

Institution: The University of Manchester		
Unit of Assessment: 23 (Education)		
Title of case study: New-generation Children's Zones: Supporting schools and their partners to implement long-term sustainable change in disadvantaged areas		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Kirstin Kerr	Senior Lecturer	2005 – present
Alan Dyson	Professor	2003 – 2016
Carlo Raffo	Professor	1995 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>University of Manchester research has enabled schools and their state and voluntary-sector partners to develop new, complex, multi-partner, place-based strategies, which are improving outcomes for vulnerable children in high-poverty neighbourhoods. Specifically, the research team have worked UK-wide with national charities and administrations, schools and Local Authorities, to co-design locally-tailored, neighbourhood-focused, Children's Zone initiatives (CZIs). These are underpinned by the research team's conceptually and empirically-rigorous model for a new generation of CZIs. The resulting new CZIs – in England already encompassing communities with ≥ 235 schools and $\geq 85,000$ children – have been enabled to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. catalyse and sustain their development 2. plan strategically for long-term sustainable change 3. establish innovative, locally-bespoke configurations of partners and interventions 4. improve outcomes for children, families, schools and services, however challenging their situations. 		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>A University of Manchester research team led by Kirstin Kerr has critically explored the idea, established in the US, of Children's Zone Initiatives (CZIs) as potentially effective vehicles to improve outcomes in high-poverty neighbourhoods. These involve schools partnering with each other, and with statutory and voluntary and community sector services (including, but not limited to, police, housing, health, employers and local community groups) to develop complex, holistic responses to disadvantage. The research team has identified a series of fault-lines running through well-established CZIs – including the internationally-renowned US-based Harlem Children's Zone (www.hcz.org) – which are arresting the field's development. In response, the Manchester team has developed a conceptually and empirically-rigorous principled model for a new generation of CZIs, explicated fully in a monograph [1]. This addresses major gaps in knowledge about how CZIs are intended to work, both in principle and in practice. Five research strands have underpinned the model's development.</p> <p>a) Developing an evidence-based rationale for CZIs. The research has generated new syntheses of international literature reporting evidence from interventions designed to improve children's holistic outcomes [1,2,3]. It established that: (i) improving children's outcomes in high-poverty neighbourhoods requires multiple, simultaneous interventions across children's ecologies; (ii) interventions in one aspect of a child's life can have positive impacts on other aspects; and (iii) interventions can be made more powerful in combination. This work has provided a much-needed evidence-base, beyond the present approach of mere descriptive advocacy, to justify investment in developing new, more effective CZIs.</p> <p>b) Analysing local contexts. Through a Leverhulme-funded study of the social determinants of educational inequities (i), the team developed an approach to surfacing local lived experiences of disadvantage called Complex Contextual Analysis [1]. This approach enables new-generation CZIs to generate rich understandings of the underlying causes (and causes of the causes) of poor outcomes in their target areas, and how local partners might</p>		

intervene effectively to address the prevailing challenges identified. This strand of research challenged the hitherto preoccupation of CZIs with short-term ameliorative measures at the expense of longer-term sustainable change.

c) Assets-oriented approaches. Through an AHRC-funded conceptual synthesis of international literature on school-community relations (ii), Kerr and colleagues have surfaced previous CZIs' reliance on deficit-oriented, socially-conservative actions. In response, the Manchester team developed an evidence-based case for a new generation of CZIs to operate on more relational, socially-transformative bases, through asset-oriented approaches [1,4].

d) Design Based Implementation Research (DBIR). The team's research has challenged evaluators' reliance on experimental evaluations which are ill-suited to explaining CZIs' complex workings. Instead, the team designed and trialled a Design Based Implementation Research (DBIR) approach, utilising Theory of Change (ToC), for monitoring and evaluating new-generation CZIs. This approach engages practitioners and academics in ongoing, iterative processes of co-designing, monitoring, and revising CZIs to enable their continuous refinement and improvement [1,5].

e) A principled model for 'new generation' CZIs. Synthesising work streams (a)-(d), the research team have developed [1] and implemented [5,6] a principled model for a new generation of CZIs which: use multiple interventions in combination; adopt locally-bespoke, long-term, assets-oriented strategies; utilise Complex Contextual Analysis; and are co-developed and evaluated through DBIR-ToC.

3. References to the research

1. **Kerr, K., Dyson, A. and Raffo, C.** (2014) *Education, disadvantage and place: Making the local matter*. Bristol: Policy Press.
2. **Kerr, K. and Dyson, A.**, (2014) Developing an evidence-based rationale for a Children's Zone Approach, *International Journal for Research on Extended Education*. 2(1), 97-112. DOI: [10.3224/ijree.v2i1.19536](https://doi.org/10.3224/ijree.v2i1.19536)
3. **Raffo, C., Forbes, C., Thomson, S.** (2015) Ecologies of educational reflexivity and agency – a different way of thinking about equitable educational policies and practices for England and beyond?, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(11), 1126-1142. DOI: [10.1080/13603116.2015.1044201](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2015.1044201)
4. **Kerr, K., Dyson, A., and Gallannaugh, F.** (2016) Conceptualising school-community relations in disadvantaged neighbourhoods: mapping the literature. *Educational Research* 58(3): 265-282. DOI: [10.1080/00131881.2016.1207872](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2016.1207872)
5. **Kerr, K. and Dyson, A.** (2020) Researching complex extended education initiatives in England: a design-based approach using theory of change. In Bae, S. H., Mahoney, J. L., Maschke, S., & Stecher, L. (Eds.) *International Developments in Research on Extended Education*. Leverkusen: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 115-134.
6. **Kerr, K. and Dyson, A.** (2016) Networked Social Enterprises: A New Model of Community Schooling for Disadvantaged Neighborhoods Facing Challenging Times. *Education Science*. 6(3), 20. DOI: [10.3390/educsci6030020](https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci6030020)

Key research grants

- (i) **Kerr, K.** Using local policies to tackle educational disadvantage. 2008 – 2009. Leverhulme Trust. GBP41,514.
- (ii) **Kerr, K.** Exploring the role of public services in relation to 'connected communities', learning from different conceptualisations of community school relations. 2011. AHRC. GBP21,031.20. Grant number AH/J500999/1
- (iii) **Kerr, K. and Dyson, A.** Save the Children community project. 2013 – 2015. Save the Children. GBP34,190.

4. Details of the impact

The implementation of the Manchester team's principled model for a new generation of CZIs has led to four key impacts:

1: New-generation CZIs have been established and sustained by multi-agency partnerships in all UK administrations

The Manchester team's model has shaped national programmes to establish CZIs in multiple local neighbourhoods. Specifically, the devolved administrations of Scotland and Wales have established new national CZIs directly informed by the model [1,5,6]. In 2018, the Scottish Government launched 'Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland' (CNS). The Director for Policy Scotland states: "*the transfer of learning from Manchester's research to a Scottish context*" has been "*an active concern*", that "*CNS's underpinning evidence review draws explicitly on Manchester's research*", and that CNS has "*sought to learn directly from other zone initiatives either co-designed with the University of Manchester, or explicitly grounded in their principled model for developing children's zones*" [A]. In 2017, the Welsh Government launched five 'Children's First Children's Zones', drawing on Manchester's research and learning from other CZIs implementing the Manchester model to inform their design [B]. In Northern Ireland, the CEO of the Greater Shankill Partnership states that since 2015, the development of the Greater Shankill Children and Young People Zone, as supported by the Northern Ireland Assembly, has been significantly shaped by "*the University of Manchester's principles for developing children's zones, especially the need to respond to the complexities of place*" [C].

In England, the Manchester team's research was "*integral to the strategic and operational development of the Save the Children's national Children's Community initiative*" including the "*co-design [of] the initial specification*" with the use of Theory of Change "*laying the foundations for each Community's strategy and actions*" [B]. Children's Communities launched in 2016 in Wallsend, N. Tyneside (encompassing 45,000 residents and 15 schools with c.6,000 pupils), Pembury, Hackney (4,000 residents and 2 schools, targeting c.1,000 Pembury-resident children) and Smallshaw, Tameside (15,000 residents, and 10 schools with c.3,500 pupils) [D, p1-2 & Appendix 4; E; data from gov.uk]. The research also informed Save the Children's more specifically-targeted place-based Early Learning Communities, launched in four further sites in 2018 [B]. The Peabody Community Foundation, local lead for Pembury Children's Community, also independently utilised the Manchester model in developing new-generation CZIs in Waltham Forest (2018) and Thamesmead (2020) [E].

The Manchester team's model has also directly informed locally-initiated CZIs, developed independently of national programmes. These have been led by schools and Local Authorities working in collaboration with the University to co-develop new generation CZIs in their specific contexts. These include: (i) North Manchester Family Zone, launched in 2016, with 17 schools with c.6,600 pupils [F]; (ii) [Text removed for publication] [G]; and (iii) Reach Children's Hub in Feltham, launched in 2017, with 1 lead school with c.900 pupils, and now working with 3 other local schools to address food poverty [H,I]. The lead for North Manchester Family Zone states: "*there is no doubt that understanding the implications of [Manchester's] zone model for the way we could work was a real catalyst... providing us with a blueprint we could adapt locally*" [F]. Other emerging locally-initiated CZIs have also cited the Manchester research as integral to their approaches e.g. West End Zone, Newcastle [J] launched in 2017.

The applicability of the Manchester model beyond the UK has been identified by the European Commission's Department for Education and Culture. Through the Commission's School Education Gateway and European Toolkit for Schools, it has promoted Reach Children's Hub and North Manchester Family Zone (and the underpinning research base) as models of good practice for policy and practice audiences EU-wide [I].

2: New generation CZIs have used the Manchester research to plan strategically for long-term sustainable change

This growing movement of new-generation CZIs has specifically used the Manchester team's Design Based Implementation Research, Theory of Change [1,5] and Complex Contextual Analysis [1] approaches to plan strategically. The Regional Head of Service at the Peabody Community Foundation explains how the Theory of Change has "*helped us determine a logical structure*" for Pembury Children's Community in the short-, medium- and long-term, "*creating an anchor we can keep revisiting, helping us to steer a realistic course, but one which still captures our ambition to be transformative for the lives of Pembury residents*" [E]. The CEO of the Greater Shankill Partnership emphasises how Complex

Contextual Analysis “*has been vital in helping us to think about where and how we might need to intervene upstream in the challenges children experience, so that we can achieve and sustain maximum positive impacts*” [C].

Utilising the Complex Contextual Analysis approach has also led CZIs to create new systems and outcome targets to act on findings emerging from their analyses. [Text removed for publication] [G].

In a further example, the lead for the North Manchester Family Zone reports how, through Complex Contextual Analysis, the Zone’s partners (who range from schools and nurseries, to housing and adult education providers, the police, health services, and local employers) [I] developed a deep, shared understanding of disadvantages commonly experienced by local children. Many of these were not routinely monitored, including bereavement, hidden homelessness, and close family serving custodial sentences. The partners used these findings to develop and utilise local indicators of disadvantage, establishing a Zone-wide ‘pastoral tracker’ monitoring system, with a matching offer of individual, targeted and universal supports, including new provision as needed. For example, in Manchester Communication Academy, the Zone’s only secondary school, in the 2018-19 academic year, the tracker flagged c.79% of its c.1,200 pupils against one or more indicators of disadvantage, with around 60 pupils a term receiving bespoke, intensive support to help overcome complex barriers to achieving good outcomes. Among other measures, the Zone’s partners have supported families’ efforts to secure suitable housing and manage family members’ health conditions [F,I].

3: New-generation CZIs have established innovative, locally-bespoke configurations of partners and interventions

As indicated above, regardless of their size or leadership arrangements, implementing Manchester’s principled model has required CZIs to establish new partnerships and develop and co-ordinate multiple interventions to help realise sustainable long-term change [1,2,3]. For example, Pembury Children’s Community has established new multi-partner working groups, including LA Services, Early Years specialists, and local residents, to support school readiness and vulnerable families [D,E]. North Manchester Family Zone has convened 17 local schools with a range of sponsors and no prior experience of joint-working to create a Zone-wide portfolio of community, family, learning and staff-development interventions. It has also established partnerships with food distribution organisations including FairShare and Kellogg’s to address holiday hunger [F]. [Text removed for publication] [G].

The ability of new CZIs to respond rapidly to changing situations has also been seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, during the first national lockdown, Reach Hub co-ordinated 35 state and voluntary sector partners to conduct a Complex Contextual Analysis exercise to identify emerging needs, and then together created matching local systems to provide food and essentials, mental health services, and financial advice [H,I]. The Head of Strategy at Reach Children’s Hub states “*this was only possible because Reach Hub was already implementing the children’s zone principles*” [H].

4: New generation CZIs are enabling local partnerships to improve outcomes, whatever their starting points

Acting on Manchester’s principled model, new generation CZIs have already improved: **(a) Children’s educational progress.** For example, in Pembury Children’s Community external evaluators found children engaged in its bespoke school readiness interventions achieved outcomes comparable with their more advantaged peers by the end of Reception from a lower baseline [D, p14]. In North Manchester Family Zone, c.85% of pupils receiving individual support through the pastoral tracker are back on track academically within a term [F].

(b) Children’s and families’ access to and engagement with services. For example, the Regional Head of Service at the Peabody Community Foundation states that Pembury Children’s Community’s new systems and provision “*have engaged families who would otherwise have limited contact with local services*”, with 836 children (of c.1,000 living in Pembury) and 499 parents taking part in Children’s Community interventions in 2017-18 [E].

(c) Children's well-being. In terms of general well-being for example, monitoring data from Pembury Children's Community shows in 2017-18, 382 secondary-aged children regularly attended CZI activities, with 95% (n=94) agreeing these 'make a positive difference to my life' [E]. [Text removed for publication] [G]

(d) Family well-being. New CZIs have met families' basic needs. For example, Reach Hub ensured 400 families' food security during lockdown [I]. Pembury Children's Community's 2017-18 monitoring data shows how the Children's Community helped 30 families with the highest level of rent arrears to significantly reduce arrears and associated family stress [E]. The CZIs have also empowered parents and enabled strong peer-to-peer support. For example, through its asset-based approaches [4] Reach Hub trained 36 local mothers as peer supporters in 2018-19, who have since reduced isolation and anxiety in 105 vulnerable families [H].

(e) Schools' and partner services' effectiveness. For example, in North Manchester Family Zone, Ofsted's 2019 inspection report on Manchester Communication Academy states: "*the 'Family Zone' has helped to reduce significantly the impact of the barriers to learning experienced by pupils*" (p4), with this contributing to an improved judgement of Good, with outstanding pastoral care, from Requires Improvement in 2016 [F]. [Text removed for publication]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. Letter from Director of Policy Scotland. Received 19 January 2021.
- B. Letter from former Head of Children's Communities, Save the Children. Received 19th January 2021.
- C. Letter from CEO of the Greater Shankill Partnership. Received 21 January 2021.
- D. Batty et al. 2019. Children's Communities Evaluation Report. <http://bit.ly/3aH7Xps>
- E. Letter from Regional Head of Service, Peabody Community Foundation. Received 25 January 2021.
- F. Letter from Director of Greater Manchester Academies Trust Social Investment Department. Received 26 January 2021.
- G. [Text removed for publication]
- H. Letter from Head of Strategy, Reach Children's Hub. Received 14 January 2021.
- I. European Toolkit for Schools resources: <http://bit.ly/3sjVk9H>; <http://bit.ly/3umGhji>
- J. *Children's Zones... Children's Communities*. 2 July 2014. <http://bit.ly/3alsERY>