Lindsay Davidson
Embassy International School

Engagement and Philosophy

Abstract: This article explores these two keywords through the approach of placing "school" on a continuum between the two extremes of a transactional, instrumental organisation and an aspirational and transformational community. The variety of stakeholder groups are redefined to include personification of abstract concepts and the model of community is considered including these stakeholders. The hypothesis proposed here is that school as a community can be seen as a verb rather than a noun and the extent to which school must by definition be, or have the form of, an organisation, is seen as a manifestation of the Schopenhauerian will of the community, with the levers of transaction pulled by the Head on behalf of the community. The 1994 UNESCO international conference on education provides a framework for discussion about culture and the purpose of education, which is reconciled with the evolving model described and envisioned in this short essay.

Keywords: school, engagement, community, organisation, philosophy, parents, pupils, stakeholders, 'school as a verb', Schopenhauer, socially constructed knowledge, orthodoxy and orthopraxy

Introduction

This short essay grew from a presentation given during an international seminar hosted by Akademia Ignatianum in Krakow in June 2018 where these two concepts were the theme under discussion, hence the focus here is limited to these two ideas. The writer is essentially proposing

a school paradigm which follows on from Sergiovanni (1994), going further in defining how such a model may look, not unlike Jim Collins' hedgehog model, where abstract ideas such as 'the future' and 'the past' are overtly transformed into stakeholders with a voice in guiding the school's decision processes and culture. The author acknowledges that as this paper was originally designed for a themed international seminar, this is only an attempt at provoking thought around two words, "engagement and philosophy", and that further considerations need to look at areas such as the balance between scholastic learning and vocational learning as well as these areas and moral/cultural learning (or indoctrination). Likewise, pragmatic issues concerning curriculum development and approaches to assessment and reporting, not to mention themes around identity and even those of political and broader societal engagement arise as result of a paradigm that goes beyond the here and now of an instrumental approach to education. This concept of school as a community is already active in a start-up school currently in its third year. In the school in question, the pupils initiated a series of broad school discussions (from year 5 to year 13) on the theme of 'eudaimonia'; they also petitioned the Head directly to recognise their achievements in creating a school culture in the face of substantial and rapid growth of pupil numbers and requested partnership in finding strategies to prevent the established culture from being swamped. The school is not an experiment and therefore any review of the situation cannot go beyond a case study, but nevertheless, it is hoped that this paper will encourage more practitioners to consciously define the position their schools occupy on the organisation-community continuum and to go further and apply a similar approach to reviewing more concepts than the two discussed here and practical questions such as those mentioned above.

Some basic definitions are necessary in order to clarify the limited scope of this essay's considerations.

An online dictionary states that "Engagement" is a noun defined as "the act of engaging or the state of being <u>engaged</u> […], a pledge; an obligation or agreement […], an encounter, conflict, or battle," or "the act or

state of interlocking," and its synonyms are "contract, promise". The same dictionary defines "Philosophy" as "the rational investigation of the truths and principles of being, knowledge, or conduct […], a particular system of thought based on such study or investigation […],the critical study of the basic principles and concepts of a particular branch of knowledge, especially with a view to improving or reconstituting them […], a system of principles for guidance in practical affairs [and] an attitude of rationality, patience, composure, and calm in the presence of troubles or annoyances".

Source http://www.dictionary.com/browse/engagement (accessed 3/06/2018) and http://www.dictionary.com/browse/philosophy?s=t (accessed 3/06/2018)

In a model where a school is more community than organisation, the stakeholders may be defined as follows:

pupils, host community, cultures and histories of community members (past, present and potential), intellectual achievement and designed/intended change, values (such as morality, humility, openness etc.), school sponsors (politicians, owners, governors) and their assumptions (sovereign states and ideology).

Abstract ideas have been personified and included here; they are created collectively by people and as such constructs have malleable will and nature, they are manifestations of the collective will of stakeholder groups who can only be defined through the evidence of their effects.

School – organisation or community?

Sergiovanni (1994) suggested "*changing the root metaphor for schools from organization to community*". He defines the two extremes of the organisation-community continuum (OCC) as follows:

Organisation	Community
– Members there for self-interest – Members subject to rewards and reprimands – Hierarchical structure – Based on contracts	– People united through commitments – Governed by fluctuating interdependent relationships

The writer proposes that the dialectical synthesis of these extremes is that 'school' is expressed as a verb, with teachers and classes and Heads of Department, and all the trappings of 'organisation' merely manifestations of the will (in the Schopenhauerian sense) of the community, brought into existence through the inherent need for the abstract stakeholders to influence the physical stakeholders.

What should schools do? Where do we find school philosophy?

The 1994 UNESCO international conference on education gives a list of aims for education (UNESCO report page 24). These points are discussed in depth and reduced to four essential elements by Hill (2007):

- understanding cultural identities across national frontiers
- knowledge about global issues and the interdependence of nations
- critical thinking skills applied to trans-national issues and world cultures, and
- an appreciation of the human condition around the world

Hill (2007)

Kelly also has something significant to contribute here:

The claim that it is the task of the school to transmit the culture of the society, so that the curriculum must be designed to convey what is worthwhile in that culture to all pupils… the best that has been thought and said. (Kelly 2004, p. 195).

Van Oord (2005) puts forward a view of culture described by Balagangadhara which is striking for its simplicity;

a culture is a tradition that can be identified in terms of a specific configuration of learning and meta-learning. In each configuration, one particular kind of learning activity will be dominant: it will subordinate other kinds of learning activities to itself. Such configurations of learning processes can be seen as 'culture-specific ways of learning'. (Balagangadhara 1994: 446 cited in Van Oord 2005:181)

This definition can be reconciled with the Hofstede Cultural Orientation Model [originally four dimensions (Individual versus collective IDV), Power distance index (PDI), Uncertainty avoidance index (UAI), Masculinity (MAS)], or by Keesing (1976), or that suggested by Chowdhury (2014), and when discussed further identifies two broad ap-proaches to understanding culture: orthodoxy and orthopraxy [Van Oord (2005]. These two concepts basically state that we create configurations of learning either through concepts and abstractions, or through doing.

In an extreme representation (dialectical simplification), this would reduce all cultures to points on a continuum between the two extremes of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. This would give us a point of entry to investigate the question of what is philosophy.

Seen in a community paradigm, schools can be said to exist in order to facilitate transfer of ideas and habits between stakeholder groups in a controlled and defined manner, leading to desired and predicted change in the stakeholders, evolution of their individual and collective 'culture'. This is a collective transformation based on free will and by definition requires self-awareness of the participants and consequently a capacity for interaction and change.

This demands that each stakeholder group is able to define itself and alter its position along this orthopraxy-orthodoxy continuum. The abstract ideas here evolve through research and debate and interaction between the physical stakeholders, they evolve through and depend upon the production of socially constructed knowledge.

In their discussion, Bernstein, Elvin and Peters (Bernstein, Elvin and Peters, 1966) explain the significance of passing through the differentiating

ritual (entrance test) for both pupil and parents and so joining a group sep-
arate to the rest of society, and in going through the test accepting sub-
servience to the regime that administered it, which then demands absolute
obedience, and rejects those who do not reinforce the authority relation-
ship. Subservience is essentially loss of individual autonomy and therefore
an act of disengagement. The writer proposes that the implication of this
is that schools should define their philosophy with ever-increasing strength
and clarity and accept those who freely wish to join, based not on a cen-
trally created 'interview' or entrance test, but on a free discussion whereby
values are made as explicit as possible, and all participants acknowledge
awareness of this. Mutual acceptance and recognition should be the crite-
ria for joining a school/community.

Hayden's (2012) paper highlights how a mission statement can con-
tribute to the cosmopolitanism of the school, and here this means the
growth of the school based on expression of ever-increasing diversity of
details in viewpoints.

Communities of Practice

As a verb, 'school' is a manifestation of a highly complex Venn dia-
gram; a result of a series of overlapping communities of practice repre-
senting stakeholder groups.

The community paradigm is based on the dialectical principle and
functions through distributed transformational leadership, and thus sev-
eral leaders are required to persuade members to transform their view-
points.

Marsh and Hau, quoted in Sullivan (2009), argue that selective school-
ing lowers academic self-concept; selection of membership of each com-
munity of practice based on ritualised roles would reduce member
diversity and thus academic self-concept, potentially creating a direction
of decreasing engagement. This can be countered by regular change of
leadership and membership, in different rhythmical cycles, and poten-
tially visitation from other groups or guest interlocutors.

Warries (1982) highlights an inherent weakness in the process of selection without absolute, universal criteria, but only using comparison between children as a distinguisher – he argues that this potentially dilutes the future capacity for the teacher to bring about maximum and most appropriate (targeted) educational change in the pupil and compromises the scope for absolute achievement as the teacher may become embroiled in measuring rather than educating. Analogically this suggests that participation in school through identifying with openly stated values, but not on tests centrally created and administered, should lead to deeper engagement collectively and a sense of being able to achieve as a group and thus ever more engagement and through this active participation, evolution of those values.

Furthermore, this construct of distributed leadership based on equality between stakeholders logically creates a periphery to centre model of curriculum (both formal and informal), granting the child (and all other stakeholders) a greater individual role and place in creating the programme of learning and allows them to take possession of and control their position as learners within the overlapping communities of practice (Borzillo, Aznar and Schmitt, 2011) and logically leads to increasing engagement and through the dialectical process, greater clarity and detail in the values.

Kelly highlighted the risks of the opposite stating that educational theorists "having set out their educational principles, have immediately translated these into prescriptions for subject content, and have thus failed to recognize that education consists of learning through subjects rather than the learning of subjects." (Kelly 2004, p201), creation of nouns rather than adding adjectives or indeed adverbs to stakeholders and their actions.

The implication of Boylan (2010) is that the teacher interacting on a one to one basis with a child plays a huge role in liberating and empowering that child, giving them a sense of belonging with the result that said child becomes the primary agent in the situative aspect of learning. This assertion is reinforced by Morais (2002). This of course depends upon the professionalism and effectiveness of the teacher themselves, as noted by Kelly, "Education is an interactive process, and the quality of

that interaction must always depend on the professional capability of the individual teacher." (Kelly, 2004, p209). Centralisation of curriculum planning and prescription of content is noted to suffocate the system and de-skill teachers (Nikolakaki, Dossa, & Moraiti, 2012) and therefore the Venn diagram image of school can only be considered a strength. Here, for increased engagement and growth of collective philosophy we should also consider the question of who is the teacher and who is the pupil – indeed we need to see each stakeholder as both teacher and pupil and create many constellations of teacher-pupil combinations.

If communities of practice are formed by discussion and debate (Busher et al, 2007) then clearly a platform for this needs to be created. Debate occurs when one or more thesis is presented to a discussion chamber together with an antithesis; the community of practice arises as a consequence of the process of synthesis. Organisational structures are ultimately the responsibility of the Head of School, and should be altered if the working groups identify a need for this.

In a paper that discusses community of practice in more depth, based on a wide review of literature, Busher et al (2007) note that studies frequently focus on the role or position of middle leader without referring in depth to what is experienced by the person filling that role. In a small school, the experience of the people involved, the *transformation* of their practice and understanding, their reflection and their transformational leadership of the children and each other must be important. Rotation of the role of lead facilitator throughout working groups will contribute to empowerment, breadth of skills, affect (noted as vital by James and Connolly et al, 2006) and personal development.

 As Rathod (2013) points out in a brief but clear article, concept mapping is is an effective method to improve cognitive skills, and from a constructivist perspective it can allow each community of practice to explore the fundamental concepts regarding their 'culture' held by members prior to building upon them, including aspects of the values that support them. This therefore facilitates ordered exchange between communities of practice and definition of self-awareness and through recognition of increasing diversity can build engagement and represent a manifestation

of what the school is. Concept mapping can lead to a kind of artificial intelligence.

Concepts of knowledge vary across cultures, and so the fundamental assumptions concerning a major part of what the school aims to transmit (and how) should ideally also be subject to examination by the stakeholder groups. This is discussed in depth by Zhong (2012) in a fascinating article about Socrates and Confucius comparing their respective concepts of 'knowing'.

Lave and Wenger (1991) discuss in more depth learning as social and situated, commented on also by Boylan (2010); combining Vygotsky and these writers with the Venn diagram model of 'school as a verb' and the assumption of meaningful, multi-directional interaction between stakeholder groups, supported by management (as the instrumental realisation of the 'will' of the school community) we can see a potent recipe for engagement and philosophical development for all participants.

However, as Leithwood et al (Leithwood et al, 2006) point out, distributed leadership, particularly in a small school, can bring about change; a view supported by Rost's (1991) discussion of leadership and management and further strengthened if we consider the issue through Sergiovanni's (1994) metaphor of school as a community more than an organisation. Hence, it can be asserted that active change in respect to the experienced curriculum can be brought about in the school/community through the concerted action of convinced individuals; where leadership is distributed it is coupled with empowerment of those individuals who have appropriate responsibility.

Dimmock and Walker (2003, p71) define culture as "*the enduring sets of beliefs, values, ideologies and behaviours that distinguish one group of people from another*". In their chapter, they are careful to cite strong empirical evidence from multiple sources supporting their assertions. Within schools there will be several cultural sub-groupings – industrialists, intellectuals, national groups, teaching staff to name a few. As Dimmock and Walker show, organisational cultures can be consciously manipulated by a leader over the short term, whereas societal cultures change more slowly. Influence between the leader and the organisational culture

is mutual whereas the community (societal) aspect of the cultural group is essentially beyond the direct individual influence of the leader, requiring sustained input over time by several leaders. In this regard, it is commented (Dimmock and Walker, 2003) that the organisational culture of the community surrounding the school is unlikely to lessen the effect of the societal cultures of the individual families that constitute this community, rather more to highlight this (citing Laurent, 1983). Sergiovanni asserts that in communities empowerment goes from individuals to the group, whereas in organisations it goes in the opposite direction – in effect delegation rather than initiative taking. This is logical, and helps us understand where any school is located on the Organisation-Community Continuum.

The 'school as a verb' should also have a defined person to lead discussion around philosophy (probably not the Head, as this would be representative of authoritarian structure and drive the school towards the organisation end of the continuum).

Conclusions – practical summary of how to support philosophy and engagement

A concept map should be visible in school stating a summary of the concepts understood to date regarding what the 'school/community as a verb' is (its philosophy), and created through discussion based on consensus and equality between all stakeholder groups. These concepts should be explicitly shared with all joining the school. This should include concepts of learning, knowing, creation and transfer of knowledge.

Schools need an evolving vision and mission statement, a definition of stakeholders, communities of practice which change shape and leaders cyclically, involving ever expanding spirals of participants and a forum for regular interaction between these groups in order to create an action zone ('school as a verb') where engagement and philosophy exist as two active and 'conscious' aspects of each complex individual in the school community and where each stakeholder group and participant is self-aware and empowered to both contribute and change.

As a result of this short essay, investigating only two words, the writer calls to school leaders who are seeking to revitalise their school paradigm to consider using these ideas as a foundation for action research to formally investigate the ways in which this way of thinking brings changes to measurable aspects of 'school as a community' and as a 'community with aspiration' as well as the very down to earth issues of reducing parental discontent and teacher-parent conflict and ensuring pupil engagement and self-esteem. It is also hoped that this paradigm can be deployed to further inform and explore issues not touched upon here, such as curriculum, teaching/learning for intercultural awareness, teaching for identity.

References

Boylan, M. (2010). Ecologies of participation in school classrooms. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 26, pp. 67–70.

Bernstein, B., Elvin, H. L., Peters, R. S. (1966), Ritual in Education, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B 251,* pp. 429–436

Borzillo, S., Aznar, S., Schmitt, A., (2011), A journey through communities of practice: How and why members move from the periphery to the core, *European Management Journal*, 29, pp. 25–42.

Busher H., Hammersley-Fletcher L. & Turner C. (2007) 'Making sense of middle leadership: community, power and practice'. School Leadership & Management. Vol 27, No 5, pp. 405–422.

Chowdhury, P. (2014), *Value Education in the Light of Culture Quotient: A Step Towards a Peaceful World,* International Educational E-Journal, III:I

Dimmock, C. & Walker, A., 'School Leadership in Context – Societal and Organisational Culture', in Bush, T. & Bell, L. (2003), The Principles and Practice of Educational Management, London: Paul Chapman.

Hayden, M., Thompson, J., Walker, G., 2004., *International Education in Practice. [online]*. Routledge. Available from: <http://www.myilibrary.com?ID=2471> 9 July 2014.

Hayden, M., (2012), *Mission statement possible: International schools and cosmopolitanism*, The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives, 11(2), pp. 5–26.

Hill, I., (2006), *Do International Baccalaureate programs internationalise or globalise?*, International Education Journal 7 (1), pp. 98–108.

James C., Connolly M., Dunning G. & Elliott T. (2006) How very effective primary schools work. Paul Chapman Publishers, London. (Chapter 12).

Keesing R.M. (1976) *Cultural Anthropology: A Contemporary Perspective*. New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston.

Kelly, A.V., (2004), Curriculum, The: Theory and Practice. SAGE Publications. Accessed <http://lib.myilibrary.com?ID=37096> 26 December 2012.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Leithwood K., Day C., Sammons P., Harris A. & Hopkins D. (2006) *Seven strong claims about successful school leadership*. National College for School Leadership, Nottingham.

Morais, A. M. (2002), Basil Bernstein at the Micro Level of the Classroom, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 23:4, 559–569

Nikolakaki, M., Dossa, K., Moraiti. T., (2012), School knowledge, cross-curricularity and teamwork teaching in the Greek primary school: mathematics education as discursive practice, *Curriculum Journal*, 23(2), pp. 247–260

Rathod, S.S. (2013), *Concept mapping – a technique for improving Cognitive skills*, International Educational E-Journal, II:I

Rost J.C. (1991) 'Leadership and Management', in Rost J.C. (1991) Leadership for the Twenty-First Century, Westport CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, pp. 97–114

Sergiovanni, TJ. (1994), *'Organisations or Communities? Changing the metaphor changes the theory'*, Educational Management and Administration, 30, pp. 214–66.

Sullivan, A. (2009), Academic self-concept, gender and single-sex schooling, British Educational Research Journal, 35:2, pp. 259–288.

UNESCO, International Conference on Education, 44th Session, Geneva, 3–8 October 1994.

Van Oord, L. (2005). Culture as a configuration of learning. *Journal of Research in International Education* . 4 (2), 173.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Walker, G. (2005), "What have I learned about international education?" transcript of speech from 9 September 2005, Stockholm, Biennial Conference of IB Nordic Schools.

Warries, E. (1982), Relative measurement and the selective philosophy in education, *Evaluation in Education*, 5 (2), pp. 191–202

ZHONG, J. (2012). Different Images of Knowledge and Perspectives of Pedagogy in Confucius and Socrates. *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education*. 8 (1), pp. 75–81

Information about the author:

Lindsay Davidson, PhD founded an international school (pre-school to year 13) in Krakow, Poland and continues to lead it as Director of Education. He has written a short book about "The Place and Potential of Music in the Primary School" and his research interests revolve around the use of music in general

education and human development as well as matters concerning the teaching and learning of music. He also runs a teaching bagpipes website, translates academic texts from Polish to English and is active as a musician and composer.

Lindsay Davidson
Embassy International School
ul. Edmunda Biernackiego 10
30-043 Krakow, Poland
l.davidson@embassyschool.pl
lindsaydavidson@lindsaydavidson.co.uk