

Collective Futures Envisioned: Care Hubs in Future Schools

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Care Hubs in Future Schools

With the prevalence of COVID-19, school leaders and educators faced the need to adopt more fluid policies and practices to respond to the pandemic-induced stressors on students and families. In the case of school districts in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), leaders at both system and school levels, focused their efforts on providing resources to support mental health and well-being for educators, students and families. A walk through GTA schools reveals posters, at-a-glance tip sheets, and images posted on the walls that contain self-regulation strategies, breathing exercises, compassionate approaches to self-care, and inspirational quotations and excerpts. Cultural and faith-based organizations joined efforts with school leaders to support the community. Such collective demonstrates that it truly *takes a village to raise a child*. Teachers supported one another with instructional resources, and collaborative planning. Special Education Resource Teachers promoted the focus on well-being, when reporting student achievement to families for their colleagues. Fostering a sense of community and building relationships has never been more relevant in educational leadership. Relationship building becomes a much-needed quality of a leader to deal with the increasing social complexities and environmental issues (Smit, 2018). Today, post pandemic, questions of empathy and care are at the forefront of people's minds. Ethics of care promote sense of belonging and mattering (Smit, 2018).

Whilst there is ample research that support the correlation between sense of belonging and academic achievement (Flitcroft & Kelly, 2016, p.301), this paper aims to illustrate the role of Care Hubs in future schools to enhance belonging mindset and engagement for both knowledge providers (parents, community, and educators) and knowledge seekers (students). Centering efforts on developing partnerships between school staff, student and parents, fosters

student sense of belonging and values parent knowledge and involvement (Flitcroft & Kelly, 2016, p.309). Assuming school leaders are relational leaders, Care Hubs is a tool for school leaders to build and strengthen meaningful social interactions between school, students, and community. Relationship is embedded in the everyday interactions and relational practices of leaders, and underpins communication and dialogue (Cunliffe & Erikson, 2011). To facilitate a dialectic and collaborative relationship between school, students, and community, school leaders define designated spaces in future schools for people to come together, to share knowledge and build new knowledge. This space, the Care Hubs, is a protected space within the school structures that are welcoming and open to students, staff, parents, and community partners throughout the day. The function(s), norms, and terms of reference for the purpose and usage of the Care Hubs are defined and mutually agreed upon by all stakeholders (pupils, school staff, and community).

Problematizing Current Context of Schooling

Basing the foundations of ‘modern’ education primarily on Eurocentric knowledge, have promoted the exclusion of other knowledge systems; consequently, cultural injustice poses challenges to the survival of humanity; the remedy to this enduring inequity, and learning to become in the future is the premise of knowledge democracy (Hall & Tando, 2020, p.22). Courtney and Mann (2020) argue that the core of teaching and learning practices has not changed during the 20th century. The authors contribute neoliberalism’s grammar of schooling to continued segregation and inequities in education systems. Policy legitimacy in appropriating educational reform accentuates that the complex process of change is deeply embedded in social institutions, and “requires much larger shift to ideology” (Courtney & Mann, 2020, p.17); ideologies that are constructed within the Western paradigm, and discount other local cultures

that lie outside by assuming them as ‘traditional’ (Hall & Tando, 2020, p.22). Community-based epistemologies are particularly significant in creating inclusive learning environments for all students, as well as other minoritized children; however, the historical marginalization and systemic racism entrenched in most educational contexts ignores community-based knowledge (Khalifa *et. al.*, 2016) in reimagining the futures of education for increasingly diverse communities. Hall and Tando (2020) assert, the colonial occupation of the world that stemmed from Europe systematically devalued and destroyed the traditional, local, existing knowledge over the course of five centuries; during this process of colonization of knowledge local cultural practices and local mother tongues have gradually disappeared (p.22). UNESCO (2020) recognizes that attempts to reverse the consequences of this “epistemicide” (p.22) over five hundred years cannot be done without acknowledging the principles of knowledge democracy.

In his synopsis, Inayatullah (2012) argues that futures studies have evolved from predicting and interpreting the future to the capacity to define and create alternative futures. This paper utilizes foresight tools to first discuss values and beliefs that shape litany of contemporary education, then outlines desired futures for education that are signaled in UNESCO’s 2050 vision. The following Causal Layered Analysis illustrates the narratives that dominate the current school-community engagement world views.

Causal Layered Analysis (CLA)

Inayatullah (2012) recognizes the tension exists between those who regard “human agency as primary” and those who focus on “structural theories of change” (p.2). In defining the layered approach in futures studies, Inayatullah (2012) alludes to interconnectedness of external realities and internal worlds. This connection contextualizes Indigenous ways of teaching that centers one as a part of whole, and whole as a part of one. Valuing the wisdom of the past, and

existing knowledge is central to planning for inspiring futures (UNESCO, 2019). However, the worldviews of other civilizations are not considered cultural assets in understanding the future or the present, rather they are viewed as obstacles overcome (Inayatullah, 2012, p.33). The following CLA (figure 1.1) discusses the various layers of community- school engagement in education, and their connections to *individual* and/or *theory-based* dimensions.

Litany: Despite various benefits of student-centered learning, the instructional delivery model remains predominantly teacher-directed. This is in part to the belief that teachers know what is best for the students and have the skills to teach to the varying learning needs. Student governance and leadership roles are created to incorporate student voice in education planning. However, the micro politics factors in play keep student engagement at a superficial level during the process, in the GTA school districts.

Systemic Causes: Efficacy of teacher training programs, in the context of Ontario, is connected with instructional and assessment practices. Although, the Ontario Ministry documents such as Growing Success and Education for All offer strategies for equitable practices such as Differentiated Instructions and Universal Design for Learning to reach learners of various backgrounds, the aim is to deliver the curriculum-based knowledge. In Ontario, state and district policies and processes, namely: *School Councils: A guide for members* (2002), *Good Governance: A Guide for Trustees, School Boards, Directors of Education and Communities* (2014), and *Developing A School Fundraising Plan*, define the role of community engagement and their mandates.

Worldview ad Discourse: The five domains of leadership outlined in the Ontario Leadership Framework prepares principals to be effective instructional leaders and support teachers

practices to deliver the world-class Ontario curriculum, and ultimately prepare students for the increasing competitive job market. School leaders mobilize their agency to enhance student assessment scores, which is value laden and performative practice in nature. With the focus on math and literacy skills, standardized testing have limited scope and do not measure the entirety of student learning (Zhao, 2021, p.2). Furthermore, education is not just about jobs, rather it must be separated from the market so it helps young people develop the relationships and capabilities that allow them to thrive in the broader society (Facer, 2021). Moreover, Lupton and Hayes (2021) suggest to shift the focus of schooling from exam success to preparing learners for broader human-focused skills (p. 148).

Myth and Metaphor: School leaders are positional leaders, with the agency to change education outcomes for their students. However, in spite of school leaders' access to power and their articulated commitments to racial equity, research conducted in Ontario and abroad, consistently shows that racialized minorities do not have the same level of access or success as their white peers" (Davis & Armstrong, 2012, p. 28). Davis and Armstrong (2012) identify the challenge to achieving racial equity in education is the school leaders' unpreparedness for naming race and racism. Despite the readily-accessible community-based knowledge schools in the Greater Toronto Area continue to use the historic knowledge informed by colonial views to introduce and other traditions and identities. In celebrating diversity, these efforts focus on victim narrative than highlights of victory and success in history. Biased views and the risks of one dominant narrative or story are perpetuated in recognition of diversity through school-based heritage celebrations in some Ontario schools.

<i>Layers of school- community engagement in education</i>	
Litany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers know how and what to teach best • Student councils, parent organizations and community-based initiatives reflect all voices in structural leadership
Systemic Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher training programs focus on instructional and assessment practices to deliver the curriculum effectively • Policies and processes define student, parent and community engagement
Worldviews and Discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools prepare students to compete in the job market through core content knowledge delivery • Standardized assessment outcomes determine future opportunities
Myth and Metaphor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools have the capacity to deliver inclusive educations and address education inequities • Schools recognize diversity through various heritage celebrations and school-based events

Figure 1.1- CLA framework for current litany in education

Situating Care Hubs in Future Schools using the Bratton Model

The Epidemiological Model of Change adapted from the work of Benjamin Bratton (Couture, & Murgatroyd, 2021) identifies two trajectories related to change in our interconnected global complex systems. Within the Bratton model, two vertical and horizontal dimensions map the space in which we can imagine the futures of Care Hubs situating. The vertical trajectory is the degree to which communities and groups make sense of situations. The horizontal trajectory of the model represents where people place their values: individual or collective, and how those values are measured. Bringing together these two intersecting trajectories, this paper discusses the promise of Care Hubs in creating spaces where humanity’s collective intelligence mobilizes rich ways of knowing and being (UNESCO, Learning to Become, 2019). The second quadrant is

where the desired futures of education lies. However, the following synthesizes each quadrant and their implications for learning and learners.

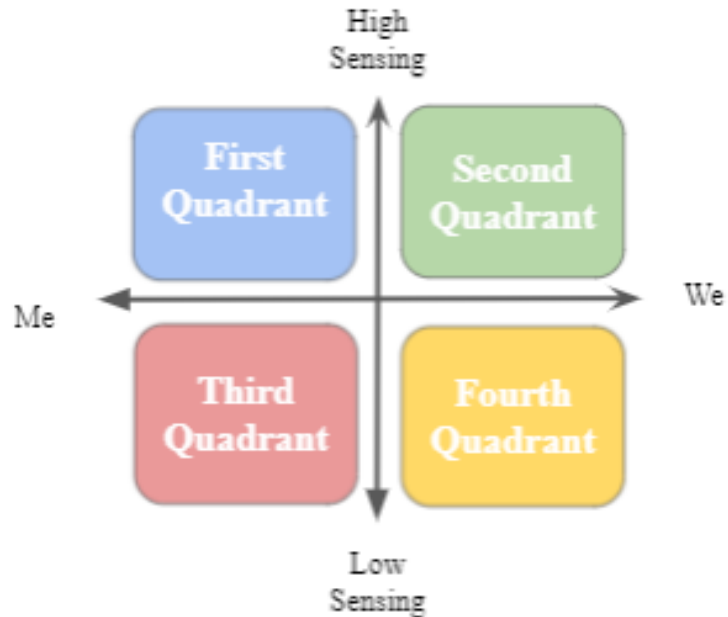


Figure 1.2- Two trajectories of change for futures of Care Hub adopted from Benjamin Bratton Model

First Quadrant: represents a commitment to the care of the student as it relates to supporting their individual academic success where there is high sensing and individual connectedness to the goal of high student performance. A compelling example for this quadrant is the Ontario Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy created in 2009. This initiative aimed to create schools where a) all students, parents, and other members of the school community feel welcomed and respected; and b) every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning (Ontario, 2009). However, since its birth in 2009, in the case of Ontario schools, one cannot claim the initial goals have been fulfilled. Evaluative measures for the efficacy of the Strategy is aligned with the province’s criteria and priorities. Stories of disproportionality and disparity continue to cause intergenerational trauma (James & Turner, 2017). Similarly, Hear

Me Out, a clip prepared by COPATORONTO (2012, Feb1), captures student voice and documents the long and short term inequities in school settings. It reveals that existing schooling systems are fertile grounds for racism, oppression, and marginalization, in the context of Ontario schools. In the video, students articulate that they fight every day to belong; schools should not be battlefields for students, rather a place where knowledge is shared and new knowledge is constructed.

Second Quadrant: is where the vision for Care Hubs in future schools is situated; where communities and schools thrive together and students' well-being is measured by their self-reported sense of belonging to their learning environments. While cities share commonalities in "composition, process and well-being" (Murgatroyd & Aris, 2020, p. 3), each possess their unique set of values, cultures, and behaviors (p.3) that have implications for "defining and applying well-being for themselves" (p.3). Based on their commonalties, cities may modify their definition of well-being to align with local priorities and/or policies. (Murgatroyd & Aris, 2020, p.3). Adopting the similar stance, in this quadrant communities determine own policies and priorities of their community schools. Moreover, Tessaro *et. al.* (2018) 5R framework: Relationship, Respect, Responsibility, Relevance and Reciprocity, for indigenizing online learning brings social cohesion in this region of high sensing and collective values.

Third Quadrant: is the region of individuation and low sensing. Some school district in the Greater Toronto Area implement a variation of nutrition program (healthy snack program, breakfast program, lunch program, grab and go, and etc.), in an attempt to address hunger and poverty in schools so that students are 'ready to learn'. One may find such humanistic initiative noble, however the individual-laden value of the intent is problematic. In one school the program is called "Food for Learning"; it implies that the *food* provided is aimed to bring students to a

ready state for curriculum-centered *learning* for the eight hours of school day rather than the simple act of love, care and compassion for another human being. In this instance, the care provided is intended for the individual human capital to access the Eurocentric curriculum. Metric to assess the success of such programs continue to value individual performance and do not reflect lived narratives of the students and communities.

Fourth Quadrant: represents individual measures (low sensing) for collective values (we). Questions of self-care and work-life balance could not be more relevant during the global pandemic. Even post-pandemic, as people gradually recover from the impact, organizations promote self-care through inclusion activities, mindfulness exercises, mental health day/week recognition and etc. Allowing time and spaces for self-care promotes ethos of care. However, organizational culture change cannot be achieved without structural change. Employees' efforts to improve mental health and well-being must be met with organizational change that allows employees to sustain and continue to enhance self-care. Conversely, employee performance and success is evaluated based on the number of absenteeism. While promoting self-care carries a collective value, how it is measured is narrow and serves individualistic goals.

Connection to UNESCO Futures of Education

During the Futures of Education (2019) launch event, President Sahle-Work Zewde addressed the United Nation assembly and stated that knowledge and learning reaches across generation; we draw on the wisdom of previous generations to “face forward to inspire and find inspirations in the hope, dreams, and plans of future generations” (UNESCO, 2019). The speaker shared the vision of the initiative by recognizing the collective and local actions, when envisioning the futures that we want. In alignment with UNESCO's Future of Education in 2050, Care Hubs broaden the consultative process of education planning to involve youth, educators,

local communities and other stakeholders (UNESCO, 2019). Ancestral and Indigenous approaches to education are rooted in love, care, and compassion. Caring is the essence of education (Smit, 2018, p.78). The reciprocal process of caring for and being cared for puts into context how the past and the future intersect I the present.

Conclusion

Alternative futures are the marriage of weights of history and the capacity to create desired futures (Inayattullah, 2012, p. 37). Care Hubs in future schools are places where communities and schools come together to define and design the futures of education they wish to experience. This community-centered dialogue seeks to affirm unique identities, promote global citizenship, celebrate human capitals, and revive ancestral approaches to knowledge seeking, knowledge keeping, and knowledge sharing. Expecting change to occur in unchanged environments is inevitable to fail. Thus, creating care Hubs in future schools provide opportunities for students, formal and informal community support providers, parents, and educators engage in intercultural dialogues, transmit knowledge through storytelling, exchange perspectives, experiences, and ideas (UNESCO, 2019). In addition to the collective resilience that local communities bring to the education, the primary goal of Care Hubs is to democratize the futures (Urry, 2016: 2-13), and bring the lost traditional and Indigenous knowledge out of the shadow of oppression and colonization. UNESCO's Futures of Education initiative signifies the plurality in future planning for education, and that we can (re)imagine more than one futures for education. Subsequently by envisioning Care Hubs in future schools, school leaders ought to remain intentional in their inclusive futures planning so that one definition of future does not blind other futures. The promise of Care Hubs mobilizes how school leaders might democratize the way the future is constructed (Urry, 2016). When imaging futures of education, Care Hubs allow us to imagine futures where

students can see the face of someone they love at school; imagine students can listen to stories in words that were stolen from their ancestors; imagine students and staff are being cared for by someone they care about every day; imagine the familiar aroma filling school buildings during local, traditional celebrations; imagine young students being able to hold the hand of someone they love, when needing a helping hand, without the constraints of policies and protocols; imagine an education where teacher's place is in people's hearts, not the classrooms, where a smile substitutes a numeric grade, where knowledge transmits through words and emotions, not only digital screens, and where one can simply feel free to be human.

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