

pioneering

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A NOTE FROM EDUCATION REIMAGINED

Kelly Young, Executive Director

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education 
reimagined

● connect. share. discover. lead. ●

pioneering

Dear Pioneers,

Where did the summer go? Hard to believe that it is already back to school time.

Back to school is often equated with a return to learning. But, we know that learning never stops—not even for the summer months. The what, where, when, how, and with whom of learning is certainly different—but the fact that learning is happening never changes.

For some, this summer learning was intentionally cultivated and curated, like my kids' experiences at their camp. For others, it was fully in the background—happening when they were honing their jump shot, trying to get a high score in a videogame, or figuring out how to make mac n' cheese by themselves. It was just what they had to do to get by. Of course, not all of these learning experiences are equally preparing kids to pursue the future of their dreams. But, I would hazard a guess that some of the best learning is actually happening in the most unlikely of circumstances.

So, what if we started this school year by acknowledging the learning that happened over the summer, regardless of how it came about? By giving this learning its due, we can take a stand for valuing all learning (even when it is happening without our noticing). Imagine what could be if the entire community—parents, learners, educators, businesses, community members—was aware of and cultivated the “out-of-school” learning that is happening throughout the year.

Sometimes, we have to remind ourselves that learning is more than what happens in that one building, six hours a day, 180 days per year. And, when we do, the possibilities are limitless.

Warm wishes,
Kelly Young

P.S. Thanks to all of the amazing pioneers who contributed their stories, voices, and experiences to this issue. Read on to explore how Atlanta-based Mount Vernon Presbyterian School incorporates design thinking in all they do, learn more about what Universal Design for Learning offers your environment, and hear one of our team member's reflections on her trip to Big Picture's Big Bang 2016.



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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.





MOUNT VERNON PRESBYTERIAN SCHOOL

Atlanta, Georgia

With the skills taught to me and my peers, I am comfortable and ready to tackle major real-world issues with a fresh and relevant perspective. —Jay Middleton

COMPREHENSIVE DESIGN THINKING INFUSION. A moniker more aligned with a Silicon Valley startup than a Southern parochial learning environment, this four-word phrase is the driving force behind the Atlanta-based Mount Vernon Presbyterian School (MVPS). And, there is no better way to see how that comes to life than to consider the MVPS continuum of Purpose, Design, Culture, and Results ([link](#)).

Home to learners as young as six-weeks up to those headed off on post-secondary pursuits, MVPS lives its purpose: to cultivate “a school of inquiry, innovation, and impact—preparing all students to be college ready, globally competitive, and engaged citizen leaders.”

Reflecting this powerful purpose, MVPS’ design speaks to kids’ inherent abilities to think, wonder, create, and problem solve. From the lower to upper schools, MVPS has established a **socially embedded, open-walled** learning environment that supports learners in developing the **knowledge, skills, and dispositions** necessary to apply their education within the broader community—creating a positive, long-lasting impact. These learners are making a difference in their communities, and they know themselves to be powerful, proactive change agents.

For example, when a group of young learners observed a room full of infants, their blossoming minds took control. Realizing the babies were fascinated by one child’s sparkly shirt—they saw an immediate possibility. By filling bottles with sparkly confetti and wrapping boxes with shiny paper, these learners worked to bring joy to those even younger than themselves ([link](#)). This Design Thinking Challenge exemplifies what occurs throughout the MVPS system. Kids are empowered to discover a problem, identify a solution, and create positive change.

All of this inquiry and invention would be impossible without the incredible learning culture MVPS has fostered. Perhaps the lynchpin of their work, this culture has supplied a self-sustaining energy for all involved. Through a questions-first approach—catalyzed by their undeterred commitment to “fail up, share the well, assume the best, and have fun”—learners and leaders at MVPS are surrounded by a supportive, open-minded community on a daily basis.

At MVPS, learning becomes real, **relevant**, and...well, fun! It also becomes enlightening—kids are invited to unapologetically discover their whole-selves at every stage in the learning journey. And, the results reveal individuals ready to think creatively, innovate, communicate effectively, make ethical decisions, seek out solutions, and collaborate with the local and global community.

Continuing to push the envelope as leaders in design thinking, MVPS partnered with Stanford’s d.School. Through this collaborative effort, the Mount Vernon Institute of Innovation (MVIFI) was born and, for the last six years, has acted as a research and development arm of MVPS “engaging students in real-world, people-centered problem solving.” Together, MVPS and MVIFI combine to create a fast-paced, forward-thinking environment—preparing learners to tackle the challenges of today and tomorrow.

LEARN MORE

[Making Education More Like Real Life Through Design Thinking](#)

[Students’ pocket park concept to be installed in Chamblee Whole Foods development](#)

[Mount Vernon Students Connect With Atlanta Entrepreneur](#)

FACTS & FIGURES

Independent School

Preschool through Grade 12

945 learners served

1:10 Faculty to Learner Ratio

Learners Receiving Financial Assistance: 24%

Community Service: 10,000 hours/year

2008-2015 Merit Scholarships Awarded: \$13 million

CONNECT

Website

[MVPS](#)

[MVIFI](#)

Social Media

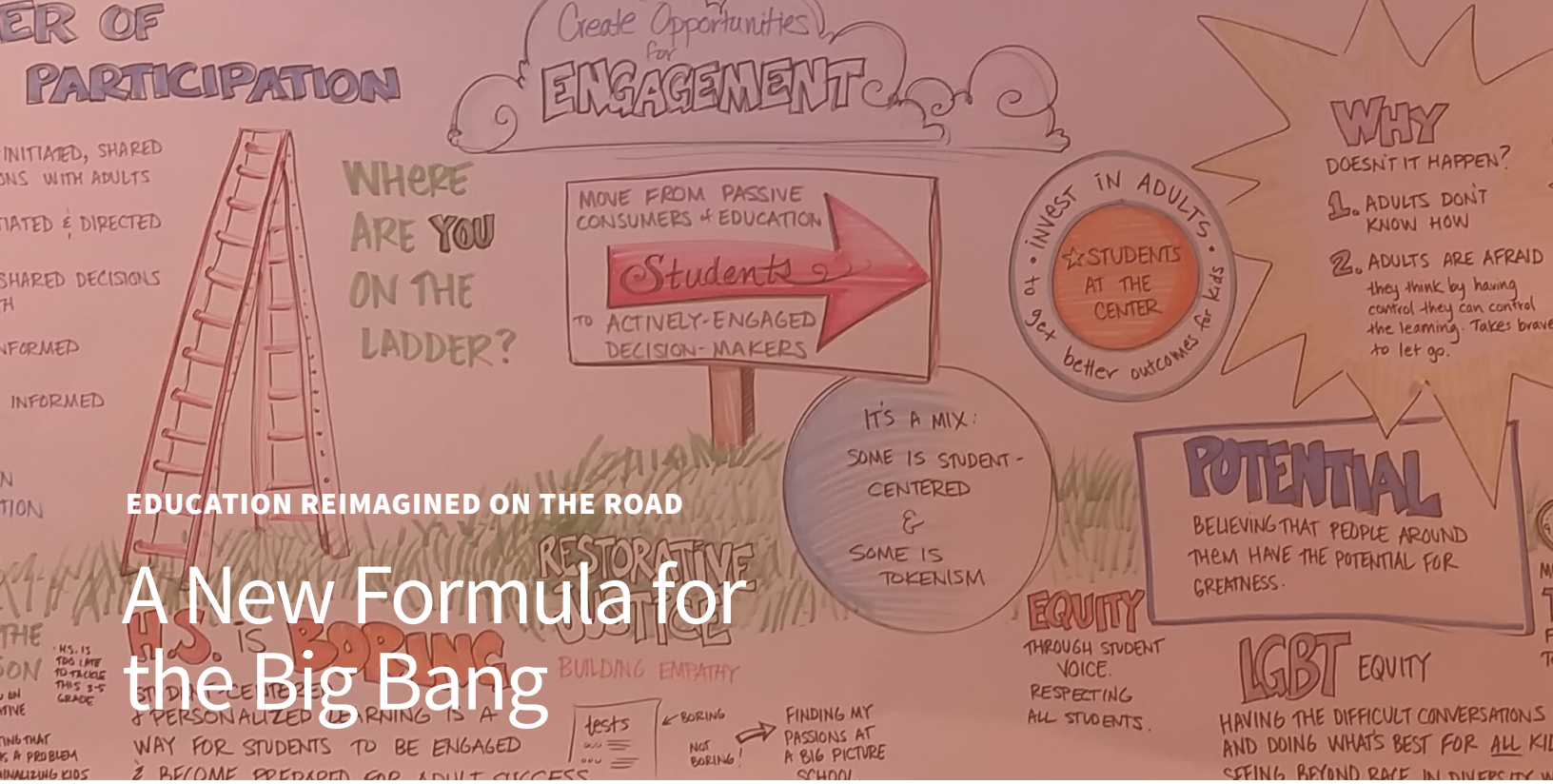
[MVPS Twitter](#)

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[MVPS Facebook](#)

[MVPS Vimeo](#)





EDUCATION REIMAGINED ON THE ROAD

A New Formula for the Big Bang

Big Bang: The International Conference on Student-Centered Learning is an experience not to be missed. This July, I was fully immersed in the Big Picture Learning (BPL) culture while attending my first Big Bang. The experience was a whirlwind adventure—I felt like a firsthand witness of BPL’s commitment to putting learners at the center.

A NEWCOMER’S INTRODUCTION

If you have ever attended a Big Bang, you know that the 10 Distinguishers are always present throughout the conference experience, and there was one in particular that struck me most fervently. Advisory Structure provides an unparalleled opportunity for conference participants to reflect, connect with others, and broaden their perspectives. A couple of weeks before the conference, I learned I was placed in an advisory group with other newcomers to learn the basics of the organization. In our first advisory session, which was virtual and occurred a week before the conference, our advisor guided us through a process of discovery to uncover our unique essential question for exploration during the conference. My chosen question was: “How does equity show up in a learner-centered environment?” (More on that below!) Each day, we met with our advisory group to reflect, share, ask questions, and simply connect—much like you would see in a BPL environment.

LEARNERS AT THE CENTER

Learners have always been at the center of BPL’s efforts and the Big Bang 2016 was no exception. Last year, BPL set an audacious goal to have learners at every table at this year’s conference—and they did. In Big Picture’s first-ever youth conference, approximately 50 BPL learners and 500 educators from across the country were gathered in one place. Learners were not on the periphery of the conference experience either. Rather, they played an integral role in the programming—making the learning relevant for all of us. The experiment was so successful, BPL plans to expand the number of learners and roles they play in future conferences.



Zakiya Reid

THE BIG BANG 2016 EXPERIENCE

The Big Bang is a two and a half day experience designed for educators and learners to explore practices that promote learner engagement. The sessions were described as “dives” into critical learning content. Between the “dives,” conference participants took part in a myriad of activities to build community, learn from one another, and simply have fun. We were taken back to the future in presentations by co-founders, Dennis Littky and Elliot Washor, and Co-Executive Directors, Andrew Frishman and Carlos Moreno. Below, I’ve tried to capture the essence of the daily “dive” experience.

Day 1 of the conference consisted of learners and educators working together in two, 90-minute sessions called “mini-dives.” The mini-dive topics ranged from learners leading a session on how to include their voices in creating learner-centered environments to BPL leaders guiding us through a discussion on using integrative thinking to solve complex problems. During each mini-dive, participants were encouraged to actively consider their essential question and how they might use their new learning beyond the conference.

Day 2 of the conference was reserved for learners to extend their learning beyond the walls of the conference, while educators engaged in a full-day inquiry, called “deep dives.”

“Leaving to Learn” experiences allowed learners to engage with and learn from the Orlando community. Learners were able to put their problem solving skills to the test at the local Escape Room, unleash their imaginations beyond their wildest dreams in a session with Disney Imagineers, or explore a variety of other opportunities.

Taking my place in the educator cohort, I was immediately struck by the unique opportunity to learn with a diverse group of educators, parents, BPL alumni, and advocates about what equity must look like in our learning environments—and it was exactly the inquiry I had hoped we would explore. The deep-dive broadened my definition of equity and challenged me to consider the ways that equity education, for educators and learners, has the capacity to powerfully impact our learning communities.

Day 3 was devoted to Sir Ken Robinson sharing his latest research and recommendations on how to transform learning environments. I think it is fair to say his words are best experienced by listening to them yourself—his keynote address can be found here ([link](#)).

FINAL REFLECTIONS

The impact of having learners present at the conference was palpable. I was greatly impacted by the opportunity to learn with and from the current learners and alumni. The significance of the BPL experience shined through the powerful stories I heard and deep understanding I gained of how it has impacted these learners’ future pursuits.

I met an alum who had recently celebrated her 10-year reunion. She spoke passionately about the connection she still shares with her BPL classmates and advisor. Ultimately, her experience at BPL influenced her decision to become an educator. She is now educating young learners in her home community and hopes to become an advisor at the BPL environment she attended. Her story, like so many I encountered at the Big Bang, illustrates the power of placing learners at the center. This work is not only about creating better learning environments, it’s about creating a community for learners to thrive.

“This work is not only about creating better learning environments, it’s about creating a community for learners to thrive.”

Zakiya Reid

Zakiya Reid is a consultant for Education Reimagined. Zakiya has been an educator for 16 years in both the charter and public school settings in the Washington, DC area. In 2013, she left school-based work to embark on a quest to devote her time and talent to initiatives that actively work to disrupt the status quo in education.



LEARNER VOICES

Check out the articles and podcasts 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.



Photo credit: Bryan Anselm for *The New York Times*

FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES

192 Questions

For the last seven years, *The New York Times* has hosted a space for learners to voice their opinions on a variety of questions relevant to their daily lives. Some questions are light-hearted ([link](#)), while others dig much deeper ([link](#)). However, both approaches have revealed profound intuitions from learners across the nation. Why not get your learners in on the action, too?! [Read here](#)

Memories and Hopes

Reading through the college application essays submitted to *The New York Times* by learners across the country, a new window into their diverse lives is revealed. [Read here](#)

FROM INC. MAGAZINE

Age Didn't Matter for these Young Entrepreneur Stars of 'Shark Tank'

When kids are given the chance to transform their imaginations into a real, viable product, even the most successful entrepreneurs in the world can't help but have their jaws drop to the floor. Learn how kids as young as six-years-old impressed a panel of millionaires. [Read here](#)

FROM THE COMMUNITY SERVICE SOCIETY

Universal Jobs for New York City Youth

In their inaugural episode, the CSS introduces listeners to a bold proposal for providing all NYC youth with the opportunity to work summer jobs relevant to their unique learning paths. Through CSS's research, they discovered learners already integrated in such a system at Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School. [Listen here](#)

“No matter your age, there's nothing that entices someone to invest in your idea more than a product that looks like a moneymaker.”

John Boitnott
INC. MAGAZINE



A VOICE FROM THE FIELD

The UDL Lens: Empower Teachers and Learners to Transform Education

Transforming education so that every learner is empowered to direct their learning and experience a great education is a vision we can all embrace. We have transformational models around the country where learner-centered, personalized learning environments are creating proactive learners—directing their unique learning experiences and monitoring their progress, while simultaneously using the latest technologies to support their learning.

In these models, trust and respect are embedded in the school culture. These characteristics are developed in schools where teachers are empowered to create learner-centered environments relevant to their community of learners and to personalize their professional learning where they are designing their learning experiences.

But the big question is, how can we transform education so that every learner gains the skills to be a self-directed, independent learner—a learner with agency?

PERSONALIZED LEARNING STARTS WITH THE LEARNER

First and foremost, we must believe that “every child on the planet is a learner.” Creating learner-centered environments begins with that belief. For too long, we have been using learning styles to determine how a child learns—labeling them as visual, auditory, or kin-



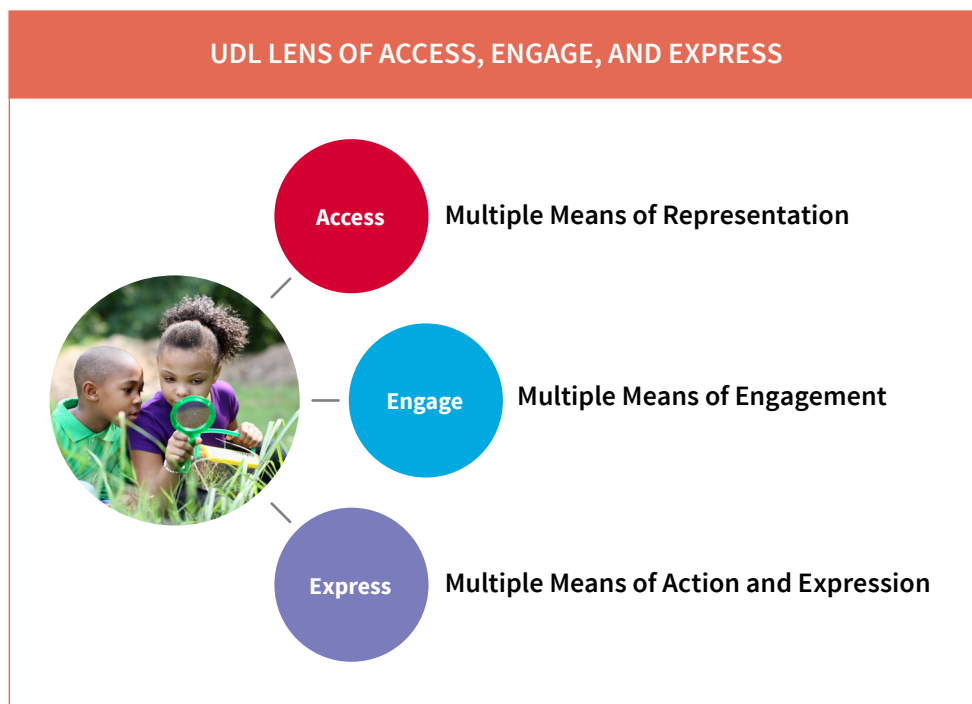
Kathleen McClaskey

esthetic learners. Over the last 40 years, the research around learning styles has shown that these labels perpetuate the stereotyping of learners (*Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 2008). As a result, many children have developed a fixed mindset on how they learn. It is also common practice to use these labels in developing how we perceive who these learners are or who they could be.

If we want to transform education and have each learner develop agency, personalized learning needs to start with the learner. So, we need to turn the page from “learning styles” to neuroscience, which shows us how we actually learn.

Over two decades ago, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was introduced by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) as a set of three principles, based on the study of neuroscience, to guide the design of learning environments and curricula that could reduce the barriers to learning and maximize the levels of support and challenge to all learners. For the UDL principles to be used in practice by both teacher and learner—such that they would become a part of the common language—new terms needed to be developed. Thus, in 2012, Personalize Learning introduced the UDL lens of Access, Engage, and Express.

- **ACCESS** for Multiple Means of Representation
- **ENGAGE** for Multiple Means of Engagement
- **EXPRESS** for Multiple Means of Action and Expression



Less than a year ago, the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) defined and endorsed UDL as a scientifically-based approach for personalizing learning. The question now becomes: How can we use the UDL lens to transform education to create sustainable, personalized, learner-centered environments?

“If we want to transform education and have each learner develop agency, personalized learning needs to start with the learner.”

Kathleen McClaskey

EMPOWER TEACHERS AND LEARNERS WITH THE UDL LENS

The UDL lens of Access, Engage, and Express is designed to show us the learner in every child. It offers key information about how a learner accesses and processes information, engages with content, and expresses what they know and understand.

Using the UDL lens can empower both teacher and learner. For the teacher, they can use it to develop a better perception and understanding on how each learner learns. With this understanding of their learners, they can now employ universally designed instructional methods that can engage learners in the content, and they can design accessible lesson materials for the diverse needs and preferences of the learners. Teachers can now offer choices to learners in how they access content and express what they know.

For the learners, they can create a Learner Profile to share their strengths and challenges in learning; followed by their preferences or needs to access, engage, and express; and ending with their aspirations, talents, and interests.

WHAT COULD A LEARNER PROFILE LOOK LIKE?

When a learner is able to tell their story about how they learn, a partnership in learning begins. This opens the door for a conversation about the learning goals, skills, and strategies the learner needs to develop to support their own learning and, in turn, become an independent and self-directed learner—a learner with agency.

“When a learner is able to tell their story about how they learn, a partnership in learning begins.”

Kathleen McClaskey

	Strengths	Challenges	Preferences
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can visualize what I hear I have excellent memory skills I can make connections with information that I hear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have a hard time in reading text I have a difficult time in understanding what I read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I need to use a text-to-speech tool for reading I prefer to use video and/or audio for learning new information
Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I like to collaborate with my peers I have good problem solving skills I can crunch numbers mentally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have a problem with organizing information I find it difficult to plan my time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I need to have project tasks broken down I prefer to work in groups rather than by myself
Express	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I like to present in front of a group I enjoy telling stories I am good at drawing and designing I can tell how I solve math problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have a difficult time organizing my ideas I have a problem with writing down my thoughts It is hard for me to show my work in math 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I need to use a tool where I could draw and include audio notes for my ideas I prefer to use multimedia tools to tell stories

My interests, talents, and aspirations. I am interested in American History, animals, and fishing. I am good at playing soccer, baseball, and chess, drawing, and math. I aspire to be a forest ranger, cartoonist, or veterinarian.

LEARNER AGENCY FOR ALL LEARNERS

Learner agency has been receiving attention among educators in the midst of a transformational shift in education. For too long, we have embraced the teacher-driven classroom with learners being the recipients of daily lectures and scripted instruction intended to improve test scores. The casualty of this great experiment are learners, who have become less engaged as they progress on their educational path (Gallup, 2013).

How can we help every learner achieve agency? Agency can be demonstrated in the choice of almost anything—learning environment, pace, pathway, and/or content. Using the UDL lens can be the first step in developing learner agency where each learner is valued and respected in the way they learn. But, where do you begin?

Discover who your learners are and build a partnership with them to:

- **initiate goal setting and action steps** so they can develop skills with tools and apps to support their learning and monitor their progress;
- **create flexible ways** for them to access content, engage in learning, and express what they know;
- contribute to the **design of new learning spaces**;
- offer opportunities to **collaborate on lessons and projects** that give more voice and choice;
- **co-design rubrics** for peer- and self-assessment;
- provide extended **learning opportunities** based on their interests, talents, or aspirations; and
- become a **pro-active** learner.

As the year moves forward and various challenges result in the development of the learner's strengths and skills, the partnership with the teacher grows stronger. When this happens, the learner is truly on the path to becoming a learner with agency.

Kathleen McClaskey is co-founder of Personalize Learning, LLC and co-author of bestseller, *Make Learning Personal* and *How to Personalize Learning* (set to be published this October). She is an innovative leader, education technologist, keynote, professional developer, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) consultant with over 30 years experience in creating learner-centered environments. She is passionate in empowering learners with tools, apps, and learning skills so they become independent self-directed learners who realize their hopes and dreams and who are prepared for college, career, and life. Kathleen continues on her mission for educators everywhere to discover the learner in every child and to level the playing field for all learners.

CONNECT

Twitter
[@khmmc](https://twitter.com/khmmc)

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Pashler, H., Mcdaniel, M., Rohrer, D., & Bjork, R. (2008, December). Learning Styles: Concepts and Evidence. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 9(3), 105-119.

Access, Engage and Express is a trademark of Personalize Learning, LLC (www.personalizelearning.com). Universal Design for Learning is a registered trademark of CAST, Inc. (www.cast.org).



Stanford 2025

In 2014, a group of learners at Stanford's d.School traversed the landscape of innovations occurring across the education space—from primary to post-secondary systems. By integrating the thoughts of learners and educators alike, the team “considered many lenses—from how students prepare for a Stanford education while still in high school, to patterns of undergraduate decision-making about what and how they study, to the shifting needs and expectations from future employers.” This project, **Stanford 2025** ([link](#)), was built to “encourage an exploratory mindset” for all educators looking to create supportive learning environments that allow every learner to thrive and be prepared for life. In particular, the project developed recommendations for how to prepare learners for, and ultimately shift, the college education experience. As you explore the imagined possibilities of how the education transformation of today will move our communities into a more fruitful tomorrow, imagine your environment ten years from now and the paths you could take to get there.

Design your Future ([link](#))

Paced Education ([link](#))

Purpose Learning ([link](#))

Open Badges

As the field of education transforms and embodies open-walled learning for all learners, an important question arises: How will learners track their learning progression when the learning is happening in so many spaces? **Open Badges** ([link](#)), a tool created by Mozilla, helps learners of all ages “share their skills and interests with the world” through a sophisticated form of digital badging. By creating a platform to verify offline and online accomplishments with credible organizations, Open Badges literally “opens” up the possibility to expand our spheres of learning to a variety of spaces. Learners’ pathways can then be tracked to form a learning profile or “back-pack.” By combining the relevancy of technological innovation with the recognized importance of learning in multiple spaces, this digital badging platform brings a new excitement for 21st-century learners. Come discover if digital badging would fit the unique mold of your learning environment.

About Open Badges ([link](#))

How to Issue Badges to Learners ([link](#))

Badge Alliance ([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](#)

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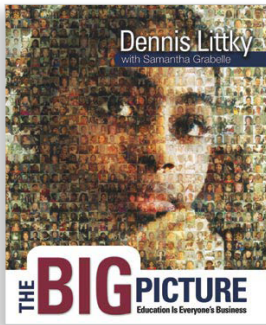
Education Reimagined

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](#)).

Know someone creating change? Send them to the White House for South by South Lawn! Nominate them [here](#) before September 10th.

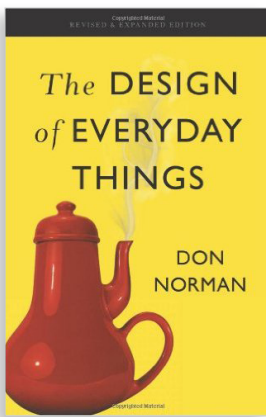


ON OUR BOOKSHELF



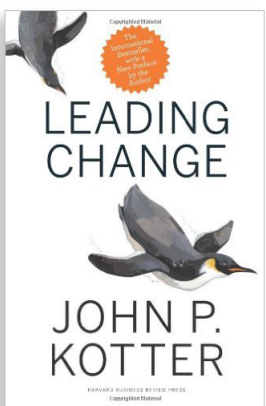
The Big Picture: Education is Everyone's Business by Dennis Littky and Samantha Grabelle

With over 40 years of experience working in education, Dennis Littky is a champion of bursting through the norms of today's education system and establishing programs that bring new life to learning environments around the world. In the 2004 book, *The Big Picture*, Littky and his colleague, Samantha Grabelle, seek to inspire educators to go beyond the conventions of their current learning environments and explore the possibilities to unleash every child's insatiable appetite for learning.



The Design of Everyday Things by Don Norman

When it comes to design, there is inspiration all around us—from the car you drive, to the shoes you wear, to the very e-publication you are reading right now. And, they all started with a healthy dose of design thinking. Recognizing the beauty in everyday things, Don Norman takes readers on a journey to heighten our understanding of what constitutes good versus bad design. Along the way, you will be encouraged to use these design thinking signals as you imagine new ways for your learning environment to fully accommodate your learners' needs.



Leading Change by John P. Kotter

To put it lightly, transforming education is a tall order. Whether you are looking to disrupt the entire system or simply shift a single learning environment, it would be nice to get a peek at what's around the corner every now and then. *Leading Change* is here to answer that call. By reviewing the successes and failures of some of the world's largest institutions, John Kotter supplies readers with a management process built for translatability across whatever domain you are looking to transform.

WORTH YOUR TIME

The Tip of the Iceberg

Reaching beneath the surface of the typical day-to-day moments at Memorial School in New Hampshire, principal Jonathan Vander Els provides a three-tiered perspective on the power of hearing his staff articulate the environment's work to visiting educators.

[Read here](#)

Learner-Centered Approach: Does it Really Matter in eLearning?

Of course this question should be responded to with an unequivocal "Yes!" And, the author agrees. Check out the many reasons why eLearning, just like any other form of education, deserves a learner-centered focus. [Read here](#)

Marvel champions education by pairing superheroes and science on variant covers

The champions of superhero lore are putting education in the spotlight with their newest comic books. Check out the beautiful designs Marvel has created in order to promote the superhero in all of our learners.

[Read here](#)

“All men who have turned out worth anything have had the chief hand in their own education.”

—**SIR WALTER SCOTT IVANHOE**

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