



Engaging with the 'Generational Bowl': Connecting to those inheriting a world in crisis

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## Engaging with the 'Generational Bowl': Connecting to those inheriting a world in crisis

Elena Lengthorn

The 14<sup>th</sup> annual Teacher Education for Equity and Sustainability Network (TEESNet) conference was held at Liverpool Hope University in December 2024. Entitled *Education for Repair and Realising Alternative Futures Together*, the conference invited an exploration of the need for a new social contract for education “that can repair injustices while transforming the future” (UNESCO, 2021).

This event included a round table exercise considering “*So what? The implications for influencing policy*”, which opened with a stimulus ‘generational bowl’ exercise to first connect participants deeply

and meaningfully with those who would be affected by the policy decisions: our children.

Our process mirrored that used by the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria, Canada, which followed advice from indigenous mentors to “create a living symbol that would serve as an ethical compass” for their decision-making (UVIC, 2024).

Attendees were invited to undertake a reflective, collaborative, and creative process that aimed to move us beyond our individualistic, personal interests and recognise our collective responsibility.

There were three successive circle captures of reflection (written notes on coloured paper, all gathered in a basket) on the following themes:

1. **The names of the children, under 17, to whom we are intimately connected:** the names were read aloud, evoking connection, before being placed in the basket by each person. Our basket gathering included the contribution of categories such as children, grandchildren, godchildren, nieces and nephews, as well as the names of many young people, including Olivia, Theo, Penny, Dominic, and Bonny.
2. **Broader groups of children we felt connected to or whom we recognised as at-risk (e.g., children caught in conflict zones):** our second layer included traveller children, children with special educational needs, children in poverty, children in Gaza and the West Bank, and unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people.
3. **Children coming after the children in the bowl and non-human children:** this widened our awareness of whom our policy decisions would impact. This final gathering of contributions included threatened local wildlife, diversity, water quality, the young people who are passionate activists, and children who are yet to be born.

Next, the bowl of gathered contributions was covered delicately with dried petals from red and white roses, symbolising a blanket of protection, compassion, and healing, capturing our responsibility toward the future – a reminder to hold these beings in our minds and hearts as we make decisions for their futures.

At UVIC, the bowl remained in the Faculty of Education to unify the team with a collective vision that was further used at a 'Faculty Futures' session with an invitation for colleagues to mentally contribute and extend its symbolic intention.

At TEESNet, the 'Generational bowl' process enabled us to forethink what we might seek in terms of educational policy for repair and alternatives within the system and to do so whilst holding our deeper responsibilities, those that we hold in our professional roles, our personal lives, and wider communities, in greater perspective.

We are deeply grateful to all the participants who took the time to join us and reflect on our need for urgent, transformative approaches. The process cultivated a shared understanding and commitment to work together as a community. We hope that they, and you, dear readers, might take this heartfelt practice into their/your own teams and communities. 🌍

### References

UNESCO (2021). Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education. [tinyurl.com/4cbfuefr](https://tinyurl.com/4cbfuefr)

UVIC (2024). Intergenerational responsibilities in difficult times: The story of the Faculty of Education's "Generational Bowl". University of Victoria, Faculty of Education. [tinyurl.com/m6a2497m](https://tinyurl.com/m6a2497m)

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