

Equality

Can It Be Achieved With Democratic Schools?

*If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time;
but if you are here because your liberation is bound up with mine,
then let us work together.*

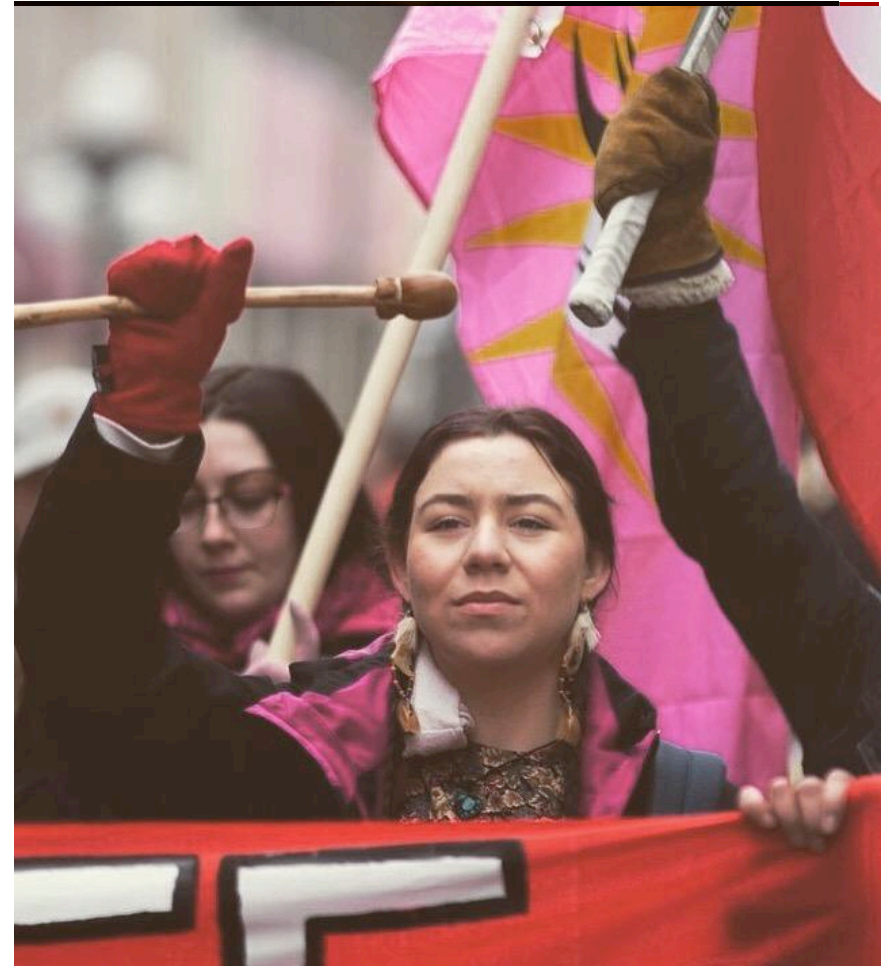
- Queensland Aboriginal activists, 1970

Discussion Questions

1. What are your concerns that brought you here this evening?
2. Have your concerns been adequately considered?
3. How might your concerns be more fully addressed through this discussion group?
4. What actions or next steps would you like to see resulting from this event?
5. Do you see publicly funded school systems as pillars of a democracy?
6. Are you satisfied with publicly funded schools? If no, do you think they need to be made better or made different?
7. Do you think equity and inclusion can be fully achieved with the traditional model of education?
8. Are traditional schools succeeding at cultivating the kind of citizenship necessary to address pressing problem?
9. What do you see as the benefits and/or drawbacks to Self-Directed Education?

Event Info

This event results from the efforts of various people and groups coming together to turn the optimism generated by a new year and a new decade into significant progress on critical issues. Uniting for Children and Youth – UCY initiated the event as part of its ongoing efforts to cultivate the connections that can make us stronger together. Questions or suggestions can be directed to UCY spokesperson: Richard Fransham at richard@ucyottawa.com.



Advancing to Our Brave New World

January 13th, 2020 : 7:00 – 9:30 pm
Jim Durrell Recreation Centre
1265 Walkley Road, Ottawa

MCs



Nira Dookeran was born in St. Boniface, Manitoba, and studied philosophy at the University of Winnipeg and the University of Toronto. She recently retired from a 31-year career of teaching in the public, private and government sectors. She has twice run for the Green Party in federal elections and is currently the CEO of the Ottawa South Greens Electoral District Association and the CFO of the Ottawa South Greens

Constituency Association. She managed the high profile Ottawa Centre campaign of Green candidate, Angela Keller-Herzog, in the 2019 federal elections.

Meghan Wills has volunteer and professional experiences comprising of Mindfulness Coaching, Human Resources and Chair of Parents for Diversity. She emphasizes the importance of intersectional wellness & diversity in everything she does. Her passion for inclusion and equity are derived from her continued experiences as a Biracial Black Canadian Woman with a Jamaican heritage. Meghan believes compassion is the key to acceptance and by accepting ourselves, we can accept others; this encourages peace, inward and out.



Agenda

- 7:00 – 7:30 Participants' displays and presentations
- 7:30 – 7:35 Land acknowledgement
- 7:35 – 7:40 Introduction of MCs and panelists
- 7:40 – 8:10 Panel presentation
- 8:10 - 8:30 Questions and answers
- 8:30 – 8:50 Developing an Action Plan
- 8:50 – 9:30 Action Discussion

Getting Out of Our Silos *Now and the Future*

This event is about social justice and empowering ourselves so that we can realize a true democracy. It is motivated by the belief that serious progress towards equity and inclusion, and a promising future for all in a sustainable world, is dependent upon us getting out of our silos, making connections, and amplifying our collective voices. People here tonight appreciate the importance of determining how we can be stronger together.

The focus is on human and environmental justice. *The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* serve as guides. Our collective action can stem from the view that our treatment of children and youth determines our future.

Abraham Lincoln said:

*The philosophy of the school room in one generation
will be the philosophy of government in the next.*

The website for the thought provoking documentary film *Schooling the World* states:

*If you wanted to change a culture in a single generation, how would you do it?
You would change the way it educates its children.*

Taking these quotes seriously requires that we put our schools under the microscope. Do they respect human rights? Are they designed for equity, inclusion and youth empowerment? Do they cultivate democratic citizenship? Dorothy Nolte wrote the poem *Children Learn What They Live*. How much do we agree with her? In their book *Paradigm Shift*, Tapscott and Caston wrote:

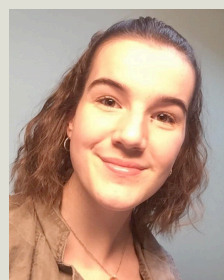
*If you want to control, you design organizations for accountability.
If you want to accomplish, you design for commitment.*

Are our schools designed for commitment?

These are questions to consider during the discussion portion of the evening. The answers to them can give direction to how we can get to the heart of equity, inclusion and youth empowerment, to how looking after ourselves depends upon looking after the common good.

Panelists

Sophia Sidarous is an indigenous rights and environmental activist. Her activism has brought her travelling throughout Canada and even on the international stage at the UN headquarters for the International day of the girl at the Speak Out event. She explained the importance of the land and Mother Earth in relation to indigenous women/girls. She is also one of the 15 plaintiffs suing the Canadian government for inaction on the climate crisis.



Ella Lake is a 15 year old climate activist and homeschooler. She is a co-founder and leader of Chelsea Youth, a local youth led community and environmental group. She has also been involved with Future Rising Ottawa, and holds a position as a Youth Water Leader with Ottawa Riverkeeper. She left traditional school to pursue climate activism, and is passionate about education and learning.

Stephanie Sewell works with families who are seeking guidance and support with their child or teen's educational journey. She helps to bring out and validate the young person's intrinsic motivation not only for learning, but for life. Her work is informed by her experiences as a school teacher, homeschool parent and co-op organizer, children's choir conductor, and Board Chair for Compass Centre for Self-Directed Learning. Stephanie believes that each young person deserves, and is capable of co-creating, an educational path that works for them.



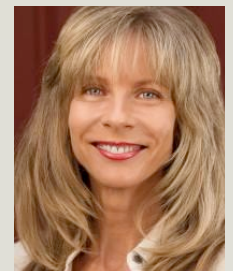
... Panelists continued

Richard Sharpe is currently with the Dream Legacy Foundation focusing his work on addressing the needs of Black communities in Canada. He is the lead on three organizations: the United Nations Decade for People of African Descent Push Coalition; the Federal Black Employee Caucus; and the 613/819 Black Hub. Richard is an activist working with others to achieve true human rights for people of African Descent locally and nationally. Richard lives in Ottawa, with his wife and three children.



Dr. Aisha Sherazi was born and raised in the UK, Dr. Aisha Sherazi migrated to Canada in 2000. Formerly a research scientist, she began teaching at the Abraar School, going on to serve as Principal from 2003 to 2006. She joined Merivale High School as Spiritual Care Worker in 2006, and currently serves on the steering committee for the program. In 2011, she helped found a new ministry-licensed program, Al-Furqan Elementary School. The Grades 5-8 program helps students with an aptitude for memorization, and teaches the Ontario Curriculum through creative thinking in an academically-rich learning environment. She is married with two busy children and paints and writes in her spare time.

Sylvia Smith is an educator with over three decades of classroom experience and 25 of them being in the Alternate High School Program within the OCDSB. In recognition of her educational approach focussing on social justice, she was awarded a Governor General's Award for Teaching Excellence in History in 2011. Sylvia makes her home in Ottawa, on unceded, unsundered Algonquin territory. She lives with her partner, two adult daughters, and one very special grandson.



Taking Action

Establishing a Democratic Foundation

People who have come here tonight want to establish a more just world and a brighter future. The proposition being put forward here is that we can most accomplish this by getting things right with children and youth. The home is viewed as sacrosanct, and so that puts the focus on schools. What can we do with them to put us all on a better course?

There is considerable agreement that our schools need fixing, but little agreement on how to go about it. Some say they need to be made better. Others say they need to be made different. It boils down to a battle of paradigms, the traditional model of education versus the Self-Directed Education (SDE) model. Over fifty years ago, the Hall-Dennis Report delivered a scathing indictment of Ontario school systems. A recent survey conducted by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education found that only 50% of people were satisfied with our publicly funded schools. In over half a century, dedicated, talented people have failed to adequately address the Hall-Dennis indictment. Trying to make things better is apparently not working. People are being invited here tonight to consider if we need to make our schools fundamentally different.

Action Plan Discussion Starter



Richard Fransham is retired from over 30 years of teaching for the public and Catholic school boards of Ottawa, and for the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. His subject areas are math and computers. He has a master's degree in Computer Applications in Education from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and he has been a long time advocate of the benefits to giving students more

control over their learning. He is a co-founder and main spokesperson for Uniting for Children and Youth.

Dealing with Divergent Views

One way to look at the diverging views on how schools should operate is to ask the question: "Who has the power?" With traditional schools, power is in the hands of adult authorities. With Self-Directed Education (SDE), power is in the hands of the learners. The former is authoritarian in nature, the latter democratic. If equality and a democratically minded population are goals of our nation, then it seems that it would be wise to undertake a serious investigation of not only SDE, but also how to orchestrate a large scale transformation of our school systems if SDE proves to be the answer to our educational dilemma.

Thomas Kuhn who is well known for his study of paradigm shifts observed that proponents of dominant paradigms do their best to keep contenders out of sight. To learn from history and avoid counter-productive battles, competing paradigms can be put on equal footings that allow people to choose what best works for them, much like they have had the choice of landlines or cellphones. The option that best meets people's needs gains dominance. Our school systems can do this and invite back people who have abandoned them in favour of homeschooling and private schools. Here in abbreviated point form are clues to how it can be done.

1. Take a small steps approach to incremental change with studies at each step informing next steps.
2. Apply the concept of schools-within-schools to conduct pilot programs that constitute one-room schools base on the SDE model.
3. Run these programs in the students' neighbourhood schools where they will be as equally visible and accessible as traditional ones.
4. Allow people to try SDE and revert back to the traditional program if it is not working for them.
5. If SDE gains in popularity, control the growth so that good quality supply keeps pace with demand.
6. Ensure that people understand the potential benefits of SDE to both students and teachers.