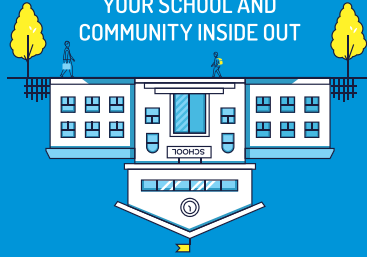


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WHY IT'S TIME TO TURN
YOUR SCHOOL AND
COMMUNITY INSIDE OUT



MALCOLM GROVES AND
JOHN WEST-BURNHAM

Chapter 13 Toolkit 3

Developing stakeholder conversations

For schools who are looking to engage their wider stakeholders, this does not necessarily require formal structures or representation. One more informal but still purposeful strategy that may be helpful is the process developed by Schools of Tomorrow for starting conversations with stakeholders about what they want and expect from schools. Once again there is no single 'right' approach; local context really matters.

Finding a focus

There are a number of possible ways to find a point of entry for starting a conversation with your stakeholders about the purpose of school and what makes a quality education.

Activities may usefully revolve around examining the purpose of the school in and for its communities, as perceived by its stakeholders. What does a good education look like, in its broadest sense? What is the point of going to school? What do our communities want from their school? But to start with such questions could be off-putting and not lead to a shared understanding of the task in hand. Here are a few alternative approaches, offering three broad entry points that you may want to explore. These are not exclusive and inevitably have a degree of overlap.

Stakeholder group

You might choose to begin by bringing together members of one (or more) of your stakeholder groups. You will need to determine who the stakeholders are for your school: parents, pupils, governors, faith groups, voluntary groups, local business members, etc. It may be that it is best to choose one group for an initial focus. (In that case, you will need to decide at what point and in what way would it be desirable to bring different stakeholder groups together.)

Consider as well whether there is a particular place for school students. How might student leaders be involved in designing, planning and implementing stakeholder conversations?

Possible topics for conversation could include the following:

- Good and not-so-good things: describing the good things (past activities) we should build on and the things to do less of or not at all.
- Designing the characteristics and qualities of the future school: what people see, feel and will work towards.

Place

You might decide to focus on those people in your local communities who have a strong social or economic interest in the area your school serves, to find out what they seek from their local school in terms of preparing their young people to understand and shape their futures. Some of these may be known to you already because of your existing links, but there may also be umbrella groups such as a council of voluntary service, a citizens advice bureau or a local chamber of commerce who could point you in new directions as well.

Inevitably this approach raises the question of boundaries, which will almost certainly overlap with other schools, and how you can approach managing these.

A possible approach might include some of the following ideas:

- Creating a timeline of key events in the school/local community, where participants share their stories linked to what they have written on the timeline. This can lead to the beginnings of participants finding common ground.

- Considering how the past can help to plan for the future of the school.
 - Describing the good things that the school/community does that it should build on.
 - Describing the things that the school/community does not do so well. What things does it do that it should do less of or not at all?
 - Discussing current local trends, possibly taken from the media, to raise awareness of key issues for your local communities.
 - Trying to establish the current trends that the school can be proud of having dealt with before exploring those areas where more could be done.
 - Establishing what the big future questions are that need to be addressed.
 - Activities related to the future school that the group wants to see. This does not have to be something static or purely verbal. It might be a creative activity, constructing visual images of change by, for example, using media such as art, video or drama.
- How can you ensure that you are not only reaching the 'usual suspects'?
 - What form should the invitation take to make it attractive and readable?
 - How far ahead should the invitation be issued to get a good response?

To what will they be invited?

- Is this some special event or is it part of an existing arrangement?
- Consider issues of where, when and for how long. Is school the best venue?
- A school might be an intimidating place for some so does it make more sense to go to where people are, rather than expect them to come to you?
- What is an optimum time and duration? The timing is crucial to attracting the largest and most varied number of stakeholders.
- Is it a one-off at this stage or part of a series of engagements?
- Refreshments?
- What is the hook to persuade people to take the time to be involved?

What will be done with the results?

- How will outcomes be shared? With participants? With others?
- What is the relationship of the emerging stakeholder conversation strategy to the school's governance structures?

You might in time move on to:

- Agreeing future directions and the strategies required to move towards them.
- Working on common values linked to future directions and prioritising them.
- Developing a draft vision statement for the future school that the group wants.
- Establishing action plans for agreed future directions.

Issue

Another approach could be built around a particular issue that concerns your stakeholders, sitting underneath the umbrella question of how well we prepare young people to understand and shape their futures (for example the future of work, or mental health and wellbeing).

There is a range of possible stimuli that might be useful in initiating this, for instance:

- Films on the chosen issue. These might be documentaries or dramas.
- Speakers from different perspectives and interest groups, local or national.
- PowerPoint presentations.
- Activities, such as World Café or Open Space Technology.¹

Practical issues for consideration include the following:

How will participants be invited?

- How many are you seeking to take part?

1. See <http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/> and <https://openspaceworld.org/wp2/what-is/>.