

pioneering

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A NOTE FROM EDUCATION REIMAGINED

Kelly Young, Director

BIG PICTURE LEARNING

Profile of their Learning Environment

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Margaret Black, Senior Director of Operations
Big Thought (Dallas, Texas)

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to say about their education

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education 
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• connect. share. discover. lead. •

pioneering

Dear Pioneers,

The growth of the learner-centered education movement continues to accelerate. With each meeting we have, we can see pioneers feeling increasingly connected, seen, and understood by others in the movement. It's inspiring and exhilarating!

Three weeks ago, we held a meeting inquiring into how learner-centered environments are meeting the needs of students who are most ill-served by the current one-size-fits-all education system. During that meeting, we heard from a handful of pioneers serving those learners—what they are discovering and the questions that have come up along the way. We are excited to be able to share what we heard with you.

In the last issue of *Pioneering*, you read Kim Carter of MC²'s remarks, in which she shared the bold premise, "We are all good learners." In this issue, you will get a snapshot of two other learning environments that were highlighted at the gathering: Big Picture Learning (BPL) and Big Thought.

You can read a profile of BPL and watch a presentation that Carlos Moreno, its Co-Executive Director, gave at the Business Innovation Factory Conference (2015). It touches on many of the same themes that he shared with us. Also read Margaret Black of Big Thought's reflections on her time with Education Reimagined, both at the meeting and at SXSWedu.

From all of these pioneers' reflections, remarks, and insights, you can begin to hear a few common, powerful themes: a celebration of each child's gifts and uniqueness; learners being seen as full human beings with real lives both in and out of school; and the co-creation of learning pathways that are exciting, engaging, and relevant to learners, their passions, and their goals.

We hope that you enjoy this issue!

Warm wishes,

Kelly

PS *Don't forget to contribute to the online, ongoing conversation about the images, metaphors, and phrases that reflect the new future of learning. We hope you'll chime in through blogs posts, Twitter, and Facebook. Just remember to use #NextEdStory to keep the momentum going!*



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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.





BIG PICTURE LEARNING

United States, Australia, the Netherlands, Canada, Italy

Our goal is simple: Ensure that every student graduates with the opportunity to apply passion and courage to something that they are interested in, something that they love. —Carlos Moreno, Co-Executive Director

BACK IN 1995, two radical thinkers and educators came together because they knew it was time for a change—a change in how the world saw learning, kids, and education. They had a vision to redesign education in a way that “put students directly at the center of their own learning.” Fortuitously, one small state in the nation was getting ready to take a risk with its own education system—Rhode Island. Thus, the first Big Picture Learning school—the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (“The Met”) in Providence, RI—was born.

Since then, Big Picture Learning has spread both across the country—now with 65 locations in 18 states—and across a few oceans—with schools in the Netherlands, Australia, Italy, and Canada. Big Picture Learning’s design has proven itself again and again. And, not just for one kind of kid. The Big Picture Learning design has been successful across the wide diversity of learners it serves, be they at-risk, over-age, under-credited, or gifted learners. It works for kids in all zip codes, with different life stories, possessing different interests, passions, and challenges. How does it do this?

With no classes, grades, or tests, Big Picture Learning’s **competency-based** environments are designed to see each learner as an individual. No two learning pathways are alike—learners, with the support of their mentors, parents, and peers, leverage Big Picture’s design components and distinguishers to create individualized learning plans. What this all comes to is that Big Picture is a place where kids learn how to learn, not where they are instructed in topics, subjects, or information. In fact, five learning goals frame how each learner approaches their work: 1) Empirical Reasoning, 2) Quantitative Reasoning, 3) Communication, 4) Social Reasoning, 5) Personal Qualities.

And, authentic assessments—“public displays of learning that track growth and progress in the learner’s area of interest”—are how they demonstrate their learning. Whether through an oral presentation, an art project, a business plan, or a story, how learners show their learning is just as personalized as how they learn.

In practice, Big Picture learners spend their time in advisories and internships. Advisories, a cohort of 15 learners and one adult advisor, stay together for four years building bonds and relationships that last a lifetime. This **socially embedded** practice is the “heart and soul” of the Big Picture design. A second key component is the Learning through Interests and Internships (LTIs). LTIs are learning made **personalized, relevant, and contextualized**. Learners step up and identify their area of interest and then find an opportunity to work with an expert out in their community. Through the LTIs, they gain **open-walled** experiences with “how their interests intersect with the real world”—learners are discovering if what they think they are interested in is actually what they are interested in.

Twenty years after the Met opened its doors, Big Picture is increasingly devoting energy to “influencing the national debate about public education.” And, from their annual Big Bang Conference to their expanded program initiatives—like College Unbound and the Deeper Learning Equity Fellowship—they are amplifying more voices and shifting more mindsets every day.

LEARN MORE

[Individualized Real-World Learning](#)

[Going Deeper: Podcasts](#)



FACTS & FIGURES

Public K-12

9,000+ learners served in the US

7,000+ internationally

Over 200 schools throughout the world, including 65 US schools

ELL or Primary Language other than English: 56%

Learners with disabilities: 18%

Free or reduced lunch: 62-74%

Graduation rates: 95%

College acceptance upon graduation: 95-100%

CONNECT

Website

[Big Picture](#)

Facebook Page

[Big Picture Learning](#)

Twitter

[@bigpicturelearning](#)

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Discover more...



Carlos Moreno,
Co-Executive Director,
presenting at the
Business Innovation
Factory.

[Watch here](#)

“We are in the most ambitious innovation business of all—innovating human beings.

Each year, we reimagine the school experience for students at a time in their lives when they are the most vulnerable and most impressionable.”



[Watch](#) the video above that asks, “Have we considered students’ own expectations of us?” If you like what you hear, visit the 10 expectations [portal](#).



Dennis Littky,
Co-Founder,
presenting at
TEDxNYED.

[Watch here](#)



A VOICE FROM THE FIELD

Covered Wagons Meet the Networked Age: Reflections on the Road with Education Reimagined

by Margaret Black, Senior Director of Operations, Big Thought

SELF-DESCRIBED STRANGE BEDFELLOWS: That’s Education Reimagined—the staff, the advisors, and the admiring fans. Now that I’ve had the pleasure of getting to know this intrepid group, I would I call them a force to be reckoned with on a path to educational metamorphosis.

I joined Education Reimagined on stage last month in Austin at their SXSWedu summit to dissect the question: How do we realize a new future of learning in which every child fulfills their boundless potential? Talk about your proverbial baptism by fire. Not only did I get instantly familiar with this discerning community, I stared wide-eyed at a standing-room-only crowd for a three-hour afternoon summit.

And yet, something odd began to unfold. Here I am sitting next to the other panelists sharing [Big Thought’s](#) Dallas City of Learning story about our citywide experiment that incorporates all five elements of the [transformational vision for education](#), when I was suddenly transported back to *Little House on the Prairie*. The organizers, the summit participants, and the Twittersphere referred to Big Thought staff as “Ed Pioneers.” So, I’m thinking Laura Ingalls Wilder, not business as usual at Big Thought.



Margaret Black

I kept hearing the same thing, that reference to Big Thought as an “education pioneer.” I was flummoxed. My imagination began to work double time as it filtered our work through the eyes of advocates and practitioners of learner-centered design. How would Big Thought programs resemble the spirit of American pioneers? Do we have our own little house on the prairie?

PIONEERS

Pioneers are first to explore—to settle a new area, which then opens the gates for others to occupy and develop. Big Thought launched in 1987 with the bold theory that the arts had the power to help children learn. Did our founders discover an unfamiliar territory and pave the way for creativity to flourish in Dallas schools and communities for decades to come? The organization has since grown to serve nearly 150,000 students each year by bringing relentless optimism, innovation, and imagination to the biggest challenge facing education today: the opportunity gap.

Sure, we are intimately aware that our latest venture, Dallas City of Learning, is an innovative approach using an emerging technology. But, are we pioneers? Our model is inspired by MacArthur Foundation-led research on Connected Learning, the Chicago City of Learning structure led by the Digital Youth Network, and the Wallace Foundation-led efforts to reduce summer learning loss. Our model is powered by the technology [LRNG by Collective Shift](#). Then, it dawned on me: Perhaps our joint progress towards a learner-centered paradigm is not unlike the western frontier. Maybe it does indeed share a kinship with groups of settlers in covered wagons travelling across the plains and mountain passes while banded together for mutual assistance—and survival.

This brings us back to SXSWedu, the Oregon Trail for Ed Pioneers. As I reflect on the whirlwind of inspiration that characterized those few days in Austin, I’m reminded that Ed Pioneers are not always well-known leaders or practitioners. SXSWedu does bring together educators of all kinds who are driven to make change, but it also unites policy advocates, tech entrepreneurs, journalists and (by golly!) even students. The major theme throughout the week: personalized, competency-based learning. How fitting, then, that the folks at Education Reimagined attracted such inquisitive participants during our afternoon summit.

But, I quickly learned that this group is sharp in every setting. They didn’t miss a beat during socializing at their Texas-style cocktail party. The learner-centered conversations just kept buzzing.

BAPTISM BY FIRE

My baptism by fire continued days later in another time zone. Now we’re in Arlington, Virginia where Education Reimagined convened their Advisory Board and guests for a daylong conversation on how learner-centered education could meet the needs of those students most disadvantaged in the current system. We exchanged brief handshakes, and then something became instantly clear—the signatories of the vision document could not be more diverse in their perspectives and experiences. That’s when the document sprung to life for me. Its content, theories, and elements struck me as that much more powerful. I saw firsthand that conflicting viewpoints could find harmony in a single north star.

As I stood before this alliance of hopefuls who were no longer debating the vision for learner-centered education, but instead were engaged in dialogue towards

“As I stood before this alliance of hopefuls who were no longer debating the vision for learner-centered education, but instead were engaged in dialogue towards transforming the whole system I again felt the pioneering presence.”

MARGARET BLACK



Margaret Black presenting at Education Reimagined's Visionary Leader Meeting (March 2016).

transforming the whole system, I again felt the pioneering presence. The word pioneer comes from Old French “peonier,” meaning foot soldier. The metaphor fits—foot soldiers do active, difficult, and unglamorous work to support a movement.

“The work is hard,” a phrase echoed by every practitioner that shared firsthand stories. Maybe this shared experience as learner-centered foot soldiers ties all of these advocates and advisors together, marching in unison on the front lines to bring the vision to life for all students. The topic was always the same: How to ensure we are serving all, including the most disadvantaged.

In Dallas, diverse stakeholders conceived the student-centered community model by asking the question: How do we level the playing field? Dallas City of Learning is a public-private citywide commitment that ensures all students have access to summer learning opportunities as we combat the growing opportunity gap disproportionately affecting low-income youth (see sidebar). While Dallas was recently named home of the fastest-growing population of millionaires, poverty in our community is intensifying. We have a 59% child asset poverty rate in Dallas, second highest of the 25 largest US counties.¹

DRIVING QUESTION

The driving question when we began the summer pilot in 2014 was: Can we create a system where low-income youth can access interest-driven programs and learn like their more affluent peers? By our second summer, we served 34,743 students—70% of whom live in the highest concentrations of poverty in Dallas. We have a long way to go to fully realize the vision, but we’re learning that it can be done. We can serve students traditionally disadvantaged by the current system through a learner-centered model.

Education Reimagined characterizes their path towards change approach as pull-from-the-bottom rather than push-from-the-top. After a mere glimpse of this group’s pioneering spirit and fresh leadership, I know the movement of foot soldiers marches on.

¹ United States Census Bureau / American FactFinder. 2009-2014 American Community Survey – 5 year. U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey Office. Tables S1501 and/or B17024 <http://factfinder2.census.gov>

COMPONENTS OF DALLAS CITY OF LEARNING

Expand the quality and reach of summer learning programs to underserved neighborhoods, acknowledging that learning programs are **open-walled** and can happen in any environment.

Comprehensive searchable catalog of learning experiences. This website is **personalized, relevant, & contextualized** because it makes visible all learning experiences, whether in-person or online, and can be searched by interest, age, location, and price. The discovery feed involves **learner agency** because each experience invites the learner to participate and provides instructions on how to engage. The learner makes the choice to engage, at the learner’s pace and in the learner’s way.

Credentialize learning in the community through digital badges, a **competency-based** tool linked to transferrable 21st century and workforce skills. The learning is **socially embedded** because earned badges may require peer review. They may be issued by a mentor or industry professional. They can be shared with peers, teachers, employers, and other gatekeepers.

Break down barriers to access by providing transportation to take kids out into the community; invest in neighborhoods to bring programs to students; deploy mobile technology to specific sites and produce free hands-on family events.



LEARNER VOICES

Check out the articles and videos below. They might just challenge your assumptions of what kids are capable of creating and doing if we let go of the current Industrial-era paradigm and move towards learner-centered education.



FROM MIND/SHIFT

The Benefits of Students Teaching Students Through Online Video

Sometimes, the best teachers are the learners. That's the theory behind student-created tutoring videos, which capture the palpable excitement of a learner teaching something that they are truly passionate about. [Read here](#)

FROM THE WASHINGTON POST

Nine-Year-Old Reporter Breaks Crime News

What do you want to be when you grow up? For one 9-year old, that question is old news. Meet Hilde Kate Lysiak, an enterprising journalist who, at age 7, founded the *Orange Street News* and who, just this week, pulled a major scoop in her hometown of Selinsgrove, PA. [Read here](#)

HOSTED BY STEVE FIGURELLI IN CONJUNCTION WITH STUDENT VOICE

“Our Vision Our Voice” Interviews with Learners, Episode 4

“It takes a mindset shift to get to a point where students can really create.” That mindset shift has to happen for everyone—educators, parents, community members, and (sometimes most importantly) the learners themselves. Hear from a few students who are coming to that realization. [Listen here](#)

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

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

So, we'd like your help in sharing learner's stories. We want to expand this section of *Pioneering* to provide a space for learners to speak their minds, showcase their projects, and be active participants in the process of education transformation.

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

It's really simple, we promise!

“I really believe that the best people to solve problems are the people who face them. In the field of education, those people are students, and I think it's unfortunate that we're often left out of the conversation.”

—SHILPA YARLAGADDA
MIND/SHIFT



Next Generation Learning Challenges

Next Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC) ([link](#)) accelerates educational innovation through applied technology and innovative learning methods to dramatically improve college readiness and completion in the United States. They are strong proponents of a “next-generation learning” model that embraces competency-based assessment and progression, as well as personalized learning through personal learning pathways, project-based learning, and blended learning strategies. NGLC awards grants, supports innovative models—like their “Breakthrough Model” schools—and creates resources for education leaders. Among those resources are summaries of the latest research into learning and motivation, case studies of NGLC grantees and their successes with implementing NGLC’s “Personalized Learning School Design Attributes,” and toolkits geared towards solving on-the-ground challenges for practitioners in the early stages of transformation. For example, they offer a toolkit that helps school leaders to develop a plan for their unique learning environment that both addresses the challenges and seizes the opportunities of transformation.

RETHINK: Planning and Designing for K-12 Next Generation Learning ([link](#))

Next Gen Tools: Personalized Learning Plans and Learner Profiles ([link](#))

Blended Learning Universe

The **Blended Learning Universe** (BLU) ([link](#)) is a comprehensive online hub, curated by the The Clayton Christenson Institute. It is packed with a wealth of resources for practitioners, policymakers, parents, and innovators seeking to “improve education through personalized, student-centered learning.”

The BLU hosts tutorials, houses a text and video guide of the different models of blended learning, and provides DIY worksheets for practitioners to plan and execute blended learning strategies with their own learners. They also produce a trove of white papers, case studies, and policy briefs—providing proof points for blended learning models and exploring blended learning’s role as a “disruptive innovator” in the education sphere. Another indispensable tool of the BLU is its directory, a rapidly growing, searchable catalog of worldwide K-12 blended learning programs. A mechanism to connect the blended learning movement, the Directory includes Q&As with school leaders and details on the edtech tools and resources being used across the country. Dig in and explore!

Directory of Schools ([link](#))

DIY Worksheet ([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.

Massachusetts Education Partnership (MEP) Annual Conference

Panel
Marlborough, MA
April 12

[Conference Website](#)

ASU GSV Summit

San Diego, CA
April 18-20

[Conference Website](#)

Remake Learning Days

Pittsburgh, PA
May 9-15

[Conference Website](#)

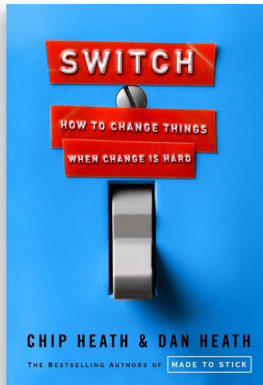
JOB BOARD

Education Reimagined is seeking a talented Writer/Communications Associate to join our team. Learn more and apply [here](#).

Big Picture Learning is hiring! They have positions available in Oakland, CA; Bronx, NY; Minneapolis, MN; and Belize. Learn more and apply [here](#).

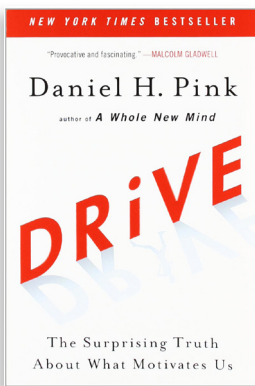


ON OUR BOOKSHELF



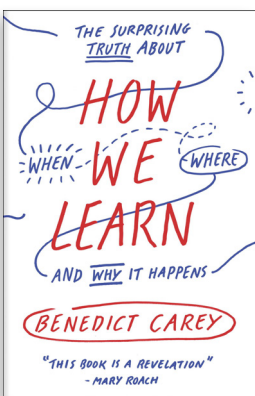
Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard by Chip & Dan Heath

Not surprisingly, science is increasingly coming to the conclusion that humans have two different decision-making systems hardwired into our brains: the rational brain, which wants that great beach body, and the emotional brain—the one lusting after that leftover pizza in the fridge. In *Switch*, authors and brothers Chip and Dan Heath explain how long-lasting change, on an individual, organizational, or systems-wide level, can be stymied by both the emotional brain’s desire for comfort and routine and the rational’s penchant for over-thinking and paralysis by analysis. Thankfully, by uniting both decision-making systems, *Switch* shows us how we can affect profound, positive change in ourselves and the world.



Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us by Daniel H. Pink

Many people take it as common knowledge that motivation inherently comes from “carrots”—rewards for success like money, power, and prestige—or “sticks”—punishments for failure. But, what if there was a third way proven to be a better motivator than extrinsic rewards and punishments? Author Daniel H. Pink posits that as society has changed, so must our assumptions about motivation. We must recognize and value our own internal drive to direct our own lives, to learn, to create, and to master new things—and to be active, contributing members of society.



How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where, and Why It Happens by Benedict Carey

Think about your brain. Is it a muscle that grows stronger with more reps and more weight? Or, as author Benedict Carey suggests, is it a natural learning machine that actually benefits most from day-dreaming, distraction, and a good nap? If we buy Carey’s theory, we should focus less on the number of hours we spend on some endeavor and more on the how, when, where, and with whom we actually learn best. We might just end up living a more well-rounded life.

WORTH YOUR TIME

Steeltown Teen Film Crew producing reality show on maker movement for Fox Network

With the rise of Youtube, Vine, Snapchat, it’s obvious that teenagers can and often do create content as imaginative, entertaining, and impactful as any adult. Read the story of the Steeltown Entertainment Project to see how Pittsburgh’s burgeoning entertainment and media industry is making the most that often untapped resource.

[Read here](#)

RSU2: Entering a New Stage in Building a High Quality Proficiency-Based District

If the question is how to transform a whole system to a competency-based model, there are few better to ask than RSU2 in Maine. Bill Zima, Superintendent at RSU2, and other district leaders share their thoughts and lessons learned from one of the oldest, and most successful, transformation stories in the nation. [Read here](#)

For Vulnerable Teenagers, a Web of Support

What does it mean to offer unconditional support? For the high schoolers in the Thread program in Baltimore, MD, it means having something they had never had before: a network of support that is there for them through thick and thin. Read this powerful example of what a learner-centered mindset can make possible. [Read here](#)

“Choose your corner, pick away at it carefully, intensely and to the best of your ability and that way you might change the world.”

—CHARLES EAMES

Read past issues of
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