

**AUTUMN 2025**

# **LEGACY**

**TRANSFORMATION IN ACTION**



**Benita C. Gordon**

**Before the Blueprint: Aligning  
with Families to Build the Future**

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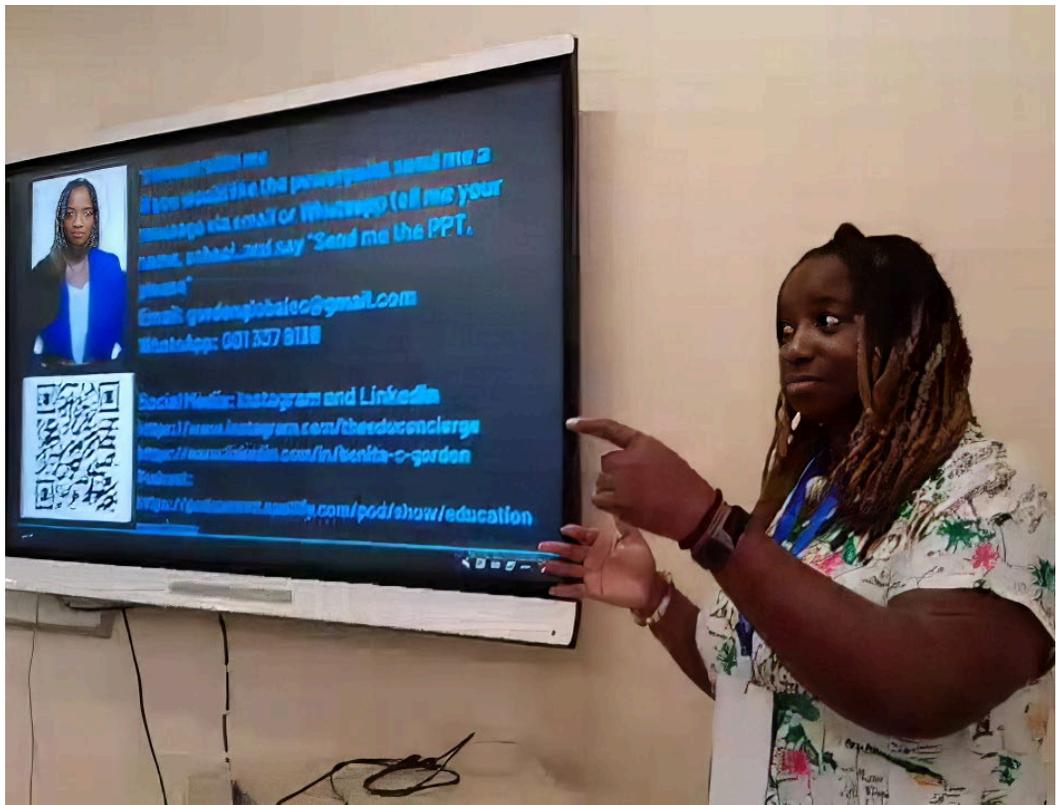
## Before the Blueprint: Aligning with Families to Build the Future of Education

Benita C. Gordon,  
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Before we sketch the schedule, choose the tech stack, or map the curriculum, have we sat down and asked, *"Who are we building this for?"* In the race to innovate, education often skips a vital step: alignment. Not just logistics, but real, relational alignment with those who know students best, families. At Global Education Concierge, we train educators, school leaders, and founders to understand that co-creation isn't just about inclusion; it's about accuracy. The most transformative educational spaces don't just reflect innovation; they reflect the community's heartbeat. Before the blueprint, we must listen. Before we build, we must align. Only then does transformation become sustainable.

### **The Flawed Foundation of "Build First, Ask Later"**

Too often, well-meaning schools and systems jump straight to strategy. They launch new models, programs, or microschoools without ever asking the community it's needs, wants and dreams. I've seen it firsthand in schools I've supported across the South - places with good intentions but fractured trust.



A moment of realization came from a teacher I trained. During our session on community engagement, she said, "I'm not sure my students' parents even want to engage. Every time I've tried before, I felt ignored." She wasn't bitter, just weary. We encouraged her to try again, differently - one phone call, one porch conversation, one co-created project. A few weeks later, she came back with tears in her eyes: "I asked a parent how their child learns best. They lit up. I tried their idea the next day, and it worked. That child beamed. I cried in the car afterward."

Connection, not perfection, created progress. By the end of the year, she had built a circle of support around her students - and herself.

### **Co-Creation: Beyond the Buzzword**

At Global Education Concierge, we teach that co-creation is more than a trendy word. It is a shared leadership practice that transforms schools from places of compliance to communities of belonging. True co-creation happens when families, educators, and students work together to design, not just approve, the learning experience.

We define three levels of engagement:

**Informing** ("Here's what we're doing.")

**Consulting** ("What do you think about this?")

**Co-Creating** ("Let's build this together.")

Many schools operate in the first two tiers. The transformation comes when they move into the third.

### **Practical Steps: Aligning Before You Design**

Here are five practical, powerful steps we train and model for leaders who want to build something *with* their communities:



#### **Host Community Listening Sessions**

Skip the auditorium. Meet at the barbershop, library, or park. Ask questions like, "What do you wish your child's school understood about your family?" and listen.



#### **Create Co-Design Circles**

Bring parents, educators, and even students into small group sessions with sticky notes, markers, and sample schedules. Let everyone sketch their vision for a meaningful school day.



#### **Do Asset Mapping Together**

Families aren't just support systems, they're partners. Ask, "What skills, connections, or traditions could you share with our students?" Then build your programming around the answers.



#### **Build Feedback Loops That Matter**

Don't wait for complaints. Use tools like WhatsApp, Google Forms, or QR code surveys and follow up regularly. The key is not just asking, it's showing that their input shapes outcomes.



#### **Make the Wins Visible**

Highlight family contributions. Post stories in newsletters: "You asked for more flexible pickup, here's how we adjusted." Let them see their voice in your systems.

## What Happens When We Get It Right

When we design with families, students feel seen. Teachers feel supported. Leaders feel less isolated. And the school becomes a living, breathing organism that reflects its community's values.

One of our clients used these practices to redesign their after-school programming. Instead of guessing, they invited parents and students to co-create it. The result? Increased attendance, fewer behavior issues, and a line of parents wanting to volunteer.

This is what happens when alignment comes first.

## Call to Action

Innovation without alignment is just noise. At Global Education Concierge, we don't just deliver PD and strategies, we help reframe what's possible by leading with listening. When we slow down to co-create, we build schools that last.

So here's your challenge: Before the next initiative, pause. Before the next plan, ask. Then open the door wider, pull up a few more chairs, and build together. Because of the blueprint for the future? It starts with trust.



## References

Gonzales, D. (2023). *Rewriting the Rules: Co-Creation in Action*. Edulnnovation Press.

Henderson, A.T. & Mapp, K.L. (2002). [A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement](#). Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.



## Community Co-Creation Checklist

From Global Education Concierge – Align Before You Design

This checklist is a practical planning and reflection tool to guide your school or program through **intentional collaboration with families, students, and community partners** before launching a new initiative, redesign, or the start of a new school year

✓ PHASE 1: CLARIFY YOUR INTENTION

Step	Description	Guiding Questions	Tools
Define your “Why”	Be clear on your purpose for co-creation and what decisions are on the table.	Why are we co-creating? What do we hope to learn, shift, or build together?	Vision planning template, Miro board
Identify who’s missing	Consider who is typically left out of the decision-making process—and invite them in first.	Who do we usually <i>not</i> hear from? How can we reach them authentically?	Community stakeholder map

✓ PHASE 2: LISTEN WITH INTENTION

Step	Description	Guiding Questions	Tools
Host inclusive listening sessions	Go beyond surveys; use storytelling, visual tools, and flexible meeting times.	What spaces do families find most accessible? How will we honor all languages and voices?	Flipchart paper, interpreter services, and feedback boards
Use multiple formats	Collect input via voice memos, phone calls, WhatsApp, and one-on-one convos; not just meetings.	How do our families prefer to communicate? What methods build trust?	Google Voice, Typeform, Canva boards

✓ PHASE 3: DESIGN WITH, NOT FOR

Step	Description	Guiding Questions	Tools
Facilitate co-design circles	Create shared space for families, students, & staff to plan together.	What would a typical day feel like in our ideal school? What rituals, visuals, and rhythms matter most?	Co-design template, mood boards
Asset mapping	Center what families & students bring to the table: skills, stories & community resources.	What assets exist in our community? Who are our culture keepers and connectors?	Asset mapping guide, interview protocol

✓ PHASE 4: BUILD THE FEEDBACK LOOP

Step	Description	Guiding Questions	Tools
Plan for ongoing feedback	Make community input a continuous part of your rhythm, not a one-off.	How often will we check back in? Who owns the communication loop?	Feedback calendar, community check-ins
“You Said, We Did” moments	Publicly share how input shaped your plans, small or large.	What did we learn, and how did we act on it?	Slide decks, visual posters, social media recaps.

✓ PHASE 5: REFLECT + REFINE

Step	Description	Guiding Questions	Tools
Conduct community reflection	Invite families and partners to reflect on the process and suggest adjustments.	What worked? What could we do differently next time?	Exit slips, focus group notes
Celebrate visible impact	Acknowledge growth, collaboration, and wins (big and small).	What legacy are we creating together?	Community storytelling night, visual timeline

🌟 Bonus Reflection: What Co-Creation Feels Like

Use this quick litmus test with your team:

- 👊 Are families **seen as partners**, not passive participants?
- 🎯 Is feedback **influencing real decisions**?
- 🌀 Are you learning *from* the community—not just about it?
- 📣 Are you **sharing power** or simply delegating tasks?



Benita C. Gordon is the Founder of the [MicroLearn Hub](#), the host of the [Global Education Concierge Podcast](#) and a strong voice for finding paths forward in this era of disruption. She has served as a panelist for The worthy Educator's [Transforming Education](#) series, and on our [Roadmap 2030 Town Halls](#).

