

pioneering

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A NOTE FROM EDUCATION REIMAGINED

Kelly Young, Executive Director

SPRINGHOUSE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Profile of their Learning Environment
Conversation with the Founders

A VOICE FROM THE FIELD

Learners Are Not Failing the System
—The System is Failing Learners
by Joanne McEachen

LEARNER VOICES

Junion Year Learning Journey
by Anya Smith-Roman


TOOLS & RESOURCES

UPCOMING EVENTS

OPPORTUNITY BOARD

ON OUR BOOKSHELF

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Dear Pioneers,

The learning continues! A few months ago, we were thrilled to learn that a cohort of about 40 superintendents organized by AASA had adopted “A Transformational Vision for Education in the US” as their North Star, using it as the framework to guide their inquiries. These superintendents, brought together through the AASA Digital Learning Consortium, are on a learning journey to discover how to improve their districts. And, just two weeks ago, I had the privilege to speak at one of their in-person meetings.

I helped to set the context for the meeting by focusing on the paradigm shift itself. This included sharing what people sometimes hear when we share about the five elements in the vision, even when we mean something completely different. The superintendents got it immediately. They saw that the five elements can be done in a school-centered paradigm. So, what people sometimes call “personalized,” “competency-based,” or “open-walled” is actually still being done “to” kids, rather than “by” and “with” the learners. The difference comes when you shift paradigms.

After my presentation, the superintendents launched into a day-long design thinking exercise, led by Google, that began with interviewing nine fantastic students from Leyden and Oak Park school districts. It was all about really listening to the kids—or the “end users” of education—and hearing what would make a difference for them. With the continued input of the learners (many of whom joined the superintendents small table groups as co-designers), the superintendents then came up with prototypes for the work they could do in their districts to display the five elements in a learner-centered paradigm. It was extraordinary. I look forward to discovering what they do and learn at their next meeting in October.

Again and again, we are reminded of the power that comes from truly listening to learners. And, of the power of pioneers—those willing to lead the way and create the paths for transforming education.

We hope you are all having wonderful summers!

Warm wishes,
Kelly Young

P.S. Thanks to the students, superintendents, AASA, and Google for your courage and leadership!



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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 inter-
ested 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.





SPRINGHOUSE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Floyd, Virginia

[We wanted] to create a space in which young people could come to deeply know themselves...in a supportive, honest, and rigorous environment. —Ezekiel Fugate

TUCKED AWAY IN THE HILLS OF SOUTHWESTERN VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE PLATEAU,

Floyd County is home to a vibrant and welcoming community. Boasting a population smaller than many senior classes, it may come as no surprise that a local learning environment, Springhouse Community School, is the smallest learner-centered environment we have discovered thus far—but don't let their size fool you.

The Springhouse vision allows for adaptability and improvisation, which is of utmost importance when leading an age-diverse group of just 16 learners. Given this small cohort, many school-centric philosophies had to be thrown out the window immediately—giving way to a free exploration of what education could be.

When launching Springhouse, there was an intentional focus on key core values: resiliency, curiosity, integrity, and a recognition of individual wholeness. Currently, they are cultivating an environment that “helps students discover and inhabit their soul calling through mentorship, serve the community, and foster a connection to Earth.” The resulting model has spurred an invigorating learning culture.

Creating mixed-age advisories—akin to small family structures—Springhouse learners are engaged in a social environment on a daily basis. Every morning begins with “advisory time,” where learners discuss current events, share personal life stories, and plan the days and weeks on the horizon.

This peer-to-peer connection permeates every aspect of the learning culture at Springhouse. For example, when learners prepared for a mock trial in their Radical Civics course—facilitated by a lawyer who specializes in social justice—the defense and prosecution teams had to identify and capitalize on the individual strengths of each member, utilize the guidance of the Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney, and synchronize their work to present a clear and cohesive argument to the judge and jury. Every participant was tasked with taking ownership of their role in the proceedings—regardless of age. Combining teamwork with the recognition of personal autonomy, **learner agency** was brought to the forefront in Springhouse's **socially embedded** culture.

But, it isn't always about group work. These learners are able to step away from these team environments with personal projects and self-directed learning. Although guided by a project management protocol—which includes one-on-one weekly check-ins to discuss the learners progress and develop a strong learner-educator mentoring relationship—the topic of study, design of expected outcomes, and **relevancy** to the learner is in complete control of the child. Topics of study have ranged from the history of Thomas Jefferson and Monticello to learning how to play the harmonica.

Springhouse is much more than its small size. It is a powerful example of what a group of passionate, knowledgeable leaders and curious, independent learners can make possible. The highway to a learner-centered education system has plenty of room for all vehicles of transformation (no matter the size or shape). It is this diversity and accessibility that allows for the continued growth and sustainability of the learner-centered movement.

FACTS & FIGURES

Project-Based High School

16 learners served

12-18 years old

Free or reduced lunch: 25%

Community Mentors for Learner Projects (2014-2016): 106

Total staff, full- and part-time (2015-2016): 11

Volunteer hours (2015-2016): 1,100+

CONNECT

Website

[Springhouse Community School](http://SpringhouseCommunitySchool.org)

Social Media

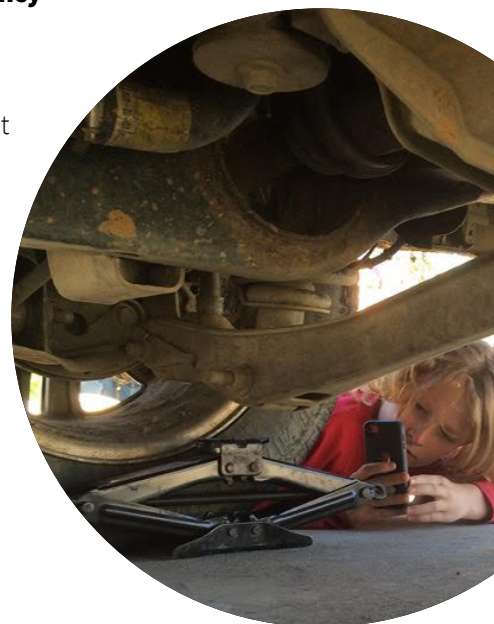
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LEARN MORE

[Springhouse Community School Looks to Grow Its Student Body](#)



Springhouse Community School: A Conversation with Ezekiel Fugate, Jenny Finn, and Joe Klein

Sitting down with Springhouse's three co-founders—Ezekiel Fugate, Jenny Finn, and Joe Klein—Education Reimagined had the pleasure of learning about the school's unique upbringing and the inspiring stories that go along with it. Discover how an environmental engineer, Rocky Mountain native, and community counselor joined forces in Floyd, VA to create holistic change in this vibrant community.

Q. What led you to the learner-centered education field?

A. JENNY: I have spent most of my career mentoring individuals, leading retreats, and speaking around the country about the importance of building solid ground within oneself to be of clearer service to the world. Because it is my understanding that every person has what they need within themselves to live a healthy, whole, and connected life, it makes sense that I would be drawn to learner-centered education. The teachers that I remember are those who saw the gift in me, asked courageous questions, and challenged me to bring my gift forward into the world.

A. JOE: One of my first mentors in college, Beryl Crowe, awakened me to my unique learning styles and expressions of intelligence, and he also opened my mind to all the learning that was taking place for me outside of the context of classroom and campus. This was the first time that any adult—let alone a teacher—had really seen me and taken the time to help me look into myself as a learning being.

As a Licensed Professional Counselor providing mental health and substance abuse counseling for adolescents in rural Appalachia, many of the students I worked with were frustrated, bored, or disengaged from the learning process. I knew there was a better way to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of young people. I also knew that the problems of teenage substance abuse, depression, anxiety, bullying, and violence in schools would never be effectively addressed if adolescent educational experiences did not evolve.

After spending six weeks providing crisis counseling for students who survived the tragedy at Virginia Tech in 2007, I re-committed myself to fostering educational opportunities for youth that address the development of social and emotional, as well as academic, skills.

A. EZEKIEL: My formal educational experiences did little to help me discover a deeper purpose for my life. While I was in a PhD program for environmental engineering, I had the good fortune of connecting with a mentor outside of the program who asked me some very honest questions. Finding the courage I needed to live authentically, I left graduate school, choosing—for perhaps the first time in my life—the vulnerability of staying open



Ezekiel Fugate



Jenny Finn



Joe Klein

over the security of doing what was expected of me. This re-orientation led me to farming and then to teaching and mentoring in a small, progressive college prep school. My direct experience working with teenagers and my own experience of being lost cemented in me the drive to create a space in which young people could come to deeply know themselves—where the emphasis was not on competitively climbing a ladder, but on cultivating one’s wholeness in a supportive, honest, and rigorous environment.

Q. What brought you to Floyd, VA? What is unique about the area/community that has let Springhouse thrive?

A. JENNY: Our journey to Floyd has been filled with serendipity. We lived on our urban farm in Colorado for nearly 25 years, and after being inspired by a Virginia farmer and listening to a deeper call, we moved our family to the Blue Ridge Mountains. The community of Floyd is unique in that it is connected, generous, and rich with experiences of all kinds. The members of this community are very excited to offer up their gifts to young people. We could not engage in project-based learning to the level that we do without this community.

A. JOE: Floyd has a thriving local creative economy. Many artisans, musicians, organic farmers, and entrepreneurs have found innovative ways to take care of the triple bottom line—people, planet, and profits. Many folks here value real world educational experiences for their own children and/or willingly contribute time and resources to help a school like Springhouse come into being to produce the next generation of innovative entrepreneurs.

A. EZEKIEL: Both sides of my family have been in southwest Virginia for many generations. When I first left the area, I vowed never to come back, mostly because I thought I was supposed to seek a better life elsewhere. When my wife and I decided to start a family, we wanted to be in a tight-knit, progressive, rural community that valued the land and its heritage. We both knew of Floyd County, so without much consideration or planning, we made a leap of faith and bought a small homestead here. The way in which we were welcomed into the community as a young family is similar to the way in which Springhouse has been welcomed here. Last year alone, over 40 individuals from the community gave nearly 1,100 hours of their time to our 16 students.

Q. How did you garner support from the Floyd community to start Springhouse?

A. JENNY: The support from this community is strong because those who give to the school get as much (or more) out of their experience as our students do. I can recall the spouse of one of our project mentors being moved to tears as she shared how valuable it was for her husband to share his carpentry skills with a teenager during his retirement years. Giving his gifts to a young person allowed him to feel filled up and grateful in his elder years. It is this fullness that community members experience that continues to bring them back to Springhouse and to share with others what it feels like to give in this way.

A. JOE: Floyd has had an alternative elementary school for over thirty years, and there has been a longstanding desire to develop some type of alternative secondary school here. After several months of public meetings and conversations about the idea, some local business owners offered a seed grant, along with a rent-free facility, to launch our school. Other businesses, non-profits, and individuals have joined in to help us provide a learner-centered education for Floyd’s teens.

“Our learners know that we are interested in the integrity of their personhood.”

Jenny Finn

Q. The Springhouse mission is to prepare learners for adulthood through individualized, rigorous, and engaged learning with the inclusion of its four values—resiliency, curiosity, integrity, and wholeness. What does that mean to you?

A. JENNY: Our learners know that we are interested in the integrity of their personhood. We see them as individuals with unique gifts, and we invite them to face their edges rigorously. If you walked into Springhouse, you would see our values in action. You would see students learning how to fail and how to recover after making a mistake. You would see students pursuing what they love. You would see students taking care of their bodies and their hearts, being asked questions about deeper meaning and purpose in their lives. And, you would see mentors drawing students toward their edges in learning.

Q. What has been your favorite story to tell others about the Springhouse environment?

A. JENNY: I love talking to people about failure. We cannot be creative without being open to failing. I often share with people stories of students who have failed and have learned from it. One example, in particular, was when a student was building a foundry to melt metal. He had poured all of the cement and water in at once and was unable to mix it as a result. He had spent his own money on the material and put a lot of work into the initial steps of building it. He became very frustrated and was ready to give up when an adult mentor stepped in and showed him a way through his mistake. Step by step, they mixed the cement in a wheelbarrow and successfully built the foundry. On Presentation Night, this student gathered community members around the foundry as he lit the fire and melted metal for the first time. He learned not only how to mix cement properly but also that, when you ask for help and persevere through difficulty, amazing things can happen.

A. EZEKIEL: About halfway through this past year, one of our youngest students came to me and timidly said she had an idea for a project. She told me that she wanted to write a book based on a story she had been crafting for over a year. I was thrilled! I immediately reached out to a friend who is a writer specializing in teen fiction and asked if she would be willing to mentor my student. They worked to outline the book, set writing goals, and developed a strategy to make it through the entire process. After less than 5 months of writing, she had finished her book, which spanned more than 130 pages. It was incredible to watch this young person come alive—working with such dedication and inspiration—and to see the depth and commitment that emerged in her relationship with her mentor.

Q. What is your long-term dream for what Springhouse could be?

A. JENNY: I see Springhouse as a place where people from all stages of life can come fully alive, learn to live in connection with each other and the Earth, and be of clear and honest service to the world.

A. JOE: I have a vision of Springhouse serving as a year-round boarding school/learning community for teens and young adults—a living educational laboratory where teachers and administrators from area public schools and teacher education colleges come to see and contribute to the creation of a new paradigm of learner-centered education in a rural setting.

A. EZEKIEL: I would love for our school to be accessible to all who want and need it and to become even more embedded in the fabric of our community.

Ezekiel Fugate, Head of School

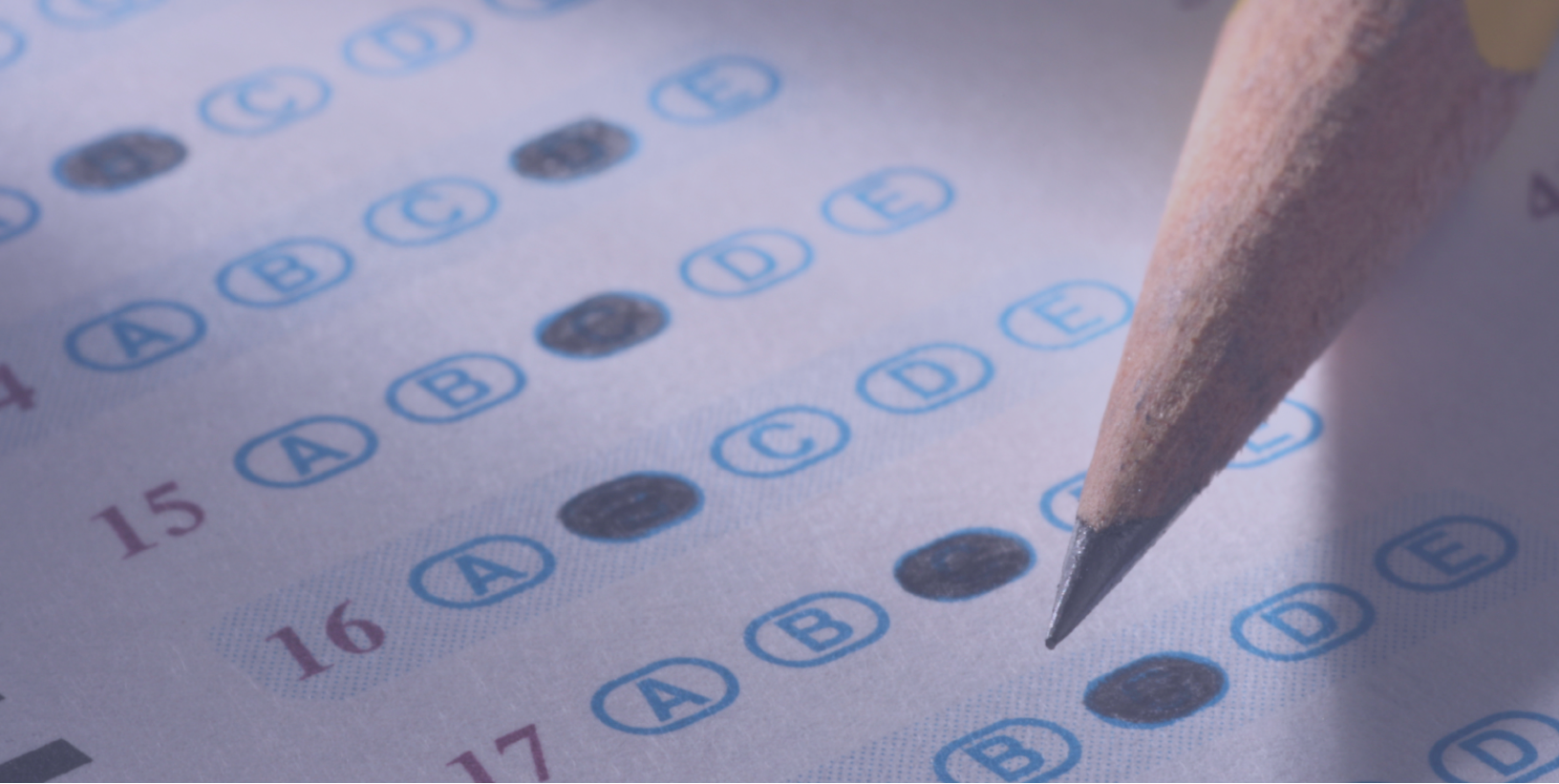
Ezekiel has a master's degree from Yale University in Environmental Engineering. He and his wife manage a small-scale permaculture homestead that includes dairy cows, chickens, an integrated orchard/vegetable/herb garden, honeybees, two dogs, and two wild little girls. Ezekiel is an all-around plant enthusiast, and he is constantly curious about the intricacies of the web of life that sustain us.

Jenny Finn, Co-founder and Director of Mentoring

Jenny has a Ph.D. in Sustainability Education from Prescott College and a master's degree in Social Work from Colorado State University. Jenny understands that relationship to the world begins with connection to oneself, and her work fosters this deep connection. She has worked in the healing arts field for nearly twenty years serving in various areas including non-profit management, trauma and hospice care, spiritual care and chaplaincy, clinical private practice, and education.

Joe Klein, Co-founder and Board Member

Joe is a Licensed Professional Counselor with a master's degree in Community Counseling from Radford University. Joe specializes in working with youth, families, and groups struggling with addictions, grief, and trauma. He is the founder of Inward Bound Mindfulness Education, a non-profit organization that runs mindfulness retreats for teens and college students. He teaches a graduate course and leads retreats on Mindfulness as Self-Care for Educators and Helping Professionals through Radford University. Joe is an avid gardener, outdoorsman, and athlete.



A VOICE FROM THE FIELD

Learners are not Failing the System—the System is Failing Learners

Joanne McEachen, co-founder of Learner First LLC, has dedicated her career to breaking down the walls of the old paradigm—and not only in the United States. Making an impact on an international scale, Joanne takes advantage of every opportunity the education world has to offer for spreading the learner-centered message.

The education system has not seen a catastrophic collapse but rather a slow decline into deep dysfunction. When learners move on to college and careers, they find themselves in a world for which they're hopelessly unprepared. At this stage, there's no opportunity to start again; no bailout for an investment gone wrong. Technology and other surface solutions keep the machine rolling, but how long do we have until the cogs can no longer support the machine? How long until we realize the system has, in fact, come crashing down (in slow motion over many years)—to leave us wondering not what went wrong but how we possibly let it get so bad in the first place?

What the education system should and must deliver on is meeting individual needs—those of learners with different and complementary strengths—and possess the capability to connect and create with each other. Real learner-centered education



Joanne McEachen

means guaranteeing every individual learner in every education system the opportunity to understand who they are, where they are from, and how they can contribute to our world. Our children are not broken; it is the system around them that is.

To make a real, sustainable difference for students, systems must examine their practice at all levels. In this sense, I refer to the system as *each and every one of us who is involved in education*. “We” created the system, and it is only “we” who can fix it. Policy is not set in concrete; it can alter and adapt to make life and learning better. Only by refocusing every decision through the eyes of the learners will we understand how to transform.

WHAT IF DOCTORS EVALUATED US WITH THE STANDARDIZED TESTING MINDSET?

The collapse of our education system has occurred on many fronts. Among the most blatant—and one of the biggest tragedies of our time—is *high-stakes* testing. When we measure test scores as the one true indicator of academic achievement, the focus is absolutely on teaching to the test. Teachers are forced to pay attention to test scores in a way that ignores who the learners are as individuals. In other words, it ignores what makes them human.

Traditional, standardized testing channels thinking and, in many ways, encourages teachers to narrow their students’ learning in order to more fully prepare them for what’s required by tests. What would happen if we started measuring a personalized and more humanity-driven outcome in education, as we do in other social fields? Does the difficulty of measuring the human capacity to drive the world forward provide sufficient grounds to ignore it?

Medical doctors have been expected to use their professional judgement when synthesizing a range of data points for years. Not one of us would expect a medical doctor to make a decision based only on the blood pressure of a patient—who perhaps could not find a parking spot, was late for her appointment, and dropped the contents of her briefcase all over the middle of the road! The doctor does not say that you need to have open-heart surgery tomorrow based on this single indicator. The doctor will usually ask, “How do you feel? Was there any other reason it might be high?” The doctor may also require a range of tests before making a professional decision. So, why has a single data indicator been acceptable in education?

Perpetuating beliefs or acting in ways inconsistent with what’s best for learners directly diminishes their capacity for success. Understanding whether a child is successful can be determined in multiple ways. By single narrative thinking, we have created a measurement system that over promises and underdelivers. Measurement in itself is a driver of change—what and how you measure gets focused on. This is only one of a number of the systemic failures persistent in public education today, all stemming from the same failure or inability to examine everything we do in light of its impact on learners. The system must change to provide, from every level and angle, a clear line of sight to its center—the learner.

ASSESSMENT BUILT COLLECTIVELY FOR ENDLESS ADAPTABILITY

I am not talking about incorporating “one-size-fits-all” programs that promise to turn around failing systems. Or academic programs and strategies that have seen success raising test scores in only one community. We don’t have time to waste implementing irrelevant programs or focusing on measurements of learning that do not fully reflect what a learner knows and is able to do. These are the very programs that promote and continue the status quo—they cannot let go of a system that is broken for many and only works for a few.

“Our children are not broken; it is the system around them that is.”

Joanne McEachen

What I am talking about is a paradigm shift to transform learning to reflect the world we live in. As long as everyone turns and draws us back to narrowing measures, we will never complete the transformational shift required in preparing our learners for success in their world.

We are building a systematic way to create the *new knowledge* needed to solve our real-world problems. The **Every Student Succeeds Act** (ESSA), a US law passed in December 2015, begins this journey. States and districts can use this policy to reach every learner—or not. They could genuinely synthesize formative information that influences learning in real time, or they could continue to place value on several single indicators and be none the wiser.

By pooling the expertise of people who can bring very different strengths to the table, we can collectively generate new knowledge to solve the challenges that some of our learners face. By listening, learning, and sparking off each other, we can collectively create the new knowledge needed for success in today’s world. This is collective cognition in action—thinking together to create new knowledge. Developing a culture committed to this way of thinking connects each level of the system to the growth, progress, and success of every single student.

“What really matters” has to be decided locally and be infused with who a learner is, what they love, who they aspire to be, and what they need to be in order to get there. We need to be using real-time assessment that is based on the full range of evidence, qualitative and quantitative, and that supports teachers to use sound professional judgment in a nuanced, but consistent, way.

SYSTEM BUILDING IN ACTION

[The Learner First](#), a company I co-founded (with Dr. E. Jane Davidson) to catalyze change in the education system, has been using a measurement system we designed called **Authentic Mixed Method Assessment** (AMMA). This is used as a way to not only change how learners are measured but also how they are tracking toward success. It’s a world-leading, rubric-based approach that uses multiple points of evidence to capture what is most important for learners. The authenticity comes from measuring what is important and relevant to each student. We utilize multiple points of quantitative and qualitative evidence—established through a conversation about the needs of the learners in the school and community in which it’s used—to show a richer, fuller picture of student performance, rather than a one-dimensional high-stakes test.

AMMA requires educators to synthesize multiple data points using professional judgment and employing a transparent, systemic, and methodical process. It leverages teachers’ educated judgments and puts them in the role of a professional diagnosing learning needs.

Teachers can only be asked to do this when we transform at all levels of our systems. This means going well below the surface to get to questions like, what do we really believe, and does that still serve us today? If we use an iceberg as a metaphor, we would see that the “what we officially do around here” (systems, policies, programs, and measures) sits above the surface for all to see. What really sits just under the waterline is the “what we actually do around here” (norms, behaviors, and practices).

“What really matters’ has to be decided locally and be infused with whom a learner is, what they love, who they aspire to be, and what they need to be in order to get there.”

Joanne McEachen

We are working internationally and in three US states with growing momentum. And, notably, we are working with leaders and on systems that are ready and on their way to positive transformation. Currently, our work in the US is with medium to large urban districts or clusters of districts. The core of our approach is:

- **Creating genuine personal relationships;**
- **Personalized, deep, and culturally responsive teaching and learning; and**
- **To remove barriers.**

We have found that—in all cases—districts, schools, and teachers were able to use our process as a lens to find out who learners really are and then use that to determine what changes need to be made within their realm of influence.

It is time for everyone to engage in a whole-system change process and identify and share the new system-wide approaches that are required for our learners' success. Only by putting the learner first and measuring what really matters will we transform education.

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Voting has begun for SXSWedu 2017! Education Reimagined has two submissions in the mix. Learn more, and cast your vote today!

Learner-Centered: Getting Started

Vote Here ([link](#))

It's A Paradigm Shift. So What?

Vote Here ([link](#))

Joanne McEachen is an internationally recognized education thought leader, author, and whole-system practitioner from New Zealand and is now based in Seattle, WA. Joanne has an outstanding career in educational transformation, working at all levels in the education system—as a teacher, a school principal, and as a superintendent. In addition, she has led and managed countrywide education change initiatives as a national (Federal) leader for the Ministry of Education in New Zealand and now in the United States with her international consultancy The Learner First, LLC, co-founded with Dr. E. Jane Davidson. Joanne also serves as Global New Measures Director for New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (NPDL), partnering with Dr. Michael Fullan and Joanne Quinn in an international movement involving 10 countries working to facilitate deep learning and to measure growth that is relevant, meaningful, and improves the lives of all learners.

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Junior Year Learning Journey: What I learned in 100 days of continuous blogging

by Anya Smith-Roman



Anya Smith-Roman

Education Reimagined had the privilege to meet an inspiring learner from the Mount Vernon Institute for Innovation in Atlanta, Georgia—Anya Smith-Roman. Throughout the following article, you will find links to Anya's personal blog, which let you go deeper into the experiences and reflections she had during the 2015-2016 school year.

What started as just a fun challenge—to create a blog and post for 100 days in a row—has now become an integral part of my life. Blogging may not be for everyone, but, for me, it has helped to clarify some of my own observations and thoughts on different parts of my daily life ([link](#)). And, the best part is that it allows me to track and record my reflections, insights, and key learning moments throughout each year.

Now that summer is here, it's a great time to zoom out and reflect upon those key learnings I gained about myself, utilizing the design process, and the future of education. Below are a few of those reflections—as well as links to the blog posts they originated from.

1. THE NEED FOR FLEXIBLE SCHEDULES

“Sometimes it feels like we’re just constantly waiting for Thursdays.” I’ve written this a few times this past year “because [Thursdays] are the days we always leave feeling like we actually were really productive and successful in making progress towards a bigger goal in our journey” [\(link\)](#). This is due to the lack of flexibility in our school schedule. In the “real world,” people do not work on a bell schedule that has obscure periods of time—like 10:15-11:05—and this past year, as I have started to do even more “real world” work, I’ve found myself struggling to find times to meet with people due to my odd school schedule. On Thursdays though, we have the first half of the day to dive deeper into work. It is our project-based learning time. During this time, I’m able to go off campus, interview people, work on prototypes with tools, etc.

Now, imagine—with the amount of work that can happen during half of a day—what we could do if we had a whole week. Students and teachers alike could travel around the world exploring ancient Rome; meeting with young entrepreneurs in San Francisco [\(link\)](#); conversing with citizens of Peru’s mountains; and tackling real world challenges, like finding clean water to drink. When students have time, there are myriad possibilities that can be explored, and they don’t even have to happen that far away from school. Just as easily as you could have time to travel the world, you could also have time to meet with people in your own community—a school’s backyard—having conversations to learn more about the community you live in.

Schools talk about wanting students to be good problem solvers; the first step in problem solving is problem finding, and the best way to problem find is to get out of your classroom chair and observe, interact, and make connections to things happening in the world. If we hope for students to be doing real world work and problem solving, then we need to support this type of work by having school schedules that are more flexible to allow for meetings, off-campus work, and time to really get into a flow of working.

2. THE ROLE OF TEACHERS

The biggest adventure of this year for me was running the first ever, student-designed AP Course, which allowed me to take ownership of my learning in a way never before experienced [\(link\)](#). A partner and I created this course because we wanted to challenge the education status quo, have the opportunity to test project ideas we’ve had over the years, and have the freedom to take control of our learning as we explore our interests through the lens of language.

For this to work, we had to be the student, teacher, facilitator, coach, mentor...everything all in one, and, with this newfound ownership of our learning, I developed a better understanding for how I envision a 21st century teacher. “I can teach, mentor, coach, and facilitate. But, when I’m in a class, I want a teacher who can bring their past experience and constantly change between all 4 of those roles and more when needed. I want a guide in the classroom. Someone to teach me skills, mentor me through stress, coach me to be confident, and facilitate me and my peers around common challenges. Most importantly though, a guide occasionally let’s their followers explore the woods and decide what path to turn down. A guide helps students along the path they choose and points out the important landmarks along the way” [\(link\)](#).

Between the research I’ve done and the conversations I’ve had with educators around the world, I’m convinced that the role of teachers will change as education continues to transform. My experience creating and leading this course, among others, has taught

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 Anya'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. [\(email\)](#)

me that teachers and students make a great team when working together, and I hope the future of education sees more guides in the "classroom" (or whatever you might call them). The words we use are less important than the action steps we take; whether it be a teacher, mentor, coach, facilitator, guide, etc. I envision a future where age is not the sole determiner of who is leading and owning learning journeys. But, instead, we are all working together to enhance the future and learning along the way.

3. PROTOTYPING AND LAUNCHING

Another huge project for me this past year was my work with the **ReSpIn Organization** I co-created ([link](#)). ReSpIn strives to **Reduce** waste, **Spark** conversations, and **Inspire** change around 21st century sustainability. The first product to come from the ReSpIn team was the RISE Sustainability System—a learning tool for teachers and students to use in order to help facilitate conversations and activities around sustainability. For this project, we created dozens of prototypes and had many moments where we struggled with taking the RISE bin to the next level.

This struggle though, is truly what happens in the "real world" with product designs. Projects take time and lots of prototypes and feedback. The most inspiring piece of feedback that we were given was from a little 5th grade girl who told me, "This is the best design challenge we've done because we never get to see a project like this get this far" ([link](#)). My work with the ReSpIn team isn't complete yet. But, after this year, I've learned the true value of prototyping early and getting feedback from a myriad of people in order to push ideas forward. No one will ever have a job in which they are working entirely alone 100% of the time or get everything 100% right on the first try (despite the mindset students are expected to have when taking a quiz or test). Due to this, it is immensely important that students begin to learn how to prototype to their best ability then work with others to gain feedback on how to make their work better.

4. SENSE OF SELF

Amongst the things that I've learned about school and design thinking, I've also learned a lot about myself over this past year. I've always been a person with countless interests, passions, and after-school activities that have consumed my "free time." I've often thought of this as a problem because I can't make up my mind on how to spend my time. I just get too interested in everything simply because I'm curious and love learning. Then I watched the TED Talk, "Why some of us don't have one true calling," and it was possibly the most moving TED Talk I've watched yet ([link](#)). Emilie Wapnick introduced me to a world of people just like me and talked about the positive side to being what she calls a "multipotentialite." According to Wapnick, a "multipotentialite" is good at:

- **Idea Synthesis:** bringing together seemingly different concepts to find the intersections where great ideas come from.
- **Rapid Learning:** getting deeply curious about one thing and learning a ton about it before moving on to the next thing.
- **Adaptability:** being able to put on different hats in different situations where different roles are necessary.

With this new concept, I've been discovering a deeper sense of self, which is an essential part of learning. I'm a person with many different interests, but I can also find the connections between these diverse topics easily. This helps me to build project teams and find the relationships between things like gymnastics and education transformation ([link](#)).

“Schools talk about wanting students to be good problem solvers; the first step in problem solving is problem finding, and the best way to problem find is to get out of your classroom chair and observe, interact, and make connections to things happening in the world.”

Anya Smith-Roman
MT. VERNON PRESBYTERIAN
SCHOOL

Finding and watching this TED Talk was such an important moment for me because I believe that knowing myself is the first step to being able to better understand the world. Truthfully, I believe that K-12 education does not focus enough on students learning about and discovering their sense of self. My sense of self has developed immensely due to blogging because sometimes when I write and then read over my writing, I'm able to discern trends and tendencies about how I act and respond to situations better than I can otherwise. I can then hypothesize about my future self in situations based on these observations. I'm still discovering more about myself every-day, and it makes me excited—I wish more students got the chance to experience this. As I move forward in life, I hope to learn more about ways to help other kids learn more about themselves because it's an important part of growing up.

5. THE ROLE OF STUDENT VOICE IN EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION

Learning more about myself has also helped me learn more about ways that I can contribute to the movement to transform education. This year I served as an MVIFI (Mount Vernon Institute For Innovation) Fellow, which opened up a number of opportunities for me to lead all kinds of educators in conversations and challenges. In design thinking, we highly value and work with our users. The main users of schools are the students. So, it only makes sense that for us to re-design schools, we need to value and work with students. Not only is it helpful for students to provide feedback and be involved with ideating on projects, but it is also a huge confidence builder as a student to be talking with external mentors about “real world” issues, such as education transformation [\(link\)](#).

In the business world, a good trade is only made when there is “mutual value”—when both parties gain something from the transaction. In my opinion, adding student voice to education conversations is a mutually beneficial transaction at its finest. Students gain confidence and practice in real-world skills like communication and problem solving, while the adults gain fresh manpower, as well as new ideas and insights from people in the generation they are designing for.

And, thinking like a kid often makes the world seem more magical and full of possibilities. When I imagine the future of education, I see a wondrous realm of malleable potential. That's the vision I hope everyone can learn to see. If we aren't using student voice in the process of reimagining education, then we will never reach our greatest potential.

All of these key learning moments from this past year have been made even greater in my mind because I was able to reflect upon them on my blog. Blogging has given me a place to share my story in a way that allows me to easily look back and find trends and connections between my observations. And, on top of everything, I'm constantly expanding my network and getting new opportunities. I know I'm not the best writer in the world, and I know it's the area that I could most improve on. But, since I've been blogging, I've developed a new confidence and joy in my writing. Writing helps us think, reflecting helps us grow, and sharing helps make the world a better place—blogging is all three in one!

“If we aren't using student voice in the process of reimagining education, then we will never reach our greatest potential.”

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SCHOOL

Anya Smith-Roman has a unique story that is rich with leadership, innovation, and pioneering. She loves to explore, tinker, craft, design, reflect, share, wander, and wonder. For the past few years, Anya's primary driving question has been, “How might we make student voice the forefront of education redesign?” This question has lead her on an invigorating investigation in how to blur the lines between school and the real world. Anya dreams of a future where “school” consists of students working side by side with business leaders in order to design for pressing issues around the world.



Coalition of Essential Schools

The Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) ([link](#)) was founded on the belief that “the central purpose of schools is to teach students how to use their minds well.” This simple statement has led to over 30 years of national service—supporting over 600 schools and 250,000 learners in 41 states and five countries. CES prides itself on supporting the development of “personalized, equitable, and intellectually challenging schools.” With their set of 10 Common Principles ([link](#)), CES lays out the foundational elements of their model, which can be uniquely applied depending on the community’s needs and resources. As with any resource, beliefs and principles are nothing more than meaningless musings without viable results to back them up—and results are what CES has. From Houston, TX to New York, NY to Franklin County, OH to Seatac, WA, CES has created a network of remarkable learning environments. Their work spans learning environments of all ages, sizes, and locales. Take an adventure and discover ways you might implement similar strategies in your learning environment.

CES School Benchmarks ([link](#))

Horace, the journal of the Coalition of Essential Schools ([link](#))

CES EssentialVisions ([link](#))

National SEED Project

As the education paradigm shifts its focus from school-centric to learner-centered environments, the socially embedded nature of those environments is crucial. In this movement, we must ensure all learners are able to connect and empathize with life experiences outside their own. Just as importantly, the adults in the system must do the same. **The National SEED Project** ([link](#)) recognizes this need by providing peer-led professional development programs that “acknowledge systems of oppression, power, and privilege, without blame, shame, or guilt.” SEED offers a host of opportunities for individuals and communities to engage in their programs—from the seven-day New Leaders’ Week to regional events that provide an introduction to SEED’s concepts and methods. When we allow our internal, pre-conceived notions to be exposed and evaluated, the life experiences of each member of our communities can be more fully understood and accepted. Explore how the National SEED Project can help you “create a conversational community to drive personal, organizational, and societal change toward greater equity and diversity.”

SEED Leaders Speak ([link](#))

New Leaders’ Week ([link](#))

SEED Blog ([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](#)

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](#)).

Education Elements

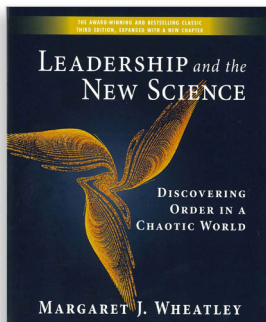
is hiring! They have a Director of Marketing position available in San Carlos, CA. Learn more and apply [here](#).

NewSchools Venture Fund

is calling on you to “Bring Your Boldest, Biggest Ideas for Reimagining Education.” Announcing up to \$7 million in new funding opportunities, find out how you can get in on the action [here](#).

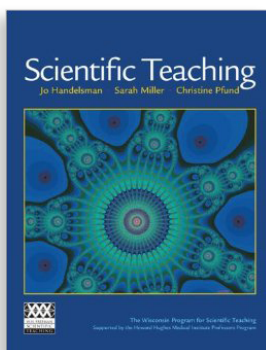


ON OUR BOOKSHELF



Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World by Margaret Wheatley

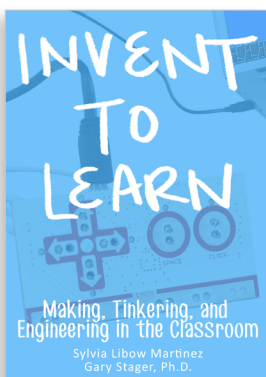
Setting out on a path less traveled can be a frightening experience—particularly when a century-old system is trying to hold you back. Find the encouragement to press on through Margaret Wheatley's *Leadership and the New Science*. Explore how the natural phenomena of biology, quantum physics, and chaos theory can be applied to the leadership strategies you invoke in your unique learning environment. Discover the advantages of embracing the chaos of new systems creation and how, within the chaos, order will be found.



Scientific Teaching

by Jo Handelsman, Sarah Miller, and Christine Pfund

From the outside, science can look like a step-by-step problem solving process with minimal improvisation. It seems quite different from the ever-changing field of education, which demands flexibility and creativity from all its participants. So, when authors Jo Handelsman, Sarah Miller, and Christine Pfund wanted to combine their love for science and apply it as a viable pedagogical approach, *Scientific Teaching* looked like a frivolous pursuit. However, their exploration of active learning, assessment, and diversity will take you on a worthwhile adventure in education design, which might just spark ideas for your learning environment.



Invent to Learn: Making, Tinkering, and Engineering in the Classroom

by Gary Stager and Sylvia Libow Martinez

Once an idea that seemed so farfetched you almost had to speak about it in low whispers, “learning by doing” is now looking to take the microphone away from old-school lectures. There are so many tools available today for educators to apply this methodology in their learning environment that it can become dizzying. So, Gary Stager and Sylvia Libow Martinez wrote *Invent to Learn* to cut through the noise and lay out clear, diverse strategies to fit your learners’ needs. With today’s technology, children are able to bring their imaginations to life, and—regardless of budgetary constraints—there’s a way for you to take advantage of the resources.

WORTH YOUR TIME

A Tour of Mastery-Based Learning in NYC

The experiences are diverse; the questions are relevant; and the storytelling will make you feel as if you were walking the fabled streets of NYC yourself. Take a look at an in-depth, multi-part reflection on the NYC Mastery Collaborative from the eyes of CompetencyWorks Co-Founder, Chris Sturgis.

[Read here](#)

In Memory: Seymour Papert

As July came to a close, so did the life of Seymour Papert. A man whose life is impossible to measure, Papert dedicated his mind and actions to challenging the status quo of American education. Take a moment to remember his legacy. [Read here](#)

Where Hip-Hop Fits in Cuba's Anti-Racist Curriculum

Racial inequity is so prominent in American culture, we sometimes forget to explore new ideas and solutions being cultivated outside our communities. Just 90 miles off the coast of Florida, an educational movement within and outside the traditional classroom setting is taking hold. Discover how Cuba—with the support of the government—is weaving an unfiltered, anti-racist curriculum into their education system.

[Read here](#)

“When people tell you it's impossible, you're on the right track.” —**GEORGE LUCAS**

Read past issues of
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