

## FEATURE 11.3

# It Takes a School to Raise a Village

CAROL GORELICK

Today, most of us recognize that the educational system doesn't terminate at the boundary of school property. The concept of community schools has developed from a preference for teaching children in neighborhood schools to a movement that sees the school as a hub that brings together many partners to offer a range of support and opportunities for children, youth, families, and the larger community. From 2007–2010, the ABC Connects program applied a systems approach and organizational learning tools to the challenge of transforming two schools in South Africa and two schools in Detroit, Michigan, into vibrant centers of community life. These schools engaged with parents and other education stakeholders to address the challenges of poverty, improve teaching and learning, and support students' well-being and development. At the same time, students and teachers benefited from taking part in cross-cultural learning opportunities with their counterparts on the other side of the globe. ABC Connects continues to build on the lessons learned from this pilot program.



Carol Gorelick

**W**e as children have power to change the whole world. Learn as much as you can. Be somebody in life. Try to change the world." Akhona Sokutu, a ninth grader at the Willow Park School in East London, South Africa, made this moving statement at the launch of the ABC Connects project, attended by 1,000 students, teachers, school leaders, partners, and community members. ABC Connects uses a systems approach and organizational learning tools to improve the quality of education for children and young people in poor areas. From 2007–2010, through a three-year action research pilot program funded by the Kellogg Foundation, my partner and I

sought to transform two schools in South Africa and two schools in Detroit, Michigan, into vibrant centers of community life. These schools engaged with parents and other education stakeholders to address the challenges of poverty, improve teaching and learning, and support the well-being and development of students in becoming empowered, active, and informed citizens.

We began with the awareness that the role of education in developing productive, responsible citizens in a chaotic environment is a complex problem. We believed that our approach would improve the pilot schools and build stronger communities. Our intention was to identify similarities and differences among the schools as well as collect lessons learned. To a large extent, we achieved our objectives. The principals and teachers in Detroit were excited about the opportunity for their students and parents to see the hope that exists in South Africa despite extremely limited resources. In South Africa, the schools learned from experienced U.S. teachers, specifically about language and literacy instruction. Future plans exist for building on this short but rich experience by continuing to create educational environments that use the ABC Connects approach and by creating cross-cultural opportunities for students, teachers, and schools.

### Origins of ABC Connects

In 2000, I was a visiting professor at the Graduate School of Business at the University of Cape Town. Apartheid had ended only six years before my trip. In addition to the requisite tourist stops, I immersed myself in the culture and met local people as much as time allowed. To be sure that I saw many sides of life in post-apartheid Cape Town, I made it a priority to tour the townships.

Townships are residential settlements that were built to segregate nonwhites under the apartheid system. A large percentage of Cape Town's population still resides in townships. Despite their poverty, these areas are abuzz in culture. I visited the township of Langa, not far from Cape Town. The tour driver scattered stray dogs and chickens as he drove the minibus through a muddy parking lot and pulled up in front of two brightly painted shipping containers. A guide greeted us and led us into one of the containers. The walls were covered with crude yet cheerful artifacts: the alphabet, numbers, children's work papers, and shelves of books. These shipping containers were home to the Chris Hani Independent School.

According to our host, Maureen Jacobs, the principal and one of two teachers, this innovative structure was originally designed to hold 100 students, but 200 learners were present. This community school served functionally illiterate, culturally deprived children, mostly girls, ranging in age from five to 16. The purpose was to transform them into school-ready learners who could be mainstreamed into the state-supported public education system.

Ms. Jacobs signaled to the children to move to an open space at the back of the shipping container. They quickly formed groups and performed several songs and dances. Their energy and enthusiasm were palpable. When the tour guide indicated that it was time to leave, I asked if I could do anything that would be helpful.

Softly, Ms. Jacobs responded, "Clothes for the girls."

I was overwhelmed by this experience. Despite the extraordinary hardship in the township, I felt a real sense of hope. The spirit of this makeshift schoolhouse was infectious. I saw the potential for breaking the cycle of poverty through small, strategic interventions and was determined to learn more about community schools.

### The Challenge

The concept of community schools has developed from a preference for teaching children in neighborhood schools to a movement that sees the

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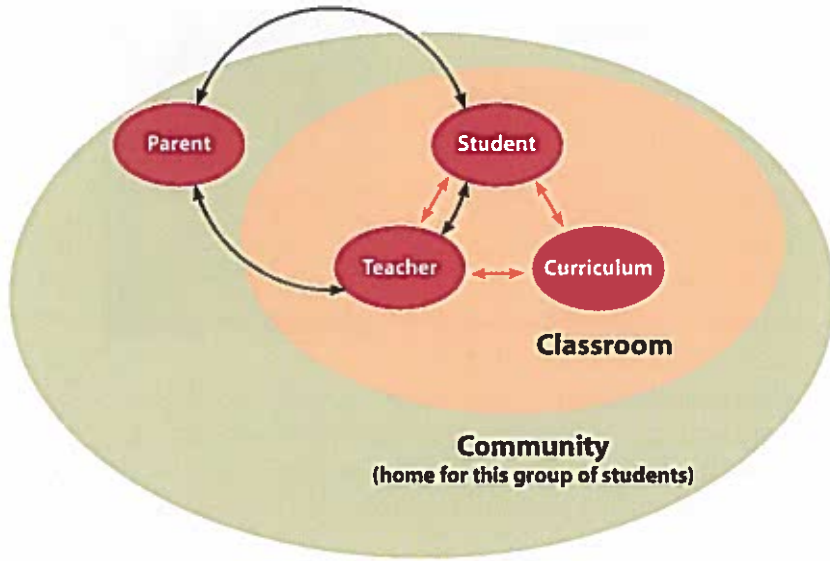
**The concept of community schools has developed from a preference for teaching children in neighborhood schools to a movement that sees the school as a hub.**

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school as a hub that brings together many partners to offer a range of support and opportunities for children, youth, families, and the larger community. The traditional focus of schooling has been teaching and learning, the instructional core (Figure 1, p.18). As populations shifted and increased, educational institutions grew from one-room schoolhouses into organizations with added layers of complexity. Modern advancements, such as changes in technology, government, media, culture, and other socioeconomic factors, directly and indirectly impact the classroom experience. Figure 2 (p.18) represents the stakeholders that participate in today's educational process.

For many children, however, these modern advancements do not ensure a quality education. If learners come to school hungry, have witnessed violence in the neighborhood, are concerned about the well-being of parents and caregivers, or are plagued by the myriad of other social issues that occur in struggling communities, the educational process cannot be effective, no matter how well administered or well intentioned. Social

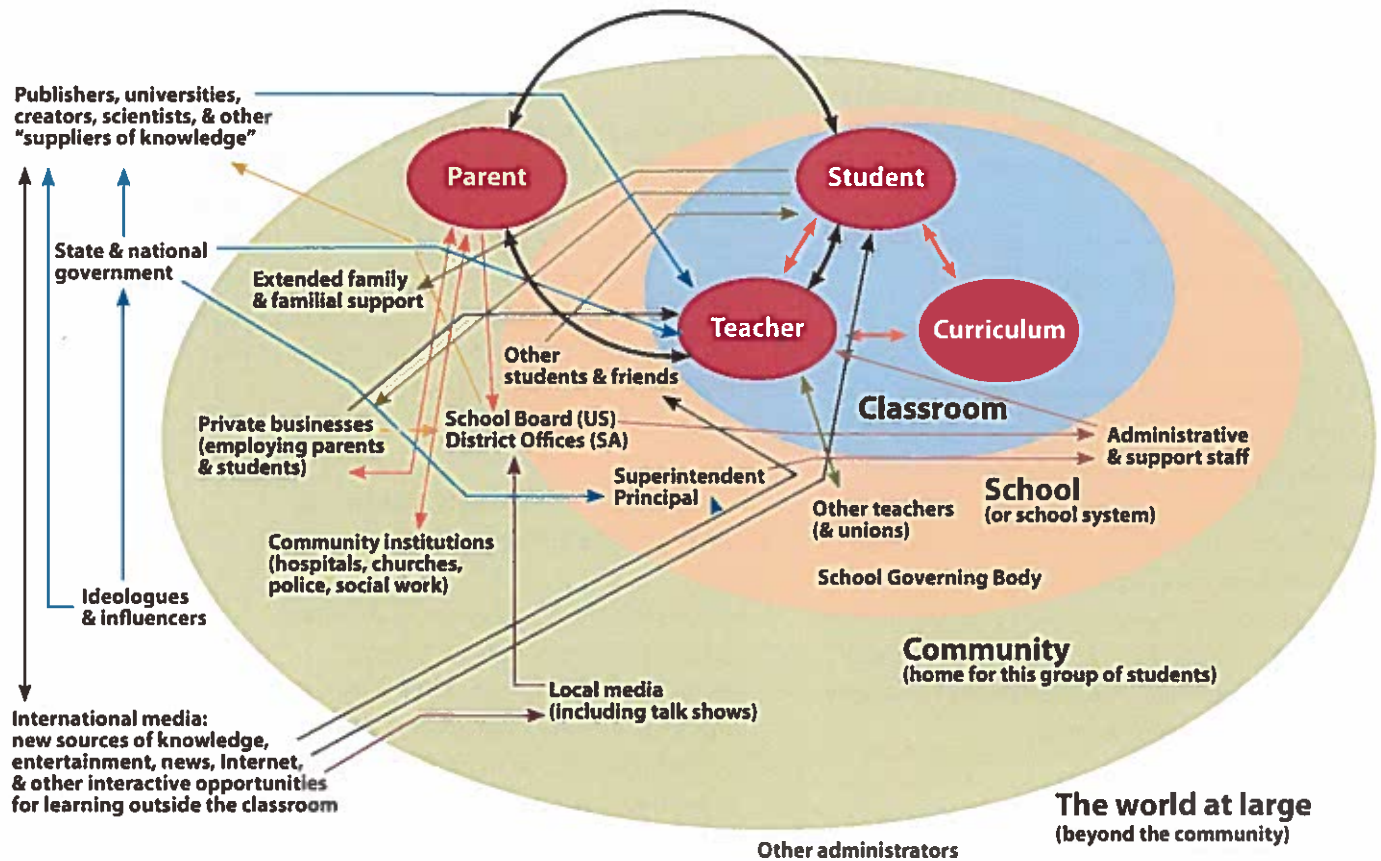
FIGURE 1 **The Instructional Core**



problems are always interconnected and collectively limit or deny children and young people the ability to take advantage of educational opportunities.

Today, we recognize that the educational system doesn't terminate at the boundary of school property. Addressing the many challenges that students and teachers face requires a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach to community building that cuts across environments and incorporates a wide range of interventions. Social and personal problems are not exclusive to poor communities but are exacerbated in such environments, because the opportunity to get a good education is often the only hope for students and their families to move out of poverty.

FIGURE 2 **Stakeholders in Today's Educational Process**



## Making It Happen

The opportunity to work in community schools presented itself when I met Allistair Witten while he was working on his master's degree at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Al was a South African principal who had transformed a once-dilapidated public school in a dangerous Cape Town township into a vibrant center of community life. He eventually received a scholarship to Harvard to codify what he knew implicitly into a replicable theory and model for a systems approach to learning. We decided to launch ABC Connects and used what we named the "School-Based Community Learning Model" as the conceptual framework for ABC Connects' action learning projects.

Al and I believed that persistent poverty and inequality affect the life experiences and opportunities of young people and their families by undermining their potential to participate as active citizens in building sustainable local, national, and global communities. The need for educational programs that influence community change, and community change that influences educational programs, has never been greater in the U.S. or South Africa. Al and I shared a passion for education, South Africa, and the scores of children in underprivileged communities who could benefit from a new approach to education.

Through ABC Connects, we sought to involve all of the stakeholders in the extended community, using the school as a central hub. We planned to facilitate interventions and develop programs to provide youth and their families with support and services to enhance their cognitive, social, and emotional development. With the support of a Kellogg grant,\* we created a practice field for action learning projects to apply the conceptual theory while simultaneously developing methods and capturing lessons learned.

## Our Goals

By facilitating collaborative events and ongoing support with and for school principals, teachers,

## Allistair Witten

Allistair Witten was a teacher and principal at Lavender Hill Primary School in Cape Town. At that time, the South African Minister of Education was planning a Safe School program to provide schools at risk with electric fences. Al spoke out against this intervention, suggesting instead that "we must invite the community in." He started to think about what connects parents and youth to the school, and how they can be persuaded to see the school as an asset to the community.



Al began by raising the funds to run a skills development program to make bricks and blocks for building new houses, with the support of a local technical college and the University of Cape Town Business School. Within eight months, the brick-making venture had created jobs for local workers. Also, the number of break-ins in the community dropped.

Witten's experience led him to Harvard's Graduate School of Education, where he developed the School-Based Complementary Learning Model that provided the conceptual framework for the ABC Connects pilot projects. Al returned to South Africa after completing his dissertation in 2010. In August 2011, he was appointed Director of the Centre for the Community School within the Faculty of Education at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

parents, and other community partners, our objectives for the ABC Connects pilot program were to:

- implement the School-Based Community Learning framework at four schools;
- establish active linkages with the community and other external stakeholders aimed at supporting projects that used the framework;
- strengthen community relations, promote civic participation, and increase the intellectual and financial resources in the school community;

\* SoL and then-executive director Sherry Immediato were the official recipients of the grant and managed the funds.



## The School-Based Community Learning Model

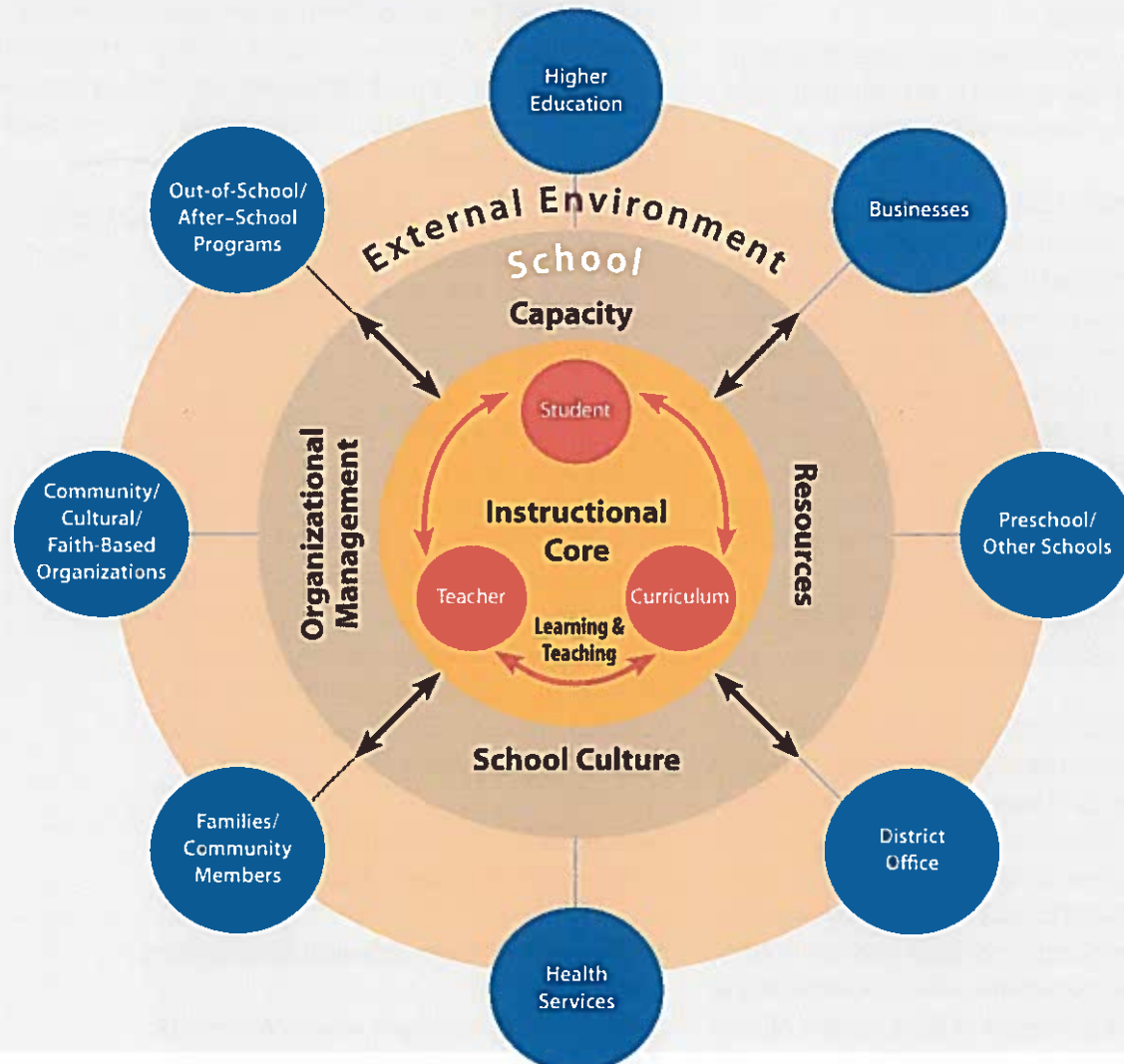
The Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) developed the concept of “complementary learning,” which focuses on the different contexts in which children develop and learn. HFRP research has shown that deliberate and focused efforts to link the various learning contexts foster positive, consistent educational and developmental outcomes for youth and their families.

For his doctoral dissertation, Allistair Witten proposed the notion of “School-Based Complementary Learning,” in which the school becomes the central hub that is explicitly connected to other learning contexts (Witten,

A. M. 2010. “Building the community school: How school principals can lead in addressing educational and social challenges in South Africa”). For practitioners, it is called the “School-Based Community Learning Model.”

Schools and their leaders can play a key role in building school–community partnerships. They can act as *initiating agents* who start relationships and projects with other stakeholders, or as *integrating agents* who connect existing initiatives to students, parents, and other partners. Figure 3 is a visual representation of the School-Based Complementary Learning Model.

FIGURE 3 **School-Based Complementary Learning Model**



- build capacity in each local community to sustain the work beyond the pilot;
- create methods and tools as well as measurement and evaluation instruments to scale up and expand the program; and
- host a conference at the end of the pilot to launch a community of practice for the four pilot schools and Allistair Witten's three dissertation schools.

To implement the School-Based Community Learning framework in the pilot schools, we developed a six-step process. Our aim was to help communities in a lasting and sustainable way without being prescriptive. The community stakeholders themselves needed to identify problems and implement solutions, supported by the process we provided.

### The Pilot Project

The ABC Connects project team initiated pilot interventions in two schools in East London, South Africa, and two schools in Detroit, Michigan.

**Year One (2007–2008):** During the first grant year, each of the schools developed a vision and identified high-priority projects to achieve that vision. From the beginning, a critical component was strengthening relationships within each school and with its immediate network, and forging new relationships and partnerships with businesses and other previously unengaged stakeholders. For example, in South Africa, PetroSA committed significant funding for school improvement. The principals and staff were also inspired by the future opportunity to connect South African and Detroit students and teachers.

**Year Two (2008–2009):** In the second year, we did a culture survey at each school to collect empirical data to understand the current situation. We used the results to focus our professional development and project plans. We also began to connect the South African and Detroit schools through a pen-pal exchange for students and a “Critical Friends” literacy project for teachers. PetroSA sponsored an ABC Connects launch event at both South African schools.

## The Six-Step Process

The steps are not intended to be a linear structure, but rather an iterative process:

**Step 1. Build Relationships** by reaching out to community members, groups, and organizations.

**Step 2. Create a Vision** by collecting desires for the school from its teachers, leaders, students, and the community.

**Step 3. Assess “What”** by asking all partners tough questions about obstacles and assets.

**Step 4. Develop Pathways** to the future by drawing a roadmap of how to get “where we want to be” by identifying organizations, groups, and individuals needed to support the journey.

**Step 5. Build Capacity** for the future by guiding school communities in becoming training grounds for the work they will do on their own tomorrow. Our commitment is to create sustainable local communities rather than achieve specific program outcomes.

**Step 6. Measure and Evaluate** by looking back at the results and asking: What happened? What do we keep? What do we change or improve?

**Year Three (2009–2010):** During the third year, we focused on supporting the schools with their projects and on developing people’s confidence with using a systems approach and organizational learning tools so that they could continue the work after the pilot officially ended. We planned a conference to celebrate, communicate, and disseminate the outcomes and learning, and to launch a community of practice to support ongoing and expanded work.

Here are some of the specific features of and outcomes at the different sites:

### *Willow Park Primary School in East London, South Africa*

Even before ABC Connects arrived, Willow Park Primary was a community school. It had been a

## Core Project Team

Name	Function	Location
Carol Gorelick	Project Director	New York, NY
Al Witten	Co-Director	Boston, MA
Sarah Bruhn	External Evaluator, Detroit	Ann Arbor, MI
Gordon Brode	Communications Manager	New York, NY
Jennifer Downing	Culture Survey Evaluator	Boston, MA
Pat Goosen	Local Coordinator, South Africa	East London, South Africa
Lorraine Lawrence	External Evaluator, South Africa	East London, South Africa
Duke Stump	Strategy, Branding	Brentwood, NH

"Model-C" (whites only) school during apartheid. Upon desegregation, the middle-class white students were replaced by black and colored students from at least three remote townships and squatter settlements. This demographic shift

resulted in serious tensions between the school and its adjacent white neighborhood and an immediate collapse of school-fee revenue.

Mr. Swanepoel, the principal, and the school's administrators also had to adapt to the fact that, while instruction took place in English, many learners spoke only Xhosa or Zulu. In addition, many of the students' parents came out of an educational system where parent involvement in schools was minimal. Not knowing how to interact with their children's teachers and others at the school, they often chose not to participate in parent meetings.

Even with these challenges, the principal was undaunted. He successfully demanded funds from the school district, worked overtime to reach out to the surrounding community, and methodically expanded parental involvement. These efforts resulted in an increase in revenue from school fees and better relationships with the parents. The school established a system so that unemployed parents could work at the school five days per month as their payment of school fees.

Many South African children so rarely have had their photos taken that a chance to appear on camera incites a joyful frenzy at Willow Park Primary.





To bring the staff and leadership team closer together, the ABC Connects project held three offsite staff development sessions. In addition, administrators attended management and leadership courses. Teacher Eleanor Hansio said, "The project encouraged us to work together as a team. We now tend to consult one another more about learners."

During the ABC Connects project, the school purchased a school bus to enable sports teams to compete with other schools and built a netball court. A computer, laser printer, and wireless Internet were installed. With community support, the student meal program was expanded; a new mobile library provided reading opportunities for each child. Beyond Basics, a Detroit-based NGO, facilitated art and book-making projects that gave kids the opportunity to see what they could create, improving their self-esteem.

Willow Park's initial visioning workshop identified a community food garden as a high priority for employing community members, stocking the school's kitchen, and offering agricultural training to students. The plan was to acquire a large plot of land adjacent to the school for the garden. Local farmers offered to provide materials and training. A small prototype garden was planted on the school property as proof of concept. Unfortunately, the large project still has not come to fruition due to legal and political conflicts over zoning and ownership of the land.

### ***Pefferville Primary School in East London, South Africa***

In 1973, a temporary prefabricated building was erected on the outskirts of the Pefferville community to serve as a school until a proper structure could be built. Almost 40 years later, this structure faithfully stands as the Pefferville Primary School. Over time, the school has been plagued by vandalism, break-ins, and hard luck. Campaigns to engage the community in cleaning up and participating in the school were largely unsuccessful.

By the time ABC Connects arrived in 2007, morale among staff was extremely low, and serious divisions existed. Dilapidated school buildings were surrounded by overgrown scrub. There were no boys' restrooms in the school. Administrators and teachers were skeptical about the prospects of change through ABC Connects.

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An early ABC task was to purchase modular furniture for the unused staff room to encourage collaboration. Acquiring the furniture served to break down staff cliques, create a culture of scheduled meetings, and provide an informal setting for teachers and administrators to interact. The initiative led the teachers to prioritize their needs. With funds from corporate partners, people from the community repaired the facilities. ABC Connects installed a computer, laser printer, and wireless Internet; sent educators to team-building sessions; and provided training for school leaders. The school opened its first physical library with major help from the U.S.-based NGO Room to Read and the efforts of two passionate teachers.

Nevertheless, parent involvement remained low. A turning point occurred when the school planned a meeting and sent parents invitations written in English and Xhosa, the most prevalent African language in the Eastern Cape. At least 140 people showed up, and the excitement was palpable. When asked, parents enthusiastically volunteered for school activities.

As a result of the activities at the school, one of ABC Connects' local partners recommended Pefferville for a nationally televised community self-improvement contest called "Kwanda." More than 2,250 residents were trained and employed in an eight-month project focused on building





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**Pefferville Primary, before and after. Visible improvements to the school have an impact beyond the cosmetic: They spark local pride and the motivation necessary to go forward with more complex community interventions.**

skills. Among the goals were preventing new HIV infections, assisting orphans and vulnerable children, reducing alcohol abuse, combating sexual violence, and generating economic growth. The community selected Pefferville Primary as the administrative hub for these interventions.

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or of the generation that  
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After three years of work, Pefferville Primary and the local community are transformed. The buildings are still old and in need of repair, but they are well kept and tidy. The community maintains a thriving garden in the central courtyard, and the school kitchen incorporates the vegetables into student meals. Members of the community are constantly at work in the school, which is becoming a center of community pride. Proof of this shift is that during the last year of the ABC Connects project, Pefferville Primary did not experience a single burglary, and community functions are fully attended.

### ***Barbara Jordan and Jamieson Elementary Schools in Detroit, Michigan***

The initial meetings with the principals at the Barbara Jordan and Jamieson Elementary Schools in Detroit were similar to those in South Africa. We conducted a follow-up visioning session with both schools, including staff, parents, and community members. ABC Connects offered to provide support in terms of capacity building and professional development for implementing the projects identified, but access to both schools was extremely difficult, and we had no on-the-ground presence to keep the work going. We had small successes from language and literacy projects that took place between the Detroit schools and Willow Park Primary.

Vivian Johnson, a Barbara Jordan teacher, spoke about the level of energy and excitement at the early professional development sessions. She enthusiastically described how her students wanted to know more about the lifestyles of South African teenagers and how they frequently asked about the status of their pen-pal project letters. As an educator, Ms. Johnson felt that the experience helped her realize that the issues she faces in the classroom are not local and that teachers across the globe are striving to develop better strategies for learning and behavior.

The third year of the pilot project coincided with major upheaval in the Detroit Public School system. Ultimately, little improvement occurred in either Detroit school. We attribute our inability to gain momentum and produce substantive results in Detroit as compared to South Africa to many factors:

**Failing to Clarify the Scope, Mission, and Purpose:**

We realized after the fact that a vast disconnect existed between the expectations of the leaders and teachers in Detroit and ABC Connects' mission of transforming the institutions into community schools. While both schools established broad vision statements, teachers were focused on the possibility for immediate impact on their students, primarily through the cultural exchange with South Africa. This disconnect also seemed to be a source of frustration for stakeholders outside the classroom. Our SoL corporate partners, DTE Energy and Ford, were willing to support the ABC Connects initiative, but the schools did not take advantage of the opportunity offered.

**Not Having an On-the-Ground Presence in Detroit:**

In East London, we had engaged a retired principal, Pat Goosen, to be our project coordinator. Because of Al's and my proximity to Detroit, our partnership with DTE and Ford, and resource constraints, we delayed hiring a project coordinator in the U.S. We later learned that beyond managing logistics, Pat played an essential role in the South African schools, establishing ABC Connects' presence, facilitating communication and engagement among the staff, and building links from the school to the surrounding community.

**Leading with Resources:** Unlike in South Africa, where projects were initiated between the school and ABC Connects, we launched the Detroit initiatives with industry at the forefront. Instead of mentoring the principals in developing relationships with these outside stakeholders, we provided them at the outset. By doing so, we created the expectation that ABC Connects would supply services and resources as opposed to our developing the school's capacity to identify its own needs and engage appropriate partners.



Students at Barbara Jordan Elementary in Detroit, inspired by their connection to South African pen pals, don African costumes for a Martin Luther King Day appreciation event.

© DTE Energy



Jamieson Elementary School in Detroit looks modern by comparison to the schools in East London, yet its students face the same challenges as their South African counterparts.

© Carol Gorelick



Barbara Jordan educators brainstorm project possibilities at a professional development workshop.

© Carol Gorelick



**Overlooking the Cultural Context:** South Africa's people are reborn: One is either of the first generation of citizens to never know apartheid or of the generation that conquered it. Despite the overt poverty, the spirit among the people is one of pride and possibility. Detroit, by comparison, has been on the brink of collapse after a sustained period of prosperity, and the overarching mood is one of desperation.

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Both Detroit principals were motivated to engage with ABC Connects for the cultural exchange with South Africa. They believed that their students and staff would benefit from seeing their counterparts who had fewer resources and less reason for hope. Our strategy to use the connection as incentive through the early stages of the project did not work. For all of our emphasis on meeting each school's individual needs, we downplayed their desire for connection, inspiration, and global relevance. Instead, we focused on capacity building and professional development for specific projects. For that reason, most of the recommended work never got off the ground.

**Failing to Sustain Victories:** When we finally facilitated the connection between the Detroit and South African schools through a pen-pal project and the formation of a "Critical Friends" community of practice around literacy, we didn't have much time left to build capacity to keep those projects going beyond the three-year Kellogg grant. These projects had the most impact on teaching and learning in the Detroit schools, but we did not sustain them in an ongoing way, and they did not continue after we left.

## Lessons Learned

One key lesson we learned during the three-year process was that the power of relationships is stronger than organizational structures. ABC Connects' role in creating social capital and cross-sector multi-stakeholder relationships was a critical success factor in generating and sustaining transformational change in Pefferville and Willow Park. We worked with the schools and their communities to build bridges among stakeholders and create long-term relationships at multiple levels: within the school, between the school and community, and from school to school.

### *Within the School*

**Culture of Collaboration:** For the School-Based Community Learning Model to be effective, school leaders must create a culture that encourages collaboration. In South Africa, the project team encouraged collaboration by building trust and respect with the schools' principals and teachers, which ultimately led to increased confidence and pride in accomplishments for the whole school and community.

**Rigor at the Start:** Engaging a school fully with multiple stakeholders, parents, community members, NGOs, and companies is imperative. This factor was noticeably lacking in Detroit due to external pressures on principals. We learned that ABC Connects and each school should develop a written agreement. At the start of an ABC Connects project, the project team needs to administer a culture survey and gather baseline statistics, with a follow-up survey and updated statistics at the end of the intervention to effectively evaluate project results.

**On-the-Ground Coordination:** A critical success factor is local coordination at two levels. First, each school needs to have an experienced project manager to ensure that the work stays on track. Second, a respected community organizer, ideally someone with local school experience, adds credibility to the work. A community organizer can build relationships with stakeholders that generate and maintain momentum. During the capacity-



building phase of the work, these functions must be transferred to local workers, preferably in the school.

### **School to Community**

**The Model:** We found the School-Based Community Learning Model a powerful lens for assessing school-community cohesion and for organizing interventions. Additional effort is required to develop a replicable, scalable implementation methodology and curriculum.

**The Role of a Champion:** PetroSA served as a corporate champion, providing significant funding for the South African schools. In this role, it had an enabling effect that allowed ABC Connects and the schools to take concrete actions aimed at addressing the schools' challenges. Second, it had an initiating effect in that many subsequent partners became involved as a result of the initial PetroSA-funded projects and PetroSA's support of the ABC Connects launch event.

**Strategic Engagement:** An inevitable tension arises between the desires to do projects and to be strategic. Limited resources require a method for evaluating and focusing attention on high-payback initiatives. Ultimately, each initiative must create needed improvements in the school community and build capacity among community members to improve teaching and learning after we leave.

### **School to School**

**International Impact:** One of the core purposes of this international partnership was to develop a professional learning community for schools to share their learning. The students, teachers, and principals who participated highly valued the interaction – however little – between the East London and Detroit schools. The Willow Park and Barbara Jordan students remarked that they and their schools were more alike than different. Expanding the interaction between schools is an opportunity for research and next steps.



Hundreds of community members, students, and faculty gather under an enormous tent, compliments of PetroSA, for the ABC Connects launch, a celebration of work completed and a commitment to the future.

© Pat Goos



A choir from Pefferville Primary School greeted visitors for the ABC Connects launch with an exuberant song.

© Pat Goos

**Critical Friends:** Teaching literacy was one of the principal challenges in the South African schools. A master's student addressed this issue as a final project. To improve classroom practice, she established an international ABC "Critical Friends"



© Pat Goosen

Leaders, staff, and educators from both East London schools came together for a residential weekend at a seaside retreat center, an opportunity for learning, mutual support, relaxation, and planning the path forward.

group. The group came together virtually so members could reflect on, analyze, and give each other feedback around their work. The Detroit teachers were enthusiastic and helpful in identifying useful teaching aids for the Willow Park teachers. The participating teachers were disappointed that the Critical Friends initiative did not continue and expand after the project manager completed her required coursework. An ongoing community of practice – something that teachers in both countries would value – requires a structured project plan with a committed project manager.

**Communication Logistics and Technology:** Technical issues made communication with our coordinator challenging and connection between the schools difficult. Additionally, the time difference between the schools in East London and Detroit (6 hours) made synchronous collaboration impractical.

**Going Deeper Events:** For Pefferville and Willow Park to get the “whole system in the room,” Al and I organized a series of yearly off-site weekend events. We combined *Schools That Learn*-based organizational learning modules and facilitated breakout sessions in which the schools produced and delivered presentations of their visions, goals,

and project plans. Each session expanded on the previous year’s work. Though each school worked separately to formulate its vision and action plans, the participants saw value in coming together.

**Community of Practice:** In late 2010, a professional learning community that integrated the ABC Connects schools with Al Witten’s dissertation schools was launched at the Manyano Conference at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU). The level of enthusiasm and positive response to the conference corroborated our belief in the need for a province-wide conversation on how to make schools the center of communities. We learned that the conference content and design seeded supportive relationships that have already had impact throughout the learning community. A positive unintended consequence was the benefit to the schools from the opportunity to reflect, prepare a presentation, and tell their stories to a multi-stakeholder audience.

**The Power of Personal Artifacts:** Low-tech objects such as handmade learner-authored books and quilts were enormously effective in developing relationships and building connections. They serve as artifacts of accomplishment for the children who helped create them and for younger children who see new possibilities.

### Looking Forward

Although the pilot has officially ended, the work is continuing. In South Africa, the community of practice initiated at the Manyano Conference has become a self-organized network of 13 schools with a local coordinator. The Faculty of Education at NMMU established the Centre for the Community School (CCS), a first of its kind in the country, to integrate research and programmatic activities to inform and support school improvement initiatives in South Africa.

The ABC Connects work is continuing in Willow Park and Pefferville. The Kwanda project recently contacted Pat Goosen, the ABC Connects coordinator, to launch a second initiative in the Pefferville community with the school as the hub.



In the U.S., we are exploring university connections as potential partners with the Centre for the Community School at NMMU and international programs such as Operation Hope, Operation Respect, Facing History and Ourselves, and Microsoft Partners in Learning. We hope to expand the interaction among the schools in both countries.

The community school movement in the U.S. is getting attention and support from the Department of Education. In addition, recent educational research includes work on school–community relationships. David Kirp’s recently published book, *Kids First: Five Big Ideas for Transforming Children’s Lives and America’s Future*, advocates for linking schools and communities to improve what both offer children. Sally Kilgore and Karen Reynolds include a chapter on family and community partnerships in *Silos to Systems: Reframing Schools for Success*.

My next steps will be to focus more strategically on partnerships and alliances and to experiment with methods of cross-cultural connection. I would like to continue training the next generation of educators and social entrepreneurs using the community schools model and methods.

Creating a community school is fundamentally about culture change, leadership, and relationships – all of which take time. But many of the administrators and teachers were encouraged by the results they experienced in three short years. As Mr. Swanepoel, the Willow Park principal, said: “We all learnt . . . a small school can do things.” Alicia Theron, a Pefferville teacher, reported: “When ABC Connects came, I was despondent. I was going to leave teaching after 34 years of service. When I saw what ABC Connects was planning for the school, I was so enthusiastic I hung on to see what was really going to take place. . . . I am renewed and feel so enthusiastic and excited about what’s happening.”

I am grateful to have experienced the work in South Africa and Detroit and to have witnessed the interactions among committed, professional



© Pat Goose



© Pat Goosen

**ABOVE:** Students at Willow Park illustrated their conceptions of gratitude on fabric squares, which were then assembled into a quilt and greeting cards by literacy partner Beyond Basics.

**LEFT:** A Gratitude Quilt is proudly displayed in the entranceway to each school as a sign of accomplishment to the young people who helped create it and of possibility for younger children.

educators in both countries. This as an exciting point in history, full of potential to close the door on social inequality and poverty as we know it and enter a time when every child can grow as a whole person. ■



In an Earth Day performance at Pefferville Primary School, students demonstrate literacy and public-speaking skills as they affirm their commitment to their environment.



© Carol Gorelick

## RESOURCES

- Kilgore, S. B., & Reynolds, K. J. (2011). *From Silos To Systems: Reframing Schools for Success*. Corwin.
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