Presentation Title	**'Rings of Security': Secure or Broken?**
Format	**Paper Session [5.04]**
Sub-theme	**Home, School and Community**

'Rings of Security': Secure or Broken?

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Abstract

There is no lack of acclamations for effective home school community collaboration. This paper endorses the approvals but takes the discussion in another direction. It utilises Boothby, Ressler & Steinbeck's 'rings of security' concept to frame the argument. The family, community and school are deemed the first, second and third 'rings of security', respectively.

The paper explores the quality of the bonds that should connect individual as well as the collective 'rings of security'. It asserts that particular undesirable social practices, perhaps a question of ethics, have eroded and eventually broken the circular frameworks that for centuries have played an essential role in educational achievement, particular during the formative primary school years. It also points out that certain social malpractices have severely damaged the protective 'adhesive' that links the 'rings', thus 'exposing' the very children that should be trained, nurtured and protected. It is against this backdrop that the paper explores the 'road worthiness' of the 'rings' and questions the level of sustained 'security' produced by the said 'rings'. The position taken in this paper was provoked by the many cases of neglect and child abuse in England that sparked off national indignation as much as it did child protection reforms, especially Victoria Climbie and Baby P's cases. The issue of knife crime in primary schools also inspired the slant taken on home school community relations.

Examples based on the relocated Montserrat student experience are used to illustrate the damage that can result when 'rings of security' are broken. The paper concludes that despite the 'dents on the frame', home school community collaboration is the way forward with regards to achievement motivation and sustained educational advancements.

Keywords: home-school collaboration, ethical framework, cooperative communities

Where can anyone find an opportunity to impact a child's world as easily and as well as in a school or home, leading children to discover their own distinct way to grow and develop – Thomas (1988).

None of us can be strong unless we have the support of the community. And unless the community is strong, it's impossible for us to be strong, no matter how big we become (Camille Cosby, Wisdom of the Elders).

Children cannot learn and live up to their full potential when violence and drugs threaten their safety in schools – President Bill Clinton (1997).

Introduction

Over the past five decades or so, researchers and academics alike have acclaimed the importance and effectiveness of home school community collaboration (Rodriguez & Conchas, 2009; Brown & Beckett, 2007; Elias, Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2007; Mitra, 2006; Shotte, 2006; Sanders, 2003; Abrams & Taylor Gibbs, 2002). Such widespread approval and research interest emphasise the need for partnerships among these societal institutions if the promotion of educational excellence is to be sustained. This paper takes side with the positions taken but explores the effectiveness of home, school collaboration from another perspective. Ressler, Boothby & Steinbeck's concept of 'rings of security' are used as the springboard to launch the discussion, and also as the boundary within which the issues are interpreted and applied. They deem the family (home), community and school as the first, second and third 'rings of security', respectively.

The paper begins by looking at the context that influenced Ressler, Boothby & Steinbeck's of 'rings of security' concept. It then highlights the main arguments that support home school collaboration as well as the factors that hinder or promote this partnership. It next identifies the issues and case studies that challenge and expose the quality of the bonds that should connect individual as well as the collective 'rings of security'. The Victoria Climbié and the Baby P cases demonstrate how the circular frameworks, which have for centuries played an essential role in educational achievement, particular during the formative primary school years, have been eroded and ultimately broken. Alongside these cases, is the issue of knife crime in schools. It is these dire circumstances that have led me to question the 'road worthiness' of the 'rings' and the level of sustained 'security' produced by the said 'rings'.

To illustrate the damage that can result when 'rings of security' are broken, the paper utilises the relocated Montserrat student experience in England as an example. To conclude, it acknowledges the enormity of the task to secure the 'rings' but contends that home school community collaboration is not only crucial for achievement motivation and sustained educational advancements, but also for the maintenance of a safe, productive society.

'Rings of Security': The Context

Ressler, Boothby & Steinbeck link 'rings of security' to the psychological trauma and 'unsettlement' that result from forced migration. They focus on "the care and placement of unaccompanied children in wars, natural disasters and refugee movements". Their three-year research work was commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) who spearheaded research on trauma amongst refugee children. The research was intended to test methods for helping refugee children to recover from the effects of violence

and uprooting. The attention given to unaccompanied children was against the backdrop two Principles of the 1959 UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child that state:

> The child must be the first to receive relief in times of distress – Principle 3.

> The child shall in all circumstances be among the first to receive protection and relief – Principle 8 (UNHCR, 2008).

There are several psychological implications of uprootedness for unaccompanied children; hence they do need 'protection and relief for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) correlates with displacement. From their study of young refugees, Fazel, Wheeler & Danesh (2005) note that the higher the level of exposure to traumatic situations, the more prevalent PTSD. Moreover, researchers have found that children exposed to directly threatening events and losses, such as separation, detention or torture, or those who have witnessed family members being killed or assaulted, will have significantly increased risk of disorder (Michaelson & Sclare, 2009, p.276). Having analysed a number of cases from various conflict zones, Ressler, Boothby & Steinbock, (1988) conclude:

> … most organized evacuation programs which have intentionally separated children from their families in order to protect them from potential psychological or physical harm have been judged to be historical mistakes (p.151).

It was following this conclusion that Ressler et al, (1988) assert that the family and the community are the first and second 'rings of security'. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), (2006) makes reference to other 'rings of security – 3rd as "other national actors, including all levels of government", 4th as NGOs and other societal organisations and 5th as the international community. School as the 3rd 'ring' is a subset of the 'umbrella' third ring. School is singled out as the third 'ring' because:

(1) Schools are learning communities for children;

(2) Schools are more that grade attainment. They can help children to build a commitment to education;

(3) The government has developed programmes such as 'Sure Start' and 'Every Child Matters', to assist schools in providing day-day support and protection for children (Department for Children School and Families (DCSF), 2009).

Ressler et al view the aforementioned 'rings of protection' as essential to providing for the psychological needs of traumatised, uprooted children. The evidence shows (such as the cases used in this paper) that children who are not uprooted also experience trauma in varying degrees in various undesirable situations. By extension therefore, the said rings are also protective agents for all vulnerable children, uprooted or otherwise. Besides, Article 25 - United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child, is for the benefit of all children:

> States Parties recognize the right of a child who has been placed by the competent authorities for the purposes of care, protection or treatment of his or her physical or mental health, to a periodic review of the treatment

provided to the child and all other circumstances relevant to his or her placement (DCSF, 2009).

It was in this spirit of protection for all children that the paper extended and applied the 'rings of security' concept. This paper is particular concerned with the sturdiness of the first three 'rings' and how individually, and/or collectively, they retard educational progress.

The 'Rings of Security': A Peek at What Researchers Say
The research evidence shows that home school community collaboration, is to a large extent, responsible for the educational success stories of many children. (Grant & Ray, 2009; Elias, Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2007; Madison, 2000).

With reference to home, the first 'ring of security', Madison (2000) observes: "the educational success of a child is very dependent on the family".   However, research findings show that the family has a limited role in that it is unable to bring about 'real' success without scaffolds from other societal institutions (Rhamie 2007; Hegarty 1993). In fact, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) (2005) promotes education as a shared responsibility – a home-school partnership. But it warns that such collaboration should not be considered as an activity, but rather as "a process that guides the development of goals and plans". However, for education to become a shared responsibility any partnership established should be "characterized by open communication, mutually agreed upon goals, and joint decision-making".   An explosion in technological advancement has made open communication possible in a number of ways – mobile phones, computers, televisions, among others.   Communication between home, school and community is crucial to collaboration and therefore with the available technology, can be better facilitated with the hope of establishing sound, effective partnerships between the rings. NASP (2005) reports that some schools have set up voice-mail systems specifically for parents to access school information.

The University of Queensland (2004) conducted a study using seven case studies to explore the links between home, school and community that support students' numeracy development. The research involved a cross-section of participants: two largely funded State/Territory programmes; the NT Mobile Pre-school Project; the Victorian Early Years Numeracy Parent Pack; a long-standing parent–school partnership programme Family Maths Project Australia; two primary schools; and a commercial tutoring agency. The findings show that barriers to effective partnerships are mainly due to funding and a lack of awareness of numeracy learning and programmes on the part of professional associations and education policy makers. This is not an isolated conclusion for Sheila Dainton, an education policy advisor, had this to say: "without additional funding, better home-school liaison simply cannot happen" (Pinnell, 2000, p.12).

Macbeth (1993, p.44) favours and recommends school-and-parent contracts as a tool for counteracting educational disadvantage. Hegarty takes a similar position by asserting that effective communication between home and school is vital to helping teachers to learn about a "child's pattern of difficulties" so that they can better help children to achieve (1993, p.120). Munn affirms that by and large, parents and teachers share a common interest in children's schooling and each group "brings complementary skills and expertise" to the teaching learning process (1993, p.175).   Such a combination speaks well for sound alliances. Undoubtedly, these partnerships can go a long way in reducing teacher stress that relates to

"fatigue, nervous tension, frustration, wear and tear, difficulties in adapting to pupils, personal fragility and routine" (Kyriacou 2004, p.267).

Evidently, effective home-school links result in higher achieving students and better behaviour (Rhamie & Hallam 2002; Mansfield, 1994). But how do the role of the community fit into this two-way partnership?

Rhamie (1998:90) investigated the factors that contributed to the academic success of African Caribbean professionals (British-born) in Britain. Rhamie utilised two models to represent her findings. It was the home-school-child link that played the major role in students' academic success. Participation of the community is perceived as extra-curricular activity rather than as an integral component of the teaching-learning environment. Thus, the community has remained on the periphery, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: A Home-School-Based Model of Success
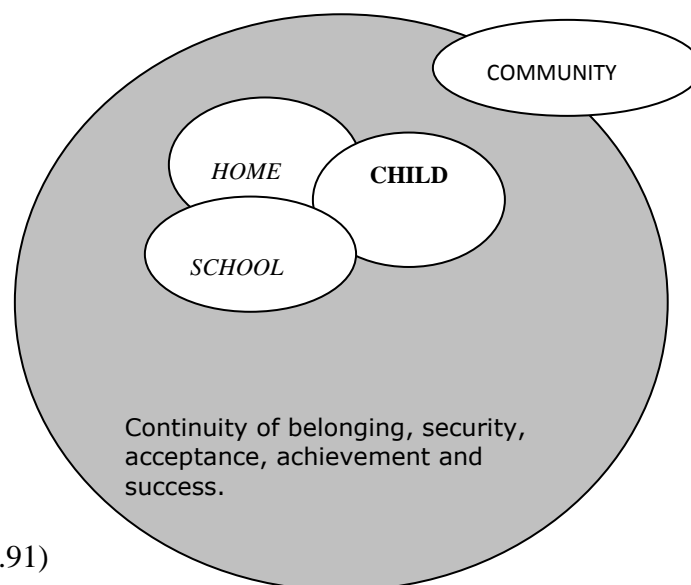
Source: Rhamie (1998, p.91)

Figure 1 illustrates a model for academic success. Nevertheless, the relocated Montserrat students' case does not fit neatly into this model for the community was found to be central, rather than peripheral, to their educational success (Shotte 2002; Shotte 1999). This underscores the importance of home-community connections. With regards to discipline, Mansfield (1994, p.18) confirms: "Close links with parents and the local community are crucial in maintaining acceptable behaviour within a school". But Rhamie takes the benefits of home-community interaction a step beyond the maintenance of acceptable behaviour. The benefits encompass a positive continuity in language and culture, and a working relationship that creates "a sense of belonging, ownership, security, acceptance, achievement and success" (Rhamie, 1998:93). In her second model of success, Rhamie illustrates that it was the community rather than the school that mainly influenced respondents' educational successes, possibly because the community provided various situations where respondents experienced achievement and success, hence supplying the motivation for respondents to succeed at school. This model of success is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: A Home-Community Based Model of Success
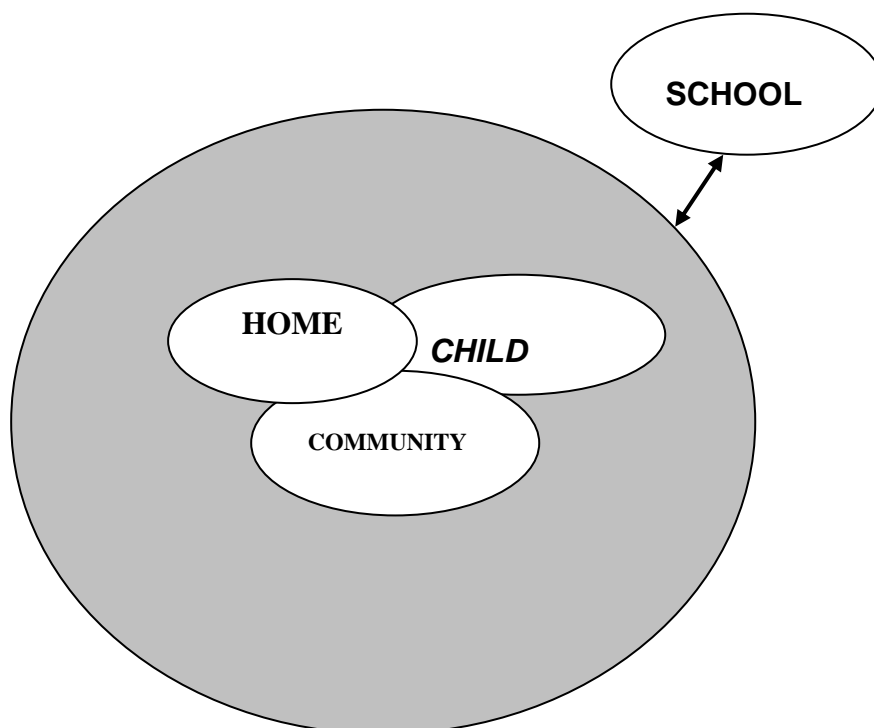
Source: Rhamie (1998, p.94)

Figure 2 shows the home and the community as playing a more significant role in children's learning than the school. But, in writing about school and community collaboration, Berger (1987, p.111) asserts that if children are to benefit more fully, there is need for the two-way traffic between the school and the community. Puri (1997, p.42) contends that it is sometimes necessary for teachers to extend their territory "beyond the classroom door" to the community since school-community collaboration will provide vital information of students' background, as well as increase students' chances of success.

The principle behind community education supports Puri's argument and extends it to the sharing of resources. In her discussion of 'community education and parent involvement', Watt defines community education as:

> a process of commitment to the education and leisure of all ages through local participation in setting priorities, sharing resources and the study of circumstances. Thus, the community and its educational provision qualify and enhance each other (Watt, 1989, p.185).

Added to the above range of principles, is the notion of "the mutually supportive relationships between school and community" (Watt 1989, p.186). It is within this mutually supportive environment that partnerships are strengthened and schooling becomes meaningful. This may seem a puzzling paradox when parents are perceived as "customers of the education service" (Munn, 1993, p.2). Munn made this observation in light of the 'rights' that British parents have with regards to choosing the school they want their children to attend. But the issue here is not about parents' choice but about the interest parents show in their children's schooling. Hartley-Brewer points out:

> Research shows incontrovertibly that parental interest in a child's work and a parent involvement in school not only raise performance but also aid a child's emotional development. Where home and school support, listen to and understand each other, children can be loyal to both, relax and thereby become comfortable and enthusiastic about the institution and their work (2000, p.11).

The above scenario is even more obvious in situations where teachers are parents, and parents are community organisation members. This mixed-role relationship poses challenges of various kinds when it comes to teachers' workload and parents' and teachers' responsibilities to home school and community; hence this caveat is in order: "home-school-*community* co-operation should not add to the burdens of parents and teachers" (Hallgarten in Pinnell, 2000, p.12).

Grant & Ray identify another aspect that can harm the three-way circular relationship – Diana Baumrind's parenting styles. Although authoritarian parenting, permissive/indulgent parenting and permissive/neglectful parenting may appear to have some merits, by and large, they often result in low self-esteem and tend to be "at high risk for emotional and behavioural problems, including alcohol and substance abuse" (2009, p.77). Yet, despite the challenges and "potential pitfalls", I contend that a home-school-community coalition is advantageous.

The Case Studies
This subheading looks at the issues that influenced the writing of this paper, namely those surrounding Victoria Climbieʿ and Baby P cases, as well as knife crimes in schools.

Victoria Climbieʿ. Victoria Climbie' was eight years old when she met a tragic death in February 2000. This horrific crime caused "widespread concern" (Davies, Mountford & Gannon, 2009, p.384), indignation and anger and subsequently brought about the largest review of child protection arrangements in the United Kingdom. BBC (2003) reports these reactions:

- Gill Morgan, Chief Executive of the National Health Service (NHS) Confederation:
  The tragedy of Victoria's death must mark a watershed for all those agencies working to protect vulnerable children. If we follow through the recommendations in spirit and in practice, they will transform children's lives. All our efforts must now be focused on tackling the flaws in the system that failed Victoria and her parents.

- Rodney Brooke, the Chair of the General Social Care Council (GCSC):
  In the future, we will have a register of social care workers…. Workers who breach our code of practice could be removed from the register. In this way, any person found to be unsuitable would be prevented from working in social care… These measures, coupled with the work of other new bodies, such as the future Commission for Social Care Inspection and the Social Care Institute for Excellence, and other innovations in the sector, will raise standards and improve protection.

- The former Chief Executive of Haringey Council, Gurbux Singh, accepted corporate responsibility:

We all need to digest the report, carefully consider and fully implement the recommendations ensuring that a repeat of this tragedy never occurs. Protecting our children must be the number one priority and I am sad on this occasion we failed Victoria.

- Shadow Health Secretary Dr Liam Fox:
  Every report says something must be done. Why will this one be different? Communication is the main problem between different agencies. How will this improve in practice beyond just setting up new structures?

- Liberal Democrat Social Services spokesman Paul Burstow:
  There is a terrible sense of deja vu in the Laming report. The same weaknesses have led to the same mistakes with the same missed opportunities to save a tortured child's life… The law must now be changed so that all agencies involved in child protection have to take a proactive part in the work of Area Child Protection Committees and support the local authority in delivering an integrated children and family service.

- Health Minister David Lammy, in whose Tottenham constituency Victoria lived:
  People in deprived communities deserve and require the best from public services. Too often they receive the worst. We must strive to ensure that these failings cannot be repeated so that no other child in Haringey can fall victim to such abuse.

- Paul Ennals, Chief Executive of the National Children's Bureau:
  Children themselves must know where to go to seek help for themselves or others with access to adults they can trust… Teachers, health workers, social services, police and voluntary organisations must be willing to make fresh efforts at co-ordination so that information flows more easily and cries for help are not missed.

The foregoing reactions were specifically selected to demonstrate that reactions came from a cross-section of the society. The views range from an admission of corporate responsibility to the kind of services that should be made available to children. It is within this climate that I question the security of the 'rings' for it seems ironical that the very institutions that should assist children are the ones that fail them. Space does not permit a comprehensive analysis of the issues but the feedback does show that the Victoria story is characterised by a series of failure and a long chain of neglect.

Baby P. Evidently, the horrors of the Baby P case would not have existed if lessons were learned from the Victoria Climbie' case. Eight years later, Baby P became another victim of "a string of failures" (Carroll, 2008). The following shows a summarised report of the shocking details:

A leaked confidential document discloses a catalogue of blunders by Haringey Council, the police and other services.

It said police did not get vital information about the 17-monthold boy's background, and officials missed meetings to discuss the case. One session

that ultimately decided against taking the child out of his home, just days before he died, was delayed by six weeks.

Baby P died in August 2007 after suffering horrific injuries at the hands of his mother, her boyfriend and a lodger. He was seen by social workers, doctors and police on 60 occasions in just eight months (Mirror, 2009).

As shown above, safety of children is a serious issue. A Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) spokesman was noted to say: "We will do whatever it takes to ensure children are safe" (Mirror, 2009). Lynne Featherstone, Member of Parliament (MP), Haringey Council, whose career spans the Victoria Climbie˙ and Baby P cases comments: "I don't believe that the ambition of that over-used phrase 'lessons must be learned' can ever be fully realised if the causes and actions are hidden". The MP further adds: "I have come to the conclusion that a contributing factor to cases like these (and others) is the secrecy, the closing ranks culture and the lack of transparency" (Featherstone, 2009). Based on the MP's comments, it seems reasonable to advocate that to keep children safe is a huge, but not impossible task.

Knife Crime in Primary Schools
Knife crime is increasingly becoming a serious problem in primary schools in England. This is causing much fear in families, schools and the neighbourhoods in the respective communities. To tackle knife crime, Operation Blunt was launched in November 2004 across 12 London Boroughs and by 2005 was operating in 32 Boroughs as a result of the success it realised earlier. Some of the tactics used by Operation Blunt are: "enforcement methods such as knife search operations utilising metal detector arches, dispersal zones where officers have the power to search in a designated area, test purchase (where we ensure shops are not selling knives illegally) and high visibility policing" (Home Office, 2007).
The fear in schools is quite obvious for according to the Southern Daily Echo (2008) "all 14 of the city's (Southampton) secondary schools, as well as eight primary and junior schools, have accepted the metal detectors issued". The following is evidence 'from the horse's mouth' – the feelings of a primary school child in poetic form:

Knives & Guns

It's not fun
To carry a Gun,
It's not fab
If you stab,
It's for real
You wouldn't dare
If you care
If you use knives
You'll waste lives
You won't be cool
You'll be a fool!

By Kirston, Year 6, Richard Alibon Primary School, Dagenham, London (Itsnotagame, 2009)

The sentiments of this Year 6 pupil were penned as a result of a recent anti-knife campaign in the Barking and Dagenham area of London. A look beyond the poetic emotions reveals a frightened little boy whose candid expressions aptly reflect communal apprehension as much

as it does families' disgust and weariness with knife crime. Little wonder that some parents have decided to home-school. In addition to religious reasons for home-schooling, Holmes (2006) lists "concerns about school being an unsafe environment through bullying and violence" among the non-religious reasons for home-schooling. Holmes further notes: "most people in the UK are not home educators by choice but families in trouble". The headlines/articles in Table 1 appear to justify parents' concerns.

Table 1: Recent Newspaper Headlines and Articles – Evidence of Broken 'Rings of Security'

| Headlines/Article	Newspaper	Date
• **Take more babies away from bad parents**	**The Observer**	**06/09/09**
• **Baby P Council let foster kid live with terrorist**	**The Sun**	**12/09/09**
• **More than 2000 school are going into the red**	**Daily Mail**	**17/09/09**
• **Paedo Nursery Worker Guilty**	**London Lite**	**01/10/09**
• **Female ex-teacher: I am a serial child abuser**	**Metro**	**08/10/09**
• **School stops pupils from buying energy drinks**	**Metro**	**08/10/09**
• **TESCO Attacks 'Woeful' Schools**	**Evening Standard**	**13/10/09**
• **Give teachers authority or betray our children**	**Evening Standard**	**29/10/09**
• **Nursery abuser names victims**	**Evening Standard**	**29/10/09**
• **Parents banned from play areas**	**Metro**	**29/10/09**

With regards to the aforementioned scenarios, I have barely scratched the surface for there is a multitude of concerns and issues that are associated with these cases. Although brief, they do demonstrate that the 'rings of security' are not so secure after all. Clearly, there is urgent need for concerned citizens to tackle the issues via strong societal links and partnerships, especially since all the 'rings' - the family, school and community - are shown in a negative light and are therefore found wanting.

The 'Rings': The Montserrat Case
Prior to July 1995, the onset of the ongoing volcanic crisis, a robust home-school-community network ably sustained the achievement motivation levels of Montserrat students (all children of school-going age), thus making educational opportunities a reality for all students and educational success a reality for a significant majority. During the early stages and up until now (the period of the ongoing crisis), achievement motivation levels are still way above average because of solid home-school-community partnerships. These assertions are based on personal experiences as a educator in Montserrat and informal conversations with parents,

teachers and a cross-section of community members. This situation clearly reflects Ressler, Boothby and Steinbock's 'rings of security' concept.   In the close-knit, Montserrat community context, these three rings, although physically separated, often operated as a single unit. This meant that in some instances, Ressler et al's 'positions' of security were shifted to fit the circumstances in which the 'players' found themselves. For example, sometimes the school or the community represented the first 'ring of security', in that either of them takes on the responsibility of the family. At other times they were rolled into one, that is, operating as a unified 'ring of security'. It was this flexibility within a cohesive network that had helped to promote and sustain students' high levels of achievement motivation in Montserrat up to present. Figure 3 illiustrates the connection.

Figure 3: 'Ring of Security: The Montserrat Model
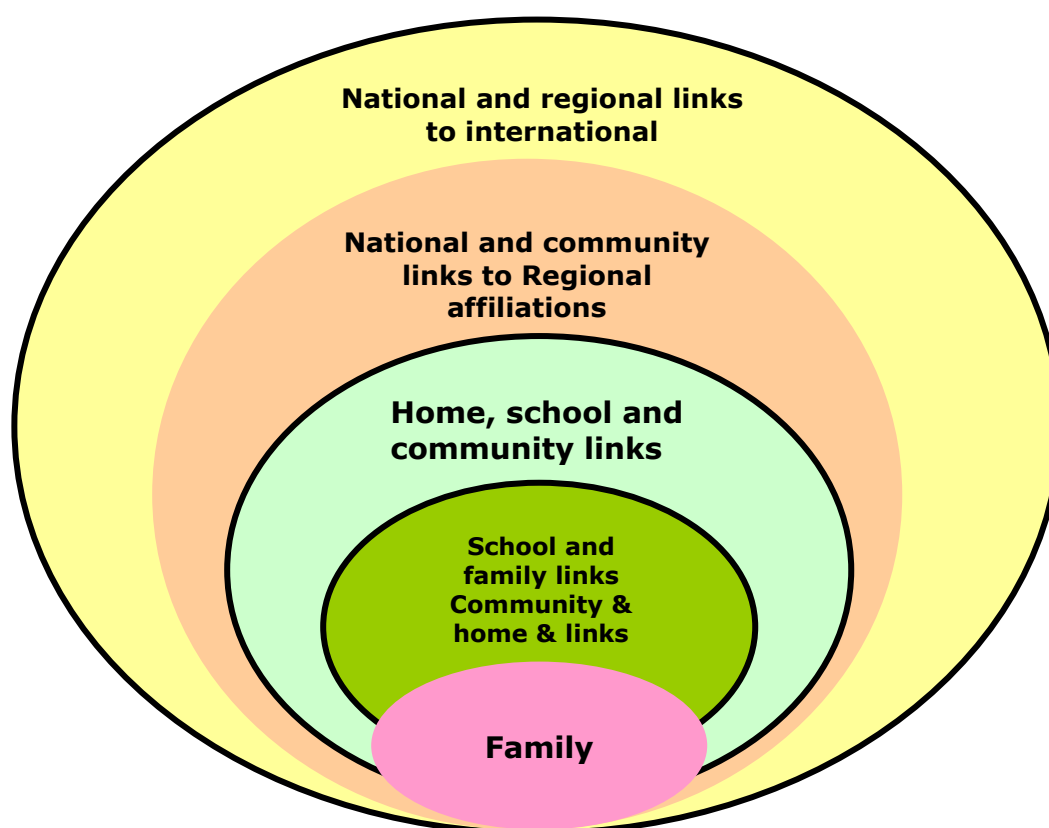
Interestingly, the Montserrat model reflects the five 'rings of security' as identified by UNICEF (UNICEF, 2006). (It would be equally appealing to explore the success of the other 'rings' in this same context.) To return to the 'three-ring' focus of this paper, the 'rings' are severely damaged since relocation to England. Figure 4 shows the results.

**Figure 4: Effects of Forced Migration on Relocated Montserratian Students'
Achievement Motivation**
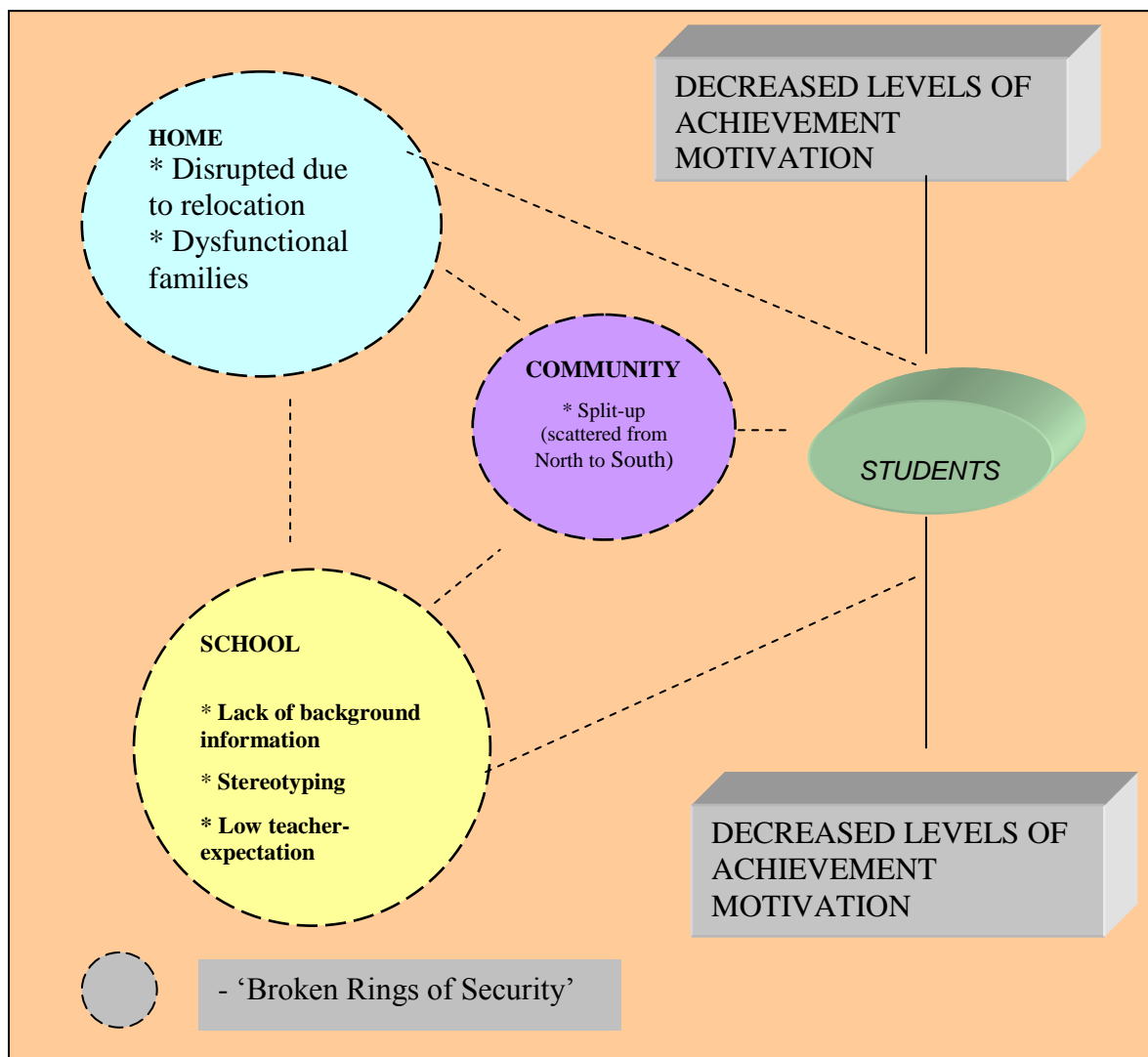
Source: Shotte (2001, p.27).

Bridging and Securing the 'Rings of Security'

In addition to the rapidly increasing academic literature on home-school-community partnership, Education Acts (1980, 1981,1986 and 1988) have all mentioned some aspects (such as parents' involvement in school choice, assessment procedures and representation on governing bodies) of this partnership (Jowett, Baginsky & MacNeil 1991:1). Such widespread attention confirms the importance of home-school community collaboration to children's educational progress.

Evidently, students benefit more when the home, school and community operate as partners in a relaxed atmosphere, rather than as splinter groups in an issue-ridden society. A comfortable, relaxed atmosphere creates an environment in which children's education can flourish. I refer again to Figure 3 since it represents a similar environment - one in which relocated students' educational aspirations were nurtured. In the Montserrat context, the school and community are virtual extensions of the family, thus the entire island becomes one close-knit 'family community'. It was this 'all-a-we-a-wan-family' environment that

mothered, trained and kept levels of achievement motivation in an acceptable position. Unfortunately, absence of a similar home-school-community partnership since relocation to England, due to several in-school and out-of-school factors, has resulted in a decrease in relocated students' achievement motivation, which is greatly affecting educational success. Relocated parents still view home-school-community partnerships as vital to their children's educational success and are therefore participating in a number of various networking strategies and initiatives spearheaded by the Montserrat Goovernment UK Office (UGUKO), with a view to repairing the 'broken rinks' and regaining the standards that will produce educational success.

The Montserrat 'ring-of-security model' was successful. From an educational-development-and-progress perspective, I venture to recommend to all concerned, a similar 'one family' partnership structure to assist in strengthening home-school-cummunity partnerships.

Conclusion
The paper explores Ressler, Boothby & Steinbeck's 'rings-of-security' concept – home, community and school as first, second and third 'rings of security'. It highlights findings from various research work that support home-school-community collaboration. It points out the need to avoid the pitfalls that can damage the relationship between the 'rings'. Additionally, it promotes the importance of home-school-community collaboration for an improvement in educational achievement, regular school attendance, an elevated concept of self, acceptable behaviour and positive attitudes towards school, learning, self-development and progress. It further asserts that a sustained partnership between the 'rings' is not only beneficial to children (students) but also to parents, families, educators and the extended societal 'family'. Success depends on enthusiasm, teamwork, active participation, positive interaction, cooperation, a strong commitment to the development of shared goals and a healthy respect of others' different perspectives.

However, it questions the 'road worthiness' of the 'rings' against the backdrop of three case studies (scenarios) - Victoria Climbieˊ, Baby P and knife crime in schools. From the research evidence examined, and from personal experiences as a parent, educator and member of various community organisations, it is clear that home-school-collaboration is the way forward for educational success and a stabilised, safe society. If partnerships are not strengthened the 'rings of security' will erode, weaken and eventually collapse thus leaving their 'protectees' totally exposed and imperilled. It still 'takes a village to raise a child' and 'every little does help'.

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