Evidence use in Community Led Learning Ecosystems (CLLEs)

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Background to the review

As part of a collaborative support to the Jacobs Foundation's Communities of Change initiative, this review sought to enhance our understanding of how evidence is understood, generated and used within community-led learning ecosystems.

The Process

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- Desk based literature review

- 25 semi-structured interviews with experts in CLLEs

- Analysis of global case studies and documented initiatives in the CLLE space.

Key Messages

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The cracks in the conventional education systems are now impossible to ignore.

CLLEs offer a compelling alternative but their definition, design and evolution varies each time.

In CLLEs, learning expands beyond the classroom.

Evidence is the thread that ties learning and action together.

Nurturing cultures of evidence within CLLEs can bring about sustained, evidence data-informed decision-making.

So, what are CLLEs?

What are CLLEs?

- CLLEs are used to describe a shift away from narrowly defined schooling models towards **more adaptive configurations that recognise multiple sources of knowledge, encourage community engagement, and are responsive to local contexts**.

- CLLEs adds a specific dimension by **drawing attention to local actors** who play a formative role in shaping these ecosystems.

- CLLEs emphasise that **all actors can generate, understand and apply evidence** to varying degrees.

- CLLEs **are ever evolving** in response to shifting local needs, available resources, and the changing priorities of community actors.

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CLLEs have varied and overlapping functions

Enhancing the learning process and improving outcomes in formal education, by improving practices.

Broadening the range of learning opportunities, both inside and outside the formal education system.

Responding to specific local workforce needs by aligning learning experiences with local economic demands.
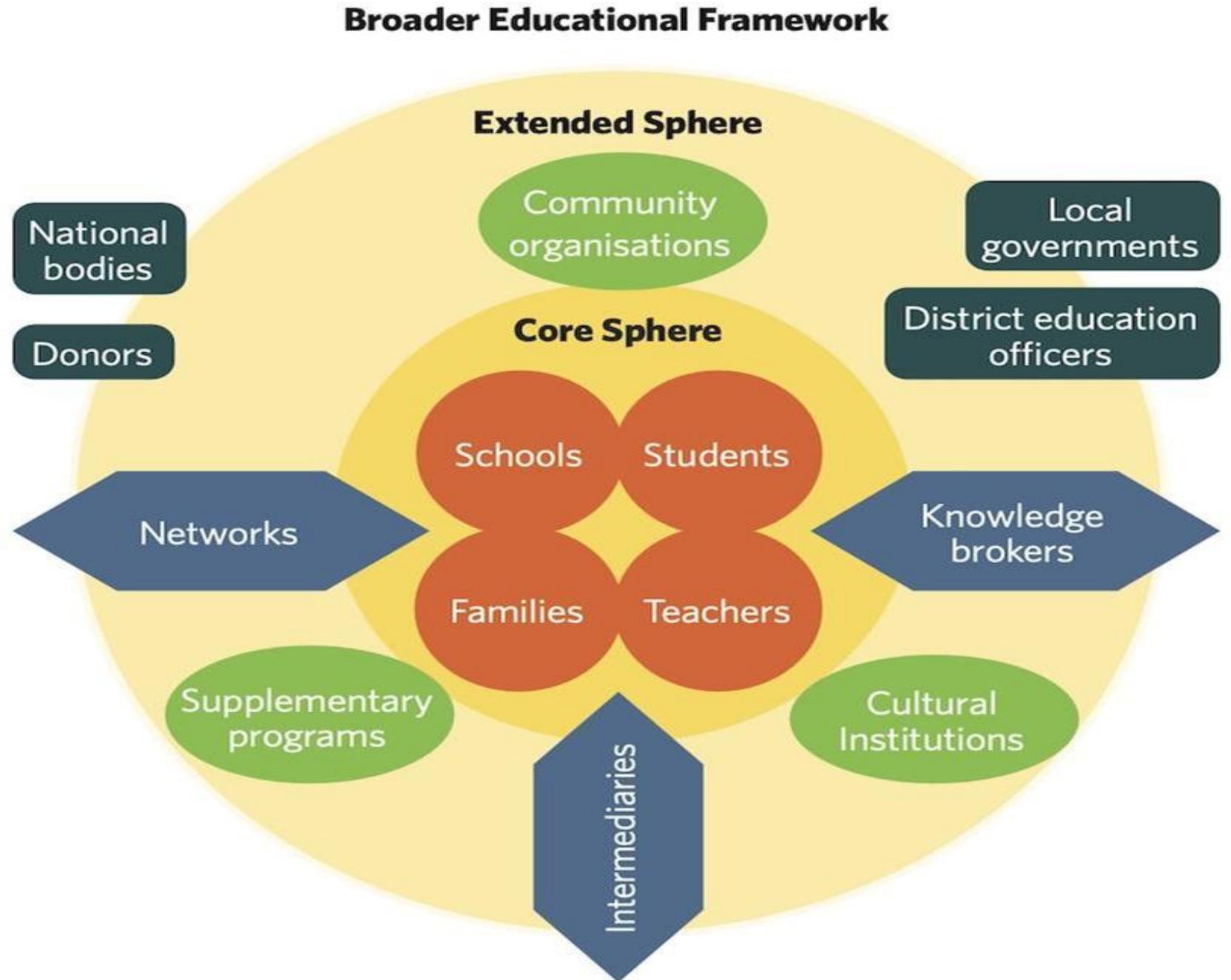
Connect actors in the ecosystem and facilitate learning and sharing.

Synthesising evidence for practical use through locally relevant approaches.

CLLEs are founded on diverse and collaborative communities

Broader Educational Framework

Extended Sphere

Community organisations

National bodies

Donors

Local governments

District education officers

Core Sphere

Schools | Students

Families | Teachers

Networks

Knowledge brokers

Supplementary programs

Intermediaries

Cultural Institutions

CLLEs are dynamic and context driven

- CLLEs can **rapidly adapt** to emerging opportunities and challenges, making them particularly relevant in an era of rapid social and technological change.

- Their **flexibility also poses significant hurdles** for evaluation, long-term planning, and comparative analysis.

- CLLEs are **inherently fluid**. They are characterised by dynamic, community-driven evolution, variable structures, and ever-shifting roles.

Why CLLEs?

Why CLLEs?

- The **inadequacies of conventional education** in delivering access to and quality of education. Thus, a widening gap exists between what traditional education delivers and what learners and societies need in this era of rapid change.

- **Systemic failures** amplified by global crises e.g. COVID-19, climate crisis, wars have increased the distance between learners and their educational environments leading to worsening educational outcomes

- **A shift in educational reform**. Discussions around education reform are increasingly embracing the concept of ecosystems, reflecting a shift from linear, technocratic, and inflexible approaches towards more adaptive and interconnected frameworks for learning.

The promise of CLLEs: 3 Ps

- **Purpose**: Redefining educational goals to address future challenges, by focusing not just on basic skills and exam success but also on fostering well rounded, adaptable individuals.

- **Power**: Empowering learners, educators, and communities to take active roles in shaping educational experiences, ensuring diverse voices are included in decision-making.

- **Practice**: Promoting innovative, learner centred approaches that challenge standardisation and address systemic inequities.

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Evidence use in CLLEs

Different forms of Evidence use in CLLEs

Organisation/Initiative	Type of Evidence	Evidence Use
Luminos Fund	Research evidence, sector-generated data, pedagogical evidence	Instrumental use (real-time data adjustment), embedded use (ongoing adaptation)
Building Tomorrow	Research evidence, sector-generated data, pedagogical evidence	Instrumental use (RCT data informs teaching models), embedded use (continuous adaptation)
Smart Start	Research evidence, sector-generated data, practice-informed advice, pedagogical evidence	Instrumental use (adapting curriculum), embedded use (coaching and feedback system)
Dream a Dream	Research evidence, sector-generated data	Transparent use (raising awareness on life skills), embedded use (tailoring interventions based on state feedback)
Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)	Research evidence, practice-informed advice	Transparent use (toolkit for awareness), instrumental use (guiding policy and program adaptations)
Firelight Foundation	Practice-informed advice, sector-generated data	Embedded use (long-term systemic change, community-driven data collection)
Lively Minds	Practice-informed advice, sector-generated data	Embedded use (community input), instrumental use (adjusting ecd programs)

Different forms of Evidence use in CLLEs

- CLLEs face an **inherent tension around evidence use:** While traditional metrics like test scores provide clear, quantitative data, they often fall short of capturing the full scope of what learning ecosystems aim to achieve. This gap between ambition and measurement capacity represents a key tension within the field of community-led learning.

- **What success looks like is different for each CLLE**.

  "Success in a learning ecosystem might mean better academic outcomes, but it might also mean stronger community ties, greater student agency, or increased family involvement. Measuring those things requires new thinking and new tools." Emily Morris, Brookings

- **Participatory evidence systems capture both tangible results and deeper, intangible transformations**.

  "We use participatory approaches, collecting stories and feedback from communities to assess how well local organisations are driving systems change and whether our approach is building long-term sustainability." Ronald Kimambo, Firelight Foundation

- **Qualitative data is key to capturing a richer picture of how CLLEs affect communities**.

  "We collect a lot of stories from our partners about how these collaborations are influencing student learning and community development. Those stories are an important part of the evidence base because they reveal what's happening on the ground in ways that numbers alone can't." Tyler Samstag, Remake Learning

- Overall, there is a **need for more comprehensive and adaptable tools for assessing learning ecosystems.**

Challenges of Evidence use in CLLEs

- CLLEs are challenging to define, measure and standardise

- Evidence use within CLLEs is both complex and contextual

- Local knowledge is underutilised in decision-making processes.

- Barriers to effective evidence use in conventional approaches persist within CLLEs.

- Conventional metrics fail to fully capture the holistic outcomes of CLLEs.

Remaining Questions

Remaining questions

- **Mapping how political and institutional dynamics influence the way CLLEs evolve, and the role evidence plays**. This includes examining power relations, policy influences, and the role of various stakeholders in shaping evidence practices and promoting evidence use.

- **Navigating the tension between balancing local leadership with scaling dynamics.** This balance is critical to ensuring that scaling efforts do not dilute the core principles that make CLLEs effective

- **Strengthening the integration of CLLEs within national education systems.** To amplify their impact, CLLEs should strive to align local initiatives with national policies and frameworks and influence their reform.

Recommendations

Recommendations for funders

- Strengthen existing networks and promote peer learning

- Advance contextualised measurement and impact evaluation

- Advance advocacy and policy engagement

- Support long-term learning and sustainability

- Leverage convening power to foster collaboration and avoid duplication

Recommendations for Practitioners

- Promote an evidence culture for sustained, evidence-informed decision-making

- Encourage conscious learning and raise awareness of CLLEs as a distinct approach

A global consultancy
and platform for change