



IZWI CONVERSATIONS MANIFESTO

The pedagogy of listening is not only a pedagogy for the school; it's an attitude for life.

Izwi le Mimosa is the space where caregivers engage in the Mimosa community, lead projects, enter into conversations and support one another, the children and the school, on the shared journey of growth and development. Izwi le Mimosa is not democratic or centralised. It is a creative, free space, to operate within the Reggio principles, and start projects or processes to achieve objectives aligned to the interests of individuals or groups of caregivers: reimagining the alleyway, supporting fundraising or marketing, facilitating caregiver engagement in classrooms.

Izwi le Mimosa is a community-building space, to encourage agency and participation for caregivers. The school / caregiver relationship is often a binary in typical school environments, while at Mimosa it is non-binary, and non-linear - all individuals have agency to participate.

Izwi Conversations is the arm of Izwi le Mimosa which is focused on *holding space for conversation*. This work is aimed at participating in and achieving *community-building*, at enacting the principles of *openness, listening, embracing difference, curiosity, enquiry, welcoming uncertainty, exchange and learning*.

As our children are on a journey observed and scaffolded by their teachers, so the community is on a journey, learning through our exchanges and experiences, and Izwi Conversations is one of the scaffolding mechanisms for the journey.

When children are working together, each is developing her own process by learning from the processes of the others. If you believe that the others are a source of your learning, your identity and your knowledge, you have opened a very important door to the joy of being together.



Izwi Conversations Vision

- An integrated, engaged and active school community
- Embracing complexity
- A Mimosa community that reflects society, where things are sometimes complicated, confusing, unclear, uncomfortable
- A community, in process
- A non-polarised community, where it's safe to disagree
- Modelling community building in a divided and polarised world where freedom of speech and engagement is curbed by a powerful politics of silencing

Izwi Conversations role taking us closer to the vision

- Holding space for the unfolding of community.
- Trusting the conversation process to deliver the value of exchange, speaking, listening, being heard, hearing others.
- Holding a 'safe space' – not always a comfortable space, but a principled, respectful space, driven by Reggio principles.
- Embedding patterns of behaviour that can be replicated by successive generations of caregivers.
- Allowing individuals and groups in the community to follow their interests, discuss their concerns.
- Responding to community members' needs to engage with the complexity of caring for children and the complexity of community and belonging - for themselves and their children.
- Supporting caregivers' agency as leaders in the community.
- Adding a layer to the layers of engagement and community building around the school – Tuesday mornings, camping trips, celebrations: layers of community building, spaces for deepening relationships, building connection and belonging.
- Offering a space for community members to meet and know and learn from one another.
- Offering a space to draw on the lived experiences and repertoires of caregivers.
- Modelling (for our children, for each other, for other schools, for society) how to have conversations, including difficult conversations – at a time when conversation can be fraught.
- Offering a space for thinking about how to talk to children about difficult topics.
- Responding to the polarisation of debate and politics in the world, creating a space where it's safe (and beautiful, and valuable) to be different and diverse, to hold strong views and disagree.
- Space for conversations on topics responsive to what is happening in the world.



Izwi Conversations Protocol

Izwi Conversations follows an anarchist leadership approach: as individuals feel inspired, or have expertise or interest to start a conversation, they are welcome to do so.

This protocol offers guidance to any member of the Mimosa community who wishes to initiate a conversation under the Izwi Conversation method.

The aim is to host 4 Izwi Conversations per year:

Conversations are not held on the school grounds, as these are community conversations, not conversations initiated or led by or between 'the school' and 'the caregivers'. These conversations are not the forum for influencing school policy.

Suggestions for topics are submitted on the Izwi Conversations WhatsApp group, which can collectively assess the appropriateness of topics for conversation. Selection criteria for topics:

- Relevance to the lives and interests of members of the community;
- Some general interest in the topic amongst members of the community;
- Aligned to the principles of curiosity and inclusion, and of supporting one another to better understand the complexity of the world in which we are guiding our children's journeys;
- Connected to some provocation such as a podcast, article, experience of emerging topic associated with the children's enquiries or their daily experiences.

Conversations should be facilitated in such a way that is structurally inclusive, mindful of the limitations for caregivers in different circumstances and how to ensure easy access to the conversation space.

Children should be invited into conversations, either directly or through engagement outside of a conversation, depending on the topic. Caregivers should never presume to speak 'for' the children, and rather allow them to speak for themselves.

Izwi Conversations do not come with expectations of participation, community members who are interested in one topic or another are invited to participate for their own benefit. Those who cannot attend or do not feel the urgency of a particular topic should not feel that this is a failure on their part to show up for their children or the Mimosa community.



Principles holding the Izwi Conversations space

Izwi Conversations acknowledges that all caregivers in the Mimosa community care very deeply about making the best possible choices for our children and our community. This investment makes it more difficult to accept doubt and difference. Differing views on topics where views are deeply held can provoke intense emotion, and it is a principle of Izwi Conversations that we welcome difference and believe there is value in conversing with people who hold different views. It is also a principle that we should all remain mindful of our emotions and regulate our behaviour to uphold respect, openness and listening at all times.

The pedagogy of listening is an important attitude for the identity of the human being. Listening to others, listening to the self and remaining open to difference, welcoming different points of view and interpretations, welcoming uncertainty and even doubt. This can be seen as education for peace, education for openness and inclusion, even, and especially, where views and orientations differ. Peace is a way of thinking, learning and listening to others, a way of looking at differences as an element of connection, not separation.

During conversations, participants are encouraged to:

- Suspend judgment and prejudice;
- Have courage: to share, to disagree, to be wrong, to learn, to change, to listen;
- Legitimize one another to represent theories and offer interpretations;
- Adhere to the humanising principles and values of the Constitution;
- Participate in a Brave Space for difficult / challenging conversations;
- Give one another permission to be vulnerable to uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure;
- Be curious and take the perspective of those who experience a different truth;
- Listen to understand instead of listening to respond;
- Ask questions;
- Risk for a reason! Lean in to the fear of not knowing the answer, be open to the benefit of entering into a conversation that feels risky;
- Remain mindful and present in the moment with intention: understand our own motivations and responses, and the way that they impact our own communication and engagement;
- Remain conscious of the loudness of our own voices, and consciously create space for other voices.

The courage to come into this room and say, “I hope to be different when I leave, not necessarily because I agree with you but because your thoughts caused me to think differently.”