden Pool's approach to providing opportunities for the local community to come together and many of their social action activities reflected this: starting with a rubber duck race down the local river; on to a mass sponsored walk up Pen Y Fan; then to arranging a Bingo night in the local church for the community's elderly and then a children's disco night in the local working men's club, as well as other events held within school. The role of Mr Church here was to support the students in facilitating introductions to members of the local community and guiding them through the process of setting up the events. However, the driving force was their own enthusiasm and energy and a willingness to use resources at their disposal, including raising awareness about their activities and cause through a specially created Twitter account.

Perhaps the most impressive piece of social action from this school was one carried out in partnership with Lee Gardens Pool itself: the 'Great Get Together' event in the summer of 2018. The students were keenly aware of this annual event held in memory of Jo Cox – former MP for Batley and Spen and who was murdered in 2016 whilst carrying out her constituency duties – and wanted to do something similar as a fundraiser at the Pool. They promoted it to the local community but, more impressively, managed to secure the attendance of their local Assembly Member, Vikki Howells and their then-MP, Ann Clwyd. The event raised nearly £500 and by the time of the First Give Final, the students had raised over £2,000 through their own efforts.

The First Give Final at MACS was a celebration of all the students who had participated on the programme – in fact across the year group around £10,000 had been raised for local causes! But the students who had represented Lee Gardens Pool had carried out so many different activities and raised so much awareness as well as funds that they were the clear winner. Their passion for this cause and what it does for their local community drove the entire project and ensured their presentation about their work was inspiring enough to secure them the top prize.

Since then, the students have travelled to London as guests of First Give for the charity's #FirstFive event which celebrated five years of the programme in October 2019. While there, they had a tour of Parliament as guests of Ann Clwyd MP. And the impact of their work has been felt, massively, by the charity. The funds raised were used to train four new lifeguards for the pool and to fund the 'Fit and Fed' programme which provides lunch and activities during the summer holidays for students who would usually be on free school meals in term time. Perhaps more importantly, the students remain engaged, volunteering at the Lee Gardens Pool Winter Wonderland celebrations in December 2019, five months since the First Give project began.

# POSTSCRIPT: COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP THROUGH SCHOOLS

Professor Liz Todd

It has been both moving and informative to read through these chapters. The accounts of youth leadership and agency in these stories are those that I have most appreciated in this book. In my experience, it is fairly common to find schools working with parents. Similarly, schools generally liaise with other organisations to support children and their families. Sometimes they consult with children. It is very rare, however, for children and parents to have a leadership role in taking action so it is not often I get to read such an inspiring set of accounts of community engagement and community organising in schools.

In this piece, I draw on my own experiences as a practitioner and researcher to reflect on why schools don't focus more on community engagement and why, when they do, the form it takes tends to be informed by professional views of community needs which are not necessarily the needs that local communities would prioritise. I talk about the development of Children's Communities and ponder reasons for the general lack, with some exceptions, of active child leadership in school community engagement. I finish with a call to action for schools, communities, and organisations they partner with, to find new ways of working together. This is crucial as we continue to negotiate living with the impact of the last decade of austerity and of COVID-19.

## WHERE AM I COMING FROM?

Motivating my work is how I think about people, organisations, professional roles, and change. One of the beliefs I hold is that we all have needs and capabilities, and that this applies even to those who appear most in need and even when their knowledge and skills are less clearly visible, and that we should work with people in ways that recognise their capabilities<sup>18</sup>. Lived experience, especially that of those who are marginalised, needs to be valued alongside professional knowledge.

It is, therefore, not surprising that whilst I have been working in schools, I have always sought to develop collaboration in one form or another. As a practicing educational psychologist, I tried to enable parents feel more involved as partners in special needs assessment – and this became a focus of my PhD<sup>19</sup>. I designed and wrote letters and psychological assessment reports directly for and to children (and found they were also appreciated by parents and practitioners).

In my experience, solving problems in communities requires the combined expertise of organisations and the community working together. Solutions will always be lacking if the community is left out. People should be actively involved in their own change process rather than approached as passive recipients of services.

## WHAT I LEARNT ABOUT PARTNERSHIP FROM RESEARCHING EXTENDED SCHOOLS

While leading the research evaluating extended schools<sup>20</sup> a decade ago, I uncovered an exciting series of projects around child and adult support, extra-curricular activities, childcare, and community engagement<sup>21</sup>. School staff were enthusiastic about the provisions they were developing and about their collaboration with other agencies.

The main learning from this research was that schools could not go it alone in addressing problems in neighbourhoods that were often systemic (underinvestment in adult skills, rising child poverty, a lack of

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<sup>18</sup> See Todd, L. (2007) *Partnerships for Inclusive Education. A critical approach to collaborative working*. London: Routledge.

<sup>19</sup> Thesis title: *The Problematic of Partnership in the Assessment of Special Educational Needs*. Newcastle University (2000).

<sup>20</sup> Extended schools and extended services were a form of community schooling that were policies in the New Labour years, 1999-2010.

<sup>21</sup> See Cummings, C., Dyson, A., & Todd, L. (2011). *Beyond the School Gates: can full service and extended schools overcome disadvantage?* London: Routledge.

affordable housing, etc.). Schools' aims tended to include trying to engage with the local community in some way for the common good and working in partnership with other organisations. There was a sense from school staff that they felt able to be creative and consequently really make a difference to people's lives.

However, I also saw a striking omission.

The model of extended schools was about the delivery of services with professionals very clearly taking the lead<sup>22</sup>. I rarely had the sense that co-creation with children, parents or communities was part of the vision of these schools. Notable exceptions to this included a school that had a film club created and managed by pupils, and another that had an active parent committee involved in making decisions about the direction of the extended strategy. It continues to be my experience that schools that develop initiatives in ways that give children leadership are very much the exception.

## WHY THE SCARCITY OF CHILD AGENCY AND LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS?

I have often wondered why it was so difficult for schools to involve children in community developments. I have speculated about whether it was a lack of belief by schools in the capability of children and families. Or whether there were other assumptions about local people that were colouring professional engagement. Perhaps it was policy mandates around the primacy of safeguarding, or the professional cultures that situate children in certain ways. Perhaps part of the problem has been a lack of time or the skills to help develop leadership in children. Our evaluation of extended schools found transformative impacts on individual children and their families and an economic analysis found that the benefits for individuals far outweighed the costs<sup>23</sup>.

However, I wondered how much more impact there could have been had the actions of the extended schools engaged those same children and families in a process where they were involved in working with others on the kinds of community change that they had helped to identify and make happen.

A barrier to this kind of collaborative working today is the high stakes testing regime in schools and the related Ofsted requirements. Schools can regard community work as distracting them from their core teaching and learning activities. Some schools have been able to combine efforts to maintain educational attainment gains at the same time as being an extended school. Some schools have built upon the learning they have gained from providing extended services to create a new model of how they could operate and become children's communities<sup>24</sup>. A 'Children's Community' brings together a range of existing services, local government, charities, cultural organisations, and businesses in a specific geographical area to work in a coordinated way to tackle childhood disadvantage, with a specific focus, from cradle to career, on all the contexts in which children live and learn<sup>25</sup>. The aim is for the organisations in a locality to work together with each other and with the community in order to evolve asset-based approaches to disadvantage. Over the last few years, the numbers of children's communities have been growing across the UK in areas such as Kirklees, Glasgow, London, Manchester, and Newcastle. An exciting and relatively new development, as demonstrated in the chapters in this book, is that some of these schools are engaging in community organising in which children are being supported to take on leadership.

## DEVELOPING MODELS OF ENGAGEMENT

So, what next? How can more schools understand their role as part of their communities and enable children to collaborate to bring about change? They cannot wait for national incentives from government policy or Ofsted – although this would be welcome. There is a need to act now. A decade of austerity has impacted

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<sup>22</sup> See Cummings, C., Dyson, A., & Todd, L. (2007). 'Towards extended schools? How education and other professionals understand community-oriented schooling' in *Children and Society*, 21, 189-200.

<sup>23</sup> See Cummings, C., Dyson, A., & Todd, L. (2011). *Beyond the School Gates: can full service and extended schools overcome disadvantage?* London: Routledge.

<sup>24</sup> Named children's communities after the adoption by Save the Children of the model of the Harlem Children's Zone that has some similarities with extended schools.

<sup>25</sup> See Dyson, A, Kerr, K, Heath, L and Hodson, P (2016) 'From School to Children's Community: The Development of Manchester Communication Academy, England' in *Developing Community Schools, Community Learning Centers*, 346-383). See also *Extended-Service Schools and Multi-Service Schools: International Exemplars for Practice, Policy, and Research*, edited by Lawson, HA and Van Veen, D. The Hague, NL: Springer International.

negatively on civic society with cuts to services and cash-strapped charities having to deliver front line services. Austerity has diminished the capacity of civil society to respond to COVID-19 which has had a greater impact on those already disadvantaged. Change needs to come through organisations working together and making sure communities are fully involved. We see many examples of this happening in this book, in which schools have played a key role in meeting community needs: increasing local affordable housing provision; tackling knife crime and building safer communities; improving local transport; and reducing the stigma of mental health.

Children's lives cannot wait. When I read the accounts in this book of children's engagement in community organising, I know that all children need the benefits of these approaches right now. For instance, the Young Citizen Action Group (YCAG) in Barking and Dagenham had success with improving transport to school and taking over land for a community garden. Young people in REACH Academy ran a local campaign against domestic violence, St Antony's Primary School children campaigned to win affordable housing in Newham, students from Mountain's Ash Secondary School in South Wales were supported by First Give to develop a dilapidated pool into a community resource. Paraphrasing from the accounts, and as a result of community organising, children's experiences of learning are (unusually for school) connected to real life problems. Students have been taken on a journey that gives them responsibility, many skills have been developed such as in presenting their case to adults in authority, and their sense of agency has been galvanised. I agree with the writers that claims this learning will last a lifetime.

The essential role of schools to society as a whole and to our communities has never been so apparent as during the COVID-19 lockdown. Schools have taken responsibility for giving out meal vouchers (in some cases through regular door-to-door deliveries), checking up on vulnerable pupils, supplying materials for pupils to learn at home, and staying open to care for vulnerable children and those of keyworkers. In the case of the latter, schools have been vital in order to support the health of the nation and keep the NHS and other vital services working. Children have missed their teachers and their friends. It will not be possible to claim in the future that schools are only important for the educational aspirations they can fulfil. Ofsted could play an important role in future in giving schools the freedom to conceptualise wellbeing as wider in scope than educational achievement alone.

## **A CALL TO ACTION: NEW WAYS OF WORKING TOGETHER**

What practical steps can schools take if they want to get more involved in community action and if they want to have children (and others such as parents) helping to drive the action? Reflecting on schools' mission and values is a good place to start. Taking stock of the current projects going on in a school, and the potential partners they could work with in their locality, can stimulate ideas about how to grow community involvement. It is likely that schools already have community links that can be developed further. There are many organisations that can offer training in skills that will help them to organise with their communities or can link with the school to develop actions.

The time-honoured model of community organising used by Citizens UK<sup>26</sup> helps schools to focus on the development of long-term relationships and long-term support, so that they can continue to help communities by using a range of approaches flexibly over time. Children can develop a critical and practical understanding of the nature of power and how they can build and use power themselves to be able to affect change. Listening campaigns teach so many skills at different levels, from the development of interpersonal skills to experiencing the way that listening within a community can bring everyone into the process of deciding actions. Becoming a member of Citizens UK means that people in a school can start to build relationships with those in other member organisations and they can access community organising training. In our children's community in Newcastle, Karen Laing and I are using a community organising approach (with support from Tyne and Wear Citizens) with parents to enable them to organise and take action to help create the kind of educational opportunities they want for themselves and their families.

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<sup>26</sup> For more on Citizens UK's approach, to community organising see the Introduction by Sebastien Chapleau and the Provocation in this book by Neil Jameson.

In my experience, you can never have too many ideas about how to engage children and young people's agency. There are many charities working with young people that have good ideas, for example Investing in Children (IiC)<sup>27</sup>, a charity based in Durham which has been engaging with children and young people as researchers for the last 20 years. IiC has developed practices, strategies and policies designed to engage older children actively in consultation and decision-making processes in matters affecting their lives. One of their approaches is to undertake an 'agenda day' in which (typically) 10-25 diverse young people aged 13-18 years meet in an adult-free environment to express their views, facilitated by other young people who have met beforehand to plan the day. The facilitators decide which questions are to be asked of the invited young people that would give them the best opportunity to express their views. The outcomes of agenda days have contributed to the development of many different organisations including schools, health services, sports facilities, the delivery of social support services and many more. IiC is constantly evolving the methods that they use and young people are fully included in this development.

Another idea is to put children firmly at the centre of a new project. Children North East, a child poverty charity, did just this when developing a programme to remove barriers to learning which exist because of the impacts of living in poverty. Poverty Proofing the School Day is an audit for schools, developed by the charity Children North East with the North East Child Poverty Commission<sup>28</sup>. The idea came from children in the first place, and child researchers from four schools devised the audit. The final audit process requires all children in a school to be consulted about their views on which school practices stigmatise poor children.

A final example suggests that small changes in practice can make a big difference. Sometimes putting young people in the driving seat is a matter simply of changing how you ask questions. Karen Laing, a senior researcher from Newcastle University, conducted a series of focus groups with girls aged 14-16. Instead of asking the girls about why they were not taking up some community resources (the brief given to Karen), Karen asked them if they could suggest what questions she should ask to understand what it was like being a girl in Wallsend. This put the whole conversation on a very different footing. Instead of the girls following Karen's agenda, the girls had been asked for their agenda for Karen to follow. The conversations were not always easy to conduct but by the end Karen knew much more about being a girl in an area in the North East. What she found was very different to what school managers had been expecting and far more useful to them. But even more important, managers now realised that they too could consult with the girls when other questions came up in school. Instead of consulting with girls based on adult assumptions of what was important, the approach enabled girls to talk about what was important to them. This led to a much greater understanding of how professionals could engage with them and a realisation that the assumptions they previously held were misguided.

The longstanding and established practices of community organising and these examples of innovative ideas can help us to think about how we can help schools to engage with young people and families in their local communities. We will need to find new ways of working in the coming months, and possibly years, to respond to the impact of austerity, to challenge the impact of rising child poverty, while social distancing is in place, and while the after-effects of the virus show themselves. There is no room for complacency, and we must constantly evolve to meet new challenges and find new ways of doing things, and of connecting as people if we are to find the solutions to some of our most entrenched problems.

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<sup>27</sup> See [www.investinginchildren.net](http://www.investinginchildren.net).

<sup>28</sup> See [www.children-ne.org.uk/poverty-proofing-the-school-day](http://www.children-ne.org.uk/poverty-proofing-the-school-day). See also Mazzoli Smith L, Todd L. (2018) Conceptualising poverty as a barrier to learning through 'Poverty Proofing' the School Day in *British Educational Research Journal*. See also Mazzoli-Smith L, Todd L. (2016) *Poverty Proofing the School Day: Evaluation and development report*.



**PAUL AMUZIE** [Senior Community Organiser – Citizens UK]

Born and bred in East London, Paul works with Citizens UK as a Senior Community Organiser. Paul has spent the last four years consulting for the Mayor's office in London and now for Frontline. Paul sees educational establishments as a hotbed of opportunity to build resilient communities and to teach the art of community organising.

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**CLAIRE ARKWRIGHT** [Community Organiser – Southwark Citizens]

Claire has been working as an organiser for Citizens UK since 2018. Currently, she works with a broad base of over twenty civil society institutions in the borough of Southwark, including six schools. Claire comes from a family of teachers and has a passion for education. She has worked in schools in the UK and abroad. Before working for Citizens UK, Claire also worked for refugee and migrant charities as a project co-ordinator.

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**LUKE BILLINGHAM** [Head of Strategy – Reach Children's Hub | Youth & Community Worker – Hackney Quest]

Luke Billingham is Head of Strategy at Reach Children's Hub, an innovative new charity based in Reach Academy Feltham providing cradle-to-career support for children and young people in Feltham, South-West London. He is also a youth and community worker for Hackney Quest, a long-running youth and community centre in Hackney, where he is involved with mentoring, exclusion prevention, youth voice and community development projects. Alongside these roles, Luke is a trustee of Haven Distribution, the books-to-prisoners charity.

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**DERMOT BRYERS** [CEO – EFA London]

Dermot founded and co-runs adult education charity EFA London. He currently teaches ESOL in London, delivers training in participatory ESOL for teachers and activists across the country, and campaigns on a range of social justice issues alongside colleagues and students. Along with Becky Winstanley and Melanie Cooke, he has published research on participatory methods and is currently an Associate Researcher at King's College London. Previously, he worked as a community organiser for Citizens UK and as a campaigns consultant for Action Aid.

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**FIONA CARRICK-DAVIES** [Family Worker – Surrey Square Primary School]

Fiona has been working in education in Southwark for almost 30 years, first as a teacher, SENCO and Senior Leader, and since 2002, in her role at Surrey Square. Fiona's experience of working across these different roles has emphasised the importance of the child's life outside the school building, and that schools are uniquely-placed within their community to become an accepting, non-judgemental hub for signposting and advocacy. Nurturing partnerships



with a wide variety of organisations has enabled Fiona to take this mission beyond the gates and for the school to become an agent for tangible change.

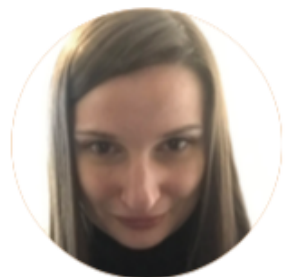
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**DR SEBASTIEN CHAPLEAU** [Founding Director – Citizen School]

Sebastien is the Founding Director of Citizen School. He has been a Community Organiser and School Leader for over 15 years. He was the Founding Headteacher of La Fontaine Academy, a state-funded primary school in Bromley, south east London, which he led for over 6 years. Before setting up La Fontaine Academy, Sebastien was a Community Organiser with Citizens UK, where he worked with Headteachers and community leaders across London, supporting them on issues of social justice and institutional development. His community organising work in London was recognised in 2012, when he received a Community Champion Award from the Mayor of London. He also received an Inspirational Educator Award from the Worshipful Company of Educators for his work across the UK. Sebastien holds a Ph.D. in English from Cardiff University.

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**EMILY CROWHURST** [Head of 4-18 Performing Arts – School21]

Emily has been teaching music in London state schools since 2010, and currently works as Head of 4-18 Performing Arts at School21. She is passionate about building empowered teams and developing music curriculum design to ensure young people consistently access a high quality, values-based music education with ensemble and community at its heart. Her belief in inclusive excellence, and a community-centred approach to education drive the projects she has designed and developed, which include the community choir, formed in 2017, and a four-year immersive, ensemble-based band project for students across Years 5-8, in which all students receive free weekly two-to-one tuition, weekly curriculum ensemble workshops and multiple performance opportunities from a dedicated team of 16 music staff.

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**MEETA DAVE** [Headteacher – Radford Academy]

I have been Teaching or in School Leadership for the last 25 years. I understand the challenges that pupils and our communities face, however, I believe that with the right curriculum in place pupils can make great progress academically as well as developing skills which enable them to become active and responsible global citizens of the future.

My passion is to work with various groups, so they are supported and empowered to bring about positive changes for themselves and their communities in an environment where there is mutual respect and tolerance.

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**NOELLE DOONA** [Assistant Headteacher – Hendon School]

Noelle has been teaching for over 20 years North-West London, living in the communities which she serves. Having been inspired by her own schooling she is a firm believer that education should be about improving life chances, as well as developing engaged and active citizens. She is passionate about creating opportunities and supporting young people to make change.

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**DR KAREN EDGE** [Reader in Educational Leadership – UCL Institute of Education, University College London]

Dr Karen Edge is a Reader in Educational Leadership at UCL Institute of Education and recently served as Pro-Vice Provost (International) at University College London. Karen has conducted research in over 30 countries and has recently completed a six-jurisdiction study of teacher motivation and retention. Karen's *Global City Leaders Project* worked with Generation X (born between 1960-80) school leaders in London, New York City, and Toronto to understand more about their work, lives and ambitions. Karen is also preparing two books on Generation X leaders (Routledge) and City-based education policy contexts and the influence on school leaders (Bloomsbury). She sits on ESRC (UK), Danish and Swiss National Research Review Panels and the Advisory Panel for International School Leadership Principals in Ontario. She is Past Editor-in-Chief of *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability* (EAEA) and a current Editorial Board Member for *EAEA*, *School Leadership and Management* and *Leadership and Policy in Schools*. She completed her PhD in knowledge management and educational reform at the Ontario Institute of Education/University of Toronto.

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**EMMANUEL GATORA** [Supervising Organiser – Citizens UK]

Prior to joining the staff team at Citizens UK in 2008, Emmanuel was a leader on the Living Wage campaign through the Wood Green New Testament Church of God, where he served as a Team Administrator and Youth Pastor. Emmanuel worked with cleaners, staff and students at the University of London to win the Living Wage for over 150 cleaning staff in 2010.

Emmanuel has led on the CitySafe campaign across London Citizens, and played a key role in TELCO's Olympic jobs campaign, placing 1,500 people into Living Wage jobs during London 2012, adding £1.5m to the local economy.

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**NEIL JAMESON CBE** [Emeritus Director and Founder – Citizens UK | Director – The UK Centre for Civil Society]

Neil is, first and foremost, a Community Organiser seeking talented leaders and young Organisers who have the courage and commitment to work with others democratically to strengthen civil society, pursue the common good and tackle injustice.

Prior to founding Citizens UK in 1988, Neil worked for 20 years in the public and voluntary sector – with Somerset and Coventry Local Authorities – and later, Save the Children and The Children's Society in the UK.

Neil seeks a legacy of a stronger, more powerful and better organised civil society, where people learn the necessity and advantages of working with others, to experience 'the art of politics' and 'organising for the common good'. His experience has taught him that this is best achieved by organising within the core institutions, specifically education, trade unions, faith, health and voluntary associations to act together.

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**DR JAMIE KESTEN** [Community Organiser – Thames Ward Community Project]

Jamie Kesten is a Community Organiser on the Thames Ward Community Project in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. Jamie is responsible for, among other things, supporting and coordinating the work of the Young Citizen Action Group, students from Riverside School who engage in social action to ensure the inclusive growth of their rapidly changing local neighbourhoods. Prior to this he was a Research Associate at the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London. Jamie holds a PhD in Human Geography from The Open University and an MSc in Ethnicity and Multiculturalism from Bristol University.

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**ANDY LEWIS** [Assistant Headteacher & Director of Religious Education – St Bonaventure’s School]

Andy Lewis is an Assistant Headteacher and Director of Religious Education and St Bonaventure’s School in the London Borough of Newham. He has worked in a number of Catholic comprehensive schools in the Diocese of Brentwood, holding both pastoral and subject leadership positions. He has contributed to Religious Education nationally through his work with Culham St Gabriel’s, Teach First, The Teacher’s Enterprise in RE, and the Catholic Education Service. He has been involved in organising TeachMeet London events and ran The London RE Hub in 2015 and 2016. Andy has spoken at a number of events including Westminster Briefings, the Institute of Ideas’ ‘Battle of Ideas’, various other TeachMeets, and regional RE training days. He has published textbook and revision guides on Religious Education. He was nominated for TES Teacher Blogger of the Year in 2016 and frequently tweets and blogs about RE and wider education.

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**MATT MORDEN** [Co-Headteacher – Surrey Square Primary School]

Matt joined Surrey Square back in 2015 as Deputy Head Teacher and moved into the role of Co-Head Teacher in 2019 alongside Nicola Noble. Matt is passionate about the education of children in the primary phase and has worked in a number of schools developing curriculum content which is relevant to the context of those school communities. Matt is currently part of the Big Leadership Adventure, working with other leaders in the profession who are passionate about changing the story of education – offering a richer curriculum and “bigger” education for all children.

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**LOUISA SEARLE** [Director – First Give]

Louisa began working with young people as a youth worker in the South East of the UK and abroad while a student. She then trained with Teach First, going on to teach English in a North London secondary school, before joining First Give as its first member of staff in order to launch it in London in 2014. Now as Director, she leads the organisation as it delivers social action education in partnership with secondary schools across England and Wales.

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**DR MATT SCOTT** [Coordinator – Thames Ward Community Project]

Matt Scott is Director of Engagement for the Thames Ward Community Project, based in the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham. He has worked in the voluntary sector for over 30 years, lectures at Goldsmiths College and London Metropolitan University and is chair of the Community Development Journal. Matt completed his Ph.D. in 2012 on the role of community development in addressing the local democratic deficit.

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**HEIDI SHEWELL-COOPER** [Community Organiser – Nottingham Citizens]

Heidi has been a part-time Community Organiser with Nottingham Citizens since 2018, having seen how organising inspired and developed her daughter as a student and the impact of the alliance on her home city. She also continues to lead the Primary 6 Partnership, established in 2006, a collaboration of primary schools in the city sharing resources, working on curriculum, staff development and enrichment together. A Probation Officer by training, Heidi also has extensive experience of school governance, having helped set up Nottingham Emmanuel School, with its motto; ‘to learn, to grow, to serve’ in the local community.

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**PROFESSOR LIZ TODD** [Professor of Educational Inclusion – University of Newcastle]

Liz Todd is Professor of Educational Inclusion Director of the Institute for Social Science at Newcastle University. Her research has a strong social justice agenda and she is known for her work on the interaction between communities and schools, involving young people in decision making, and respectful democratic approaches to change. Liz is passionate about the role of community organising, Citizens UK, to get everyone working together out of various bubbles to bring about change for the common good. Her books *Beyond the school gates: can extended schools overcome disadvantage?* and *Partnerships for inclusive education* were highly commended. In the past Liz worked as a maths teacher and an educational psychologist before moving to Fiji for 3 years to the University of the South Pacific. She also works as a trainer in video interaction guidance and in narrative therapy.

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*As we move through lockdown, schools and leaders now have the nation's attention. They educate our families through emergency remote teaching and learning strategies developed almost overnight. Schools coordinate catering and food delivery to offsite families who need it most. They remain open to care for the children of keyworkers. Teachers and leaders are checking in on their students and families. Our schools' roles as central to our communities have never been clearer to the wider public. I am heartened that the nation appears to have woken up to the power and possibility our schools offer their students and communities.*

*These scary and challenging conditions make the timeliness and importance of this collection even more paramount. The authors' reflections on creating stronger, more cohesive, schools and communities will provide food for thought for readers as we contemplate our 'new' ways of working and living. We will all need to be even more inclusive and understanding as we build back to our new education realities.*

Dr Karen Edge, in her Foreword

*We have a unique chance to design and/or redesign what our core purpose(s) is/are, as an educational system. We're a system that is viscerally connected to the communities we are rooted in and serve. This means that, one of our core purposes should be [...] build relationships of trust with other parts of civil society, in ways that enable us to reweave the often-damaged fabric of society.*

*Emerging from such a worldwide crisis will take time to truly digest. Over the coming months – perhaps years – we will be reacting to the situations we now find ourselves in: a world in debt like never before, with levels of fear like we've never experienced, a world where most countries' resilience has been put to the test. Amongst all the noise, the tears, the pains, and the sleepless night, I urge us all to dig deep into our shared grief to resurrect the drive that the majority of us still have within our hearts. Let's not suppress our pains: rather, let's make them public and let's talk about our shared hopes. Let's reconnect to the very reason the majority of us became educators in the first place: a holistic view of what education and schools can do to make society a much better place than it is, one where, in the end, we don't play eternal catch up and where we constantly firefight. Rather, a society where relationships are strong and where collaboration is such that the demands of our communities are heard and taken seriously. This view of the world [...] is one which is possible even more so now than ever before.*

Dr Sebastien Chapleau (editor), in his Introduction

*We will need to find new ways of working in the coming months and possibly years to respond to the impact of austerity, to challenge the impact of rising child poverty, while social distancing is in place, and while the after-effects of the virus show themselves. There is no room for complacency, and we must constantly evolve to meet new challenges and find new ways of doing things, and of connecting as people if we are to find the solutions to some of our most entrenched problems.*

Professor Liz Todd, in her Postscript

