

pioneering

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A NOTE FROM EDUCATION REIMAGINED

Kelly Young, Executive Director

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Dear Pioneers,

In the last few weeks, I've had the opportunity to work with 40 superintendents in the AASA Digital Consortium as they explored plans to pilot or further their learner-centered district initiatives and to visit with a community of pioneers in Minnesota hosted by Education Evolving. We are so grateful for the courageous leadership of students, teachers, superintendents, and supporting organizations like Education Evolving and AASA.

While I have been on the road, we have also been spending a lot of time distinguishing “the learner-centered paradigm for education.” While it is still a work in progress, we welcome you to check it out ([link](#)). Getting the boundaries of this paradigm sharper is deepening our insights into what is and isn't learner-centered.

Working on that distinction while visiting and talking with many learning environments has made something much clearer for me. Starting with a question about how we can more effectively have our kids be proficient in the state standards, chances are that the resulting innovation will be school-centered—leading to incremental improvement of the current system.

Why doesn't it lead to transformation? Because the question is fundamentally about, “How do we deliver education better to students?” It is inherently a system-focused or school-centered inquiry. When an innovation starts with a question like, “How do we support learners in reaching their full potential?” it is more likely to lead us down transformational, learner-centered paths.

One innovation unleashes the learner's motivation, creativity, and ownership, and the other is about adults delivering learning to kids. While both take a huge effort, the learner-centered kind will be sustainable—eventually making the adults' work easier and producing much greater results. If a community is courageous enough to undertake innovation, we want it to pay off big for them—their learners and the community.

It leaves me with a question, “How do we (as a movement) help more people start down learner-centered pathways to innovation and avoid the pitfall of innovation inside the current paradigm?”

Warm wishes,
Kelly Young

P.S. In this great issue, we have the story of a district shifting their system's paradigm through waves of change and some reflections from a New Hampshire learner about his reinvented pumpkin-flinging catapult and how he found his voice as a leader. Enjoy!



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Connect. Share. Discover. Lead.
We seek to accelerate the growth of the movement dedicated to transforming education in America. We invite those excited and interested by the possibility of learner-centered education to discover more, join a growing movement, and begin a journey to make this a reality in diverse communities across the country.





KETTLE MORaine SCHOOL DISTRICT

Wales, Wisconsin

“Kettle Moraine allows my education to be personalized and innovative while still remaining challenging and rigorous.” – EMILY GIOMBI, SENIOR AT KETTLE MORaine

WHEN THE SYSTEM SEEMS TO BE WORKING IN YOUR FAVOR, like at Kettle Moraine School District (KMSD), it is incredibly difficult to assess your circumstances and say “we can and should do better.” But, what happens if you do?

When looking at the traditional metrics, there was no reason any KMSD leader should have given a second thought to transforming their vision. But, when they put themselves in their learner’s shoes, they began to uncover information the numbers couldn’t reveal—**the dispositions** with which their learners approached learning. Based upon the district’s innovative work in four charter schools, it was determined that these dispositions are most efficiently and effectively developed in a learner-centered environment.

Kettle Moraine’s most recent community forum in fall 2015 allowed the community to reflect upon the district’s vision of “Learning without Boundaries.” It suggested that all students in Kettle Moraine, not just those in the charter schools, have the opportunity to be part of a personalized learning environment where learners should no longer be constrained by the roadblocks of time, space, and teacher-owned learning. Instead, learners should be given an invitation to **personalize, contextualize, and make relevant** their own learning experiences—learning should be driven by their own **agency**.

For one learner, this has allowed his **socially embedded**, entrepreneurial idea—dubbed the “Miracle Minute” ([link](#))—to go from a school project to a community-integrated campaign. By using an innovative fundraising strategy, which called upon participants to pool funds together in just 60 seconds, he raised thousands of dollars for his town’s local Children’s Hospital. Through this process, the learner integrated his personal and educational experiences and applied them over a multi-year fundraising campaign.

Expanding this personalized work beyond a single story, KMSD educators have incorporated a “Genius Hour.” During this time, learners are provided an hour to explore their interests without limitations. From this process, comes unique project ideas—some of which are never completed. Failing forward is strongly encouraged and by creating a positive association to failure, learners allow their imaginations to run wild and explore their creativity without restraint—even when exploring learning beyond the “Genius Hour.”

Once KMSD saw what it meant to be a 21st-century learner, they knew a complete transformation was all that would suffice. Through their unwavering commitment to developing a system that recognizes and celebrates the uniqueness of each learner, the community at KMSD—learners, educators, parents, and all other stakeholders—is proud to be seen as “Future Ready” and dedicated to transforming education.

LEARN MORE

[What Makes Kettle Moraine Future Ready?](#)

[Transforming the Classroom with Micro-credentials](#)

[A Genius Solution to Foster Creativity](#)

FACTS & FIGURES

Public + Instrumentality Charter

4,189 learners

10 schools (6 Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, 4 Unique Charter Schools)

ELL or Primary Language other than English: 1%

Students with Disabilities: 13%

Free & Reduced Lunch: 12%

Graduation Rate: 96%

Post-secondary Enrollment: 80%

CONNECT

Website

[Kettle Moraine School District](#)

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Kettle Moraine School District: A Conversation with Dr. Theresa Ewald

Education Reimagined recently spoke with Kettle Moraine's Assistant Superintendent of Teaching & Learning, Theresa Ewald, about her path in the education field, the innovations of the district in exploring personalized learning, and what the future holds for Kettle Moraine.



Dr. Theresa Ewald

Q. We always like to know how our guests got involved in the education space and what keeps them motivated in the present day. What is your story?

A. I've been a passionate educator for 23 years, and I was a consumer of educational systems for the 23 years prior to that. Both as a consumer and a provider, I've never felt content with "how we do school." As such, I have developed a lifelong habit of pushing the status quo.

With that being said, I've never been more hopeful and excited about the state of education than I am now. In the last decade, we have been able to explore the "science" of learning. The use of Functional Magnetic Resource Imaging (fMRI) and the translation of research for the practitioner has provided more tools for educators to be knowledgeable about how to engage all learners. Additionally, the digital age has created conditions where information is pervasive. It allows educators an opportunity to focus on developing deep-learning skills rather than knowing an exhaustive list of facts and concepts. These conditions allow us to build a system of education that truly is for all learners.

Q. What makes Kettle Moraine's professional development unique? How does it serve as a model for personalizing learning for students?

A. Like many school districts across the country, students of Kettle Moraine have a long legacy of high performance. This can leave some wondering, "Why change?" While student achievement remains important, a student's ability to take charge of his/her own learning and life is of the highest importance. As our teachers experience the power of planning and taking charge of their own learning, they better understand the power of personalization for their own students.

The Kettle Moraine culture considers all teachers, leaders. They are trusted to lead groups of learners each day. Additionally, as educators experience taking the lead in their own learning, they understand some of the challenges students experience when they enter personalized learning environments. These challenges have been more deeply understood when experienced first, and through this understanding, strategies are more easily developed.

This belief has led to the development of career pathways not normally recognized in other school districts. The distributed leadership model we developed formally recognizes approximately 10% of our teachers as leaders of teacher teams. These

leaders engage in ongoing professional development that builds confidence and skills in mentoring and coaching. Because of these roles, all staff are able to be part of small teams that receive regular and targeted feedback. This feedback has further enhanced a growth mindset that sets a culture of risk-taking and stretches our practice for the benefit of student learning and engagement.

With the development of smaller teams and practice of regular and specific feedback, each professional can develop a personalized professional development plan. The use of micro-credentialing professionals' learning formally recognizes the ongoing growth of each and every teacher. The learning and subsequent application of teacher learning in the classroom is incentivized through our compensation model. In Kettle Moraine, teachers experience compensation increases through growing in practice, not for the number of years they've been in a classroom.

Q. KM began cultivating a unique makeup of legacy schools and instrumentality charter schools as the district transitioned from a traditional environment to a learner-centered one. How are the charter schools integrated in the district system? How did KM leaders communicate their new vision to the public, and what was the public input when the vision was developed?

A. Kettle Moraine serves students across our community in 10 schools. Six of our schools are referred to as our legacy schools, and we host an additional four charter schools (three at the high school level and one at the elementary level). Unlike much of the country, those charter schools are district schools, hence the title "instrumentality." The teachers are employees of the district, and the physical schools are on our campus. The charter contracts of the schools are approved and monitored by our public school's school board. Our model is closely aligned to the original intent of charters, which is to have small environments to develop new models with the intent of scaling the success for all learners. Our vision has never wavered; we seek to transform learning for all kids, not just learners in Kettle Moraine.

The creation of charters as a way to develop and learn from innovation came as a result of the charge and vision of our school board. This charge was later confirmed through multiple community forums. The latest message from our community in October 2015 was that they wanted personalized learning for all. The community's expectation and participation has helped fuel district plans for scaling personalized learning across all environments.

Q. Technology is an important component in the 21st-century learning space. How has technology opened the doors to learning in your district and what needs does technology currently not meet for KM learners, if any?

A. Technology is an important tool for innovation. When each student has a device and has access to programs that adapt to their needs, personalization is accessible. Technology is a key ingredient in providing conditions for each learner to know their current level and have an individual plan to advance to the next steps.

Our experiences, however, suggest that without a shift in pedagogy, the technology matters little. Technology allows access to a world of information for learners. A teacher, however, opens a world of skill development, strategy acquisition, and character development. Our learners' voices and data continue to reinforce to us that a learner's relationship with teachers impacts belief in self, willingness to take risks, and character development. In short, in the technology age, the role of teacher has never been more important!

“As our teachers experience the power of planning and taking charge of their own learning, they better understand the power of personalization for their own students.”

Dr. Theresa Ewald

Q. A common theme among pioneers in the learner-centered movement is the word "messy." Have you found that it gets “cleaner” as the transformation becomes more fully realized?

A. Transformation of any kind is messy. The spirit in which an organization engages in the transformation journey is the most important element. Our organizational tenacity has grown from our strong resolve toward our vision, “Learning without Boundaries.” Without a strong belief or vision, teachers are likely to feel unsupported and uninspired.

Transformation becomes “cleaner” as learners and teachers co-create the daily flow. Many of our personalized environments find a daily rhythm of learning. This rhythm, however, is not so tight that it can’t be responsive to the needs of individual learners or the group. Learners are typically able to adjust to these conditions. Teachers are better able to adjust to these more open structures when they deeply believe that the learners are the drivers and the teacher is a facilitator.

Q. As KM continues to push forward, what initiatives are on the horizon that we should be looking out for?

A. As this question indicates, transformation never ends, and we have not “arrived.” The culture in KM supports a steady push forward to develop practices and structures that efficiently and effectively address achievement, engagement, and student-efficacy. The evolution of our work has most recently brought us to the implementation of competency-based learning. Work around translating continuums of learning into competencies at the elementary level and translating competencies into credits at the secondary level is underway. This work is being done in both our charter environments and within our legacy schools.

Early indicators suggest that our learners embrace the opportunity to be in charge of their environments. One such indicator is the power of the learner’s voice in our scaling efforts. As our learners move from personalized environments into more traditional environments, they make suggestions to teachers on different ways of having the class. At times, it is as simple as the movement of furniture that suggest learners believe in the power of social learning. At other times, it is as complex as the learner suggesting creating an alternate plan for assessment and saying to a teacher, “Can I show you I’ve met the targets in a way different than your test? Here are my ideas.” For some of our teachers, experiences such as these create the urgency to shift to a more personalized approach.

Dr. Theresa Ewald is the Assistant Superintendent for the Kettle Moraine School District, nationally recognized for their work in innovating education through personalization. Early models included four charter schools, a Youth Apprenticeship Manufacturing Certificate diploma, and a multi-age, project-based middle school environment. Personalized learning is now being scaled across all ten of the district’s schools. Using data at the individual, school, and district level, as well as developing teacher leaders, has been the core of that work. Theresa has also served as a middle school principal, elementary principal, and teacher over the last 23 years.



LEARNER VOICES

From Unheard and Unseen to Leading an Entire Team

by Harrison Hicks

Up until I was 15 years old, I was a traditional public school student—one among many. As someone who simply blended into a 1,500 student body, I found little opportunity to stand out, regardless of my extracurricular involvement and academic achievements. I also found that learning solely from a standard curriculum made the experience all the more painful. Rather than receiving assignments that required me to think critically, I felt the information was forced on me and I was simply expected to pass a test and move on.

During the one year I spent at my previous high school, there was only one thing I enjoyed about the setting: collaborative work. For a while, I was considering homeschooling for the remainder of my high school career. But, one major drawback of homeschooling is the lack of collaborative work. So, I decided to attend MC², which is a happy medium between the two very different forms of schooling. Although MC² is mainly focused on self-directed work; in order to be successful, you have to regularly collaborate with peers and teachers.

EMPOWER ME

One thing that has really resonated with me throughout my time at MC² is the school's mission statement: "Empowering me with the knowledge and skills to use my unique voice effectively, and with integrity, in co-creating our global, public world." MC²'s goal is to give students the opportunity to have their voices heard.



Harrison Hicks

I find this goal to be incredibly important in that I'm able to take on leadership roles and I'm recognized for it. This recognition is a huge motivator for me to continue putting my best effort into my learning. My peers and I don't just work hard to get good grades; we work hard to become better people. And, at the same time, we excel in our learning.

ASSESSMENT THAT SEES ME AS A UNIQUE INDIVIDUAL

Whenever I think about my overall growth since transferring to MC², I love how I'm assessed based on my habits, rather than on how well I do on cookie-cutter exams. Through this form of assessment, I have had the opportunity to grow through leadership, self-direction, and character. The habits form a lens that allows me to perform critical self-inquiry and then execute that inquiry.

When I first attended MC², I was assessed as "proficient"—the middle of the rubric—in almost every habit, but as the quarters progressed, I ended up improving myself and getting higher ratings on each of the habits more frequently. I believe this was due to the increase in project intensity since the beginning of the year. At this point, almost all of my habits are at an "exemplary" level or higher, thanks to my determination to get work done and improve myself as a person and a learner.

These habits are shining through in a lot of ways. During my time at my old high school, I felt like one of the least organized and least motivated students in the school. I consistently "lost" homework and reluctantly showed up to school. Since attending MC², I have begun to love learning, I haven't missed a day of school in 14 months, and I even arrive an hour early every day to work with teachers and spend time expanding my critical thinking skills.

A LEADER IS BORN

MC² gives me the opportunity to stand up and be a leader.

The first realization I had of this was during a project I led earlier this year building an underhand catapult. The challenge was to create a tension catapult—under six feet tall—that could launch a ten-pound pumpkin without additional human force. After envisioning what the catapult might look like, I sketched a catapult with an arm rotating clockwise—just under three-hundred degrees—and stopping at a forty-five degree angle giving us a desirable trajectory. After coming up with my idea, I was tasked with convincing 25 of my peers and our teacher about why we should create an underhand catapult, rather than the overhand catapult everyone already had their minds set on. This process was extremely tedious, but after my persuasive arguments—aided by sketches of a small-scale prototype—26 people voted to create the underhand, pumpkin-flinging masterpiece.

For the next two and a half weeks, members of the team and I would go straight to my house after school and work until nightfall—trying to make the catapult work. These grueling afternoons consisted of constant experimentation and persistent troubleshooting leading to an eventual, much-deserved celebration, but not without some drama first.

ALL-NIGHTER, ALL WORTH IT

The night before the competition, we worked in my teammate's yard for around two hours test-launching the catapult before overextending the arm, bending the axle terminally. We easily could have given up then and there but, instead, jumped into yet another challenge. At 8:30 p.m., five of us drove half an hour to our nearest Home Depot to buy new pieces to create a lighter arm with a three-quarter-inch thick, threaded steel pipe.

“My peers and I don't just work hard to get good grades; we work hard to become better people.”

Harrison Hicks

That night, I stayed up with a fellow teammate until 5:30 a.m. in the below freezing, late-fall, New Hampshire weather working on our catapult, “The Underdog.” We spent seven and a half hours trying to put together the new arm, reinforce the steel axle, attach the new axle, and experiment with different ways to attach our tension system—giving our catapult the force needed to move the arm the two-hundred and eighty degrees required. Despite our best effort, our tension system was still not fully functional.



The MC² team huddles together as they prepare for launch

After a single hour of sleep, I was more than ready for the day ahead. My teammate and I met the rest of the team at the Cheshire Fairgrounds—a few miles from our school. With only two hours before the first launch, I led the team in making some incredibly crucial decisions, knowing we had very limited time. These decisions were based primarily on our understanding of physics: we understood we needed to shed weight from the basket, as well as use more bungies to give our tension system enough force to launch the pumpkins at a sufficient velocity. With the clock ticking, the team rushed to make these changes.

Triumphantly, the “The Underdog” launched a ten-pound pumpkin 39.5 feet only to be outdone by a 44-foot launch from our competitor. Although we were bested in the distance contest, we ended up taking home first place overall after winning the other two categories—“Savvy Use of Materials” and “Unique Design.” Needless to say, we were thrilled.

This project made me think about education differently. If I hadn’t gone to MC², I wouldn’t have had this amazing opportunity. I believe it is important for every student to have the opportunity to attend a school like MC². The experiences I have had in the last year alone have been incredible, and I’m so grateful to have had this life opportunity.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

The most powerful advocates for learner-centered education are the learners themselves!

Are you a learner? Do you have a story like Harrison's? A project that you could share about? Or reflections and insights about your own learning environment? We want to hear from you!

Contact us for learner submission guidelines. [\(email\)](#)

Harrison Hicks is a 16-year-old high school student from the small town of Keene, New Hampshire. After attending public schools for most of his academic career, he now attends an innovative charter school. He is currently in his second year at Making Community Connections Charter School and is planning to graduate by spring of 2017. MC² has given him the tools to achieve his life goals. Harrison is passionate about IT and politics. He wants to make millions off of his inventions so that he can provide for his pet tortoises, and one day hopes to be President of the United States.



Living Room Conversations

One of the biggest barriers in transforming a learning environment from a school-centered system to a learner-centered vision is garnering collective support from all community stakeholders. Designing ways to hold well-structured, collaborative discussions is a pivotal component in this transformation and is certainly not an easy task. **Living Room Conversations** ([link](#)) provides a framework to conduct these discussions. It is their belief that “a world in which people have fundamental differences of opinion and backgrounds can work together with respect, and perhaps joy, to realize the vibrant future we all desire.” By providing a platform for communities to host self-guided conversations and rediscover the beauty of civil discourse, LRC is confident that once unattainable breakthroughs can and will be had. Their structure fits perfectly for the types of conversations commonly occurring in individual learning environments. With no more than six or eight participants, each discussion can dive deep into various, divergent issues with every voice having the space to be heard loud and clear. Ready to start a conversation in your community? Explore how Living Room Conversations might assist you.

What is a Living Room Conversation? ([link](#))

Conversation Ground Rules ([link](#))

The National Coalition For Dialogue & Deliberation Beginner’s Guide ([link](#))

Recap

When educators are first introduced to the idea of personalized, relevant, and contextualized learning, they commonly begin adding up the hours of extra work that will be involved in designing 30+ individual plans for their learners. But, when they couple it with learner agency and discover the power of designing an environment that is truly learner-driven, they begin to see how much of the work learners will start to take on themselves. However, there still remains a crucial component to the learning process that educators must revolutionize—assessment. With our learners, how can we assess the development of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions in real time—particularly when we are no longer in the same physical space? The team over at Swivl had a similar thought, so they designed an application called **Recap** ([link](#)) where educators and parents alike can engage with their children through a video reflection platform. Whether you want to conduct a formal assessment to “gather deep insights” on your learner’s learning or get a real-time project update, kids can simply record their response and send it directly to you in no time at all. Explore how Recap might enhance your environment’s assessment practices.

Video Reflection Made Easy ([link](#))

Get To Know Recap Pioneers ([link](#))

Recap: Let’s Get Students Talking ([link](#))

UPCOMING EVENTS

Mark your calendars! We will be speaking at some and hosting workshops at others. In all cases, pioneers will be front and center! Join us.

iNACOL Blended and Online Learning Symposium

**San Antonio, TX
October 25-28**

[Conference Website](#)

Teach for All Global Conference

**Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria
October 25-27**

[Conference Website](#)

City Neighbors' 6th Annual Progressive Education Summit

**Baltimore, MD
November 12**

[Conference Website](#)

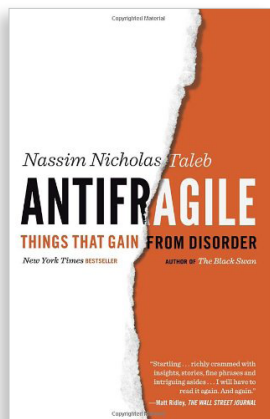
OPPORTUNITY BOARD

Education Reimagined

is seeking two new learner-centered staff members to join our team: an Associate Director of Partnerships and Convenings ([link](#)) and an Associate Director of Practitioner Engagement and Learning ([link](#)).



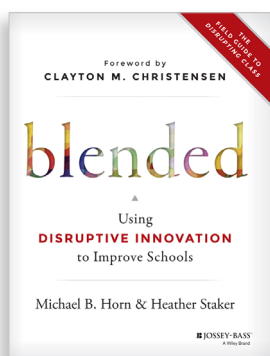
ON OUR BOOKSHELF



Antifragile: Things that Gain From Disorder

by Nassim Nicholas Taleb

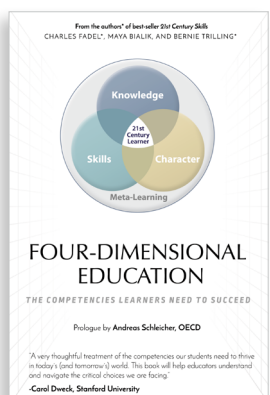
Educators are used to feelings of chaos and disorder as they blaze new paths for their learners. As such, avoiding the creation of a system that buckles under pressure is paramount. Instead, how might you use these disruptions to make the system stronger? In *Antifragile*, Nassim Nicholas Taleb explores this question and gives examples of how it is accomplished every day. Just as a human muscle gains strength through healing micro-tears after being put under stress, we can create systems that embrace tension and uncertainty—strengthening from these circumstances. Discover how becoming antifragile might assist you in designing your learning environment.



Blended: Using Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools

by Michael B. Horn and Heather Staker

Just ten years ago, the idea of integrating online learning and various forms of technology in a learning environment was a future on the horizon, but not quite here yet. Today, this idea is becoming the central foundation in many environments across the country. As a result, the school-centered system is beginning to see a massive disruption to its century-old model. Stemming from ideas laid out in Clayton Christensen's previous book, *Disruptive Class*, Horn and Staker take the lead in *Blended*, providing practical tips on how to integrate online learning into your environment and increase the autonomy of your learners.



Four-Dimensional Education: The Competencies Learners Need to Succeed

by Charles Fadel, Bernie Trilling, and Maya Bialik

It has nearly become cliché to say learners are preparing for careers that don't exist yet, but it bears repeating until the system in which they learn is preparing them for such a world. And, although promoting such an idea is a good first step, we must begin identifying the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for a future we can't predict. Flipping through *Four-Dimensional Education* by Fadel, Trilling, and Bialik might be a great place to start. By exploring the universal, adaptation-ready attributes fit for an ever-changing world, the authors dig into the core of what any learner needs to succeed.

WORTH YOUR TIME

Teaching Your Child Emotional Agility

Feel it. Show it. Label it. Watch it go. This is the simple message from psychologist Susan David when it comes to socio-emotional learning in kids. Discover what these principles are all about and imagine how they might apply to your learners.

[Read here](#)

How Lobsters Are Keeping Students in School

How do you motivate a teenager to engage in learning after earning \$40,000 as a fisherman during the summer? This anecdotal question was what the Deer Isle-Stonington community had to address system-wide. Check out how this coastal community turned education on its head. [Read here](#)

5 Ways to Participate in the #GoOpen Movement

Sharing is caring, and what better way to explore learner-centered strategies than with fellow pioneers from all over the country? Discover strategies on how you can open your resources to educators across the country. [Read here](#)

“We should say to each [child]: Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique. In all of the world, there is no other child exactly like you.”

— **PABLO CASALS, *JOYS AND SORROWS***

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