

pioneering

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connect. share. discover. lead.

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Dear Pioneers,

Education Reimagined has always been guided by the idea that Margaret Mead shares so eloquently: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.”

As proof of that, we were born out of a dialogue of 28 ideologically diverse education stakeholders—all of whom were willing to let go of fears of being disappointed and give their whole selves to reimagining education and shooting for the stars. They had the courage to throw themselves into a process with people they didn’t know or trust for the sake of having a system that truly works for each and every child in this country. This led to the creation of a vision and a theory of change that fundamentally believes that each person is truly unique, capable, curious, and wondrous—children and adults of all ages.

This fundamental belief in the individual is what held them back from prescribing “the” answer for what learner-centered environments and systems should look like. Rather, they believed that learner-centered environments should be created by people in their communities to fit their own learners and circumstances. They (and we) continue to have incredible trust in people—young and old—who are learner-centered.

This past week, this trust was displayed in all of its grandeur at SparkHouse, a two-day learner gathering. Forty-two (42) learners from 15 learner-centered environments from 12 states came together to explore both what learner-centered education is all about and what leadership they want to contribute to the movement. These inspiring young learners are committed to making learner-centered education available to all learners. In this issue, check out some of their reflections. They are already at work making things happen—sharing the possibility of learner-centered education with their communities and the country.

We never doubt the power of a small group of thoughtful, committed people. And, I will tell you this group blew us away! Go #SparkHouse!

Warm wishes,
Kelly Young



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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.





EPiC ELEMENTARY

Liberty, Missouri



“By fostering an entrepreneurial mindset into the fabric of our school, we are developing self-directed, independent learners.” — **SUSAN MAYNOR, BLENDED LEARNING COACH**

TALK IS CHEAP WHEN YOU LIVE IN THE “SHOW-ME STATE,” and you’d be hard-pressed to find anyone willing to accept mere words as proof of action. The leaders at EPiC Elementary hold this truth in high regard and let their innovative actions do the talking.

After a moment of introspection by the local school board, the entire education community in Liberty, Missouri was brought together to explore a brand new vision for their learners. Leaders gathered information from unique learning environments across the nation and began drafting a blueprint of how they could use these examples to build an environment that would meet the needs of their community.

A theme that continued to pop up no matter where they traveled was the cultivation of empowered learners—empowered to create, discover, and apply their learnings to the world around them in a way that was **personalized, relevant, and contextualized**. This empowerment produced an invigorating energy in both the learners and educators.

With their imaginations working at a level they hadn’t experienced since childhood, the district forged ahead with a new mindset: no idea is too crazy. Rather than building a brand new building, they “upcycled” an old office space and eliminated any sense of traditional, empty hallways. Every square inch was to be used for learning, and in a way, this propelled EPiC to a new age of learning.

Since opening, EPiC learners have been given the freedom to explore their interests. For example, when tasked with engineering toys from a limited number of resources, they were encouraged to test, fail, and test again on designs they were most interested in creating. From model swingsets to paper frisbees, each learner was not only engaged in their work but also able to identify lessons they learned along the way—like the importance of building a strong base to support a standing structure or making sure there is equal weight distribution in a flying object.

Paramount to the learning happening at EPiC is the freedom not only to create inside the building but also to apply and continue that learning through an **open-walled** approach where learners take their knowledge to the streets of Liberty and beyond. For instance, a group of nine-year-olds studying historic and modern-day explorers looked to deepen their understanding by connecting through FaceTime with a biomedical engineer from Germany, who explores the intricacies of the human spine.

With only a couple of years under their belt, learning at EPiC is happening at a rapid pace at all levels. As the system develops in this single environment, the entire district will be watching and imagining how this innovative system can be translated and adapted to all learners in Liberty.

LEARN MORE

[Empowering Students to Grow](#)

[New Faces, New Spaces](#)

[EPiC Discoveries](#)

FACTS & FIGURES

K-5 Project-based learning environment

300 learners served

Total certificated staff, full- and part-time (2016-2017): 17

1 school

Free and Reduced Lunch: 8%

Over 3000+ volunteer hours

CONNECT

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EPiC Elementary: A Conversation with Dr. Michelle Schmitz

Education Reimagined recently caught up with EPiC Elementary's Principal, Michelle Schmitz. Her undying passion for transforming education for all kids drives her to make EPiC the learning environment all kids want and deserve. Check out our conversation below!



Dr. Michelle Schmitz

Q. As an educator, what had you step toward transforming the system?

A. When I started in education, classrooms of learners were being taught in the same way at the same time frame every day. Sheer boredom filled the eyes of the learners, and I knew this had to change. I was driven to find a way where we could truly become learner-centered—where every child was set up for success. Questions filled my mind. What would happen if the walls of the classroom became tall trees and the carpet became layers of dry crunchy leaves all surrounded by a stream with birds chirping, and nature was the backdrop for learning? What if the world could become the classroom for our learners; filled with real-life experiences brought to them by people of all ages?

It has always been my drive to help young people discover their talents. From my earliest days, I have wanted to help others be the best in life. I have had a determination to reimagine education for our learners in a way that is exciting and matches the world around them. There are endless opportunities to make learning wildly contagious. We just have to think big enough to make it happen.

Q. There was a massive initiative EPiC and the Liberty PS Board of Education undertook in 2013 in order to explore education transformation. What did that process look like?

A. Our success as a school is built upon the foundation of shared leadership, both within and outside the organization, and the authentic process that constructed the components of our building and learning environment. Our vision to transform education began in 2013 with the shared leadership of the Liberty Public Schools Board of Education, superintendent, central office staff, teachers, parents, patrons, and students. This journey began with the question, "What would you do if you could create the ideal learning environment to prepare students for a world that continues to evolve?"

Ideas developed around a 1:1 learning model with mobile technology, flexible learning spaces, creativity, team-based teaching, engaging and authentic learning, and a continuous learning calendar. As a part of this journey, the team visited several noteworthy school districts across the United States that had successfully launched at least one or more of these ideas. After the visits, we were confident that we could create a school that encompassed the environment our team had envisioned.

With research, confidence, and determination, EPiC Elementary became a reality. The team developed the vision and mission for EPiC Elementary and worked closely with the architectural firm Hollis-Miller to design a flexible learning environment. We partnered with Apple who helped us design a mobile technology infrastructure. We also partnered with William Jewell College, the city of Liberty, and other local businesses. Because success depends on the foundation that is built in the beginning, EPiC Elementary has been constructed with a strong professional development infrastructure and school-wide implementation of an engaging and authentic learning environment. Through this process, we learned that the birth of a vision requires the support of all stakeholders and the passion to make a difference for our learners.

Q. What an incredible process. In these first few years, what has this meant for your learners?

A. Wonder, curiosity, and excitement fill the air at EPiC Elementary. Our learners come to us as active participants in their learning environment. We believe our job is to facilitate and grow that learner agency throughout their time at EPiC. Our learners have an opportunity to tap into their passions and interests by exploring learning through a variety of avenues.

Our youngest learners begin coding upon entering kindergarten. I, along with the teachers, have also been learning coding side-by-side with our learners. Our first graders produce a weekly weather report that they post on YouTube and have also taken on the challenge to make our community healthy. In the spring, they put on a health fair for the community, which included an interactive online exercise calendar, a Google health website, and videos with the correct way to do specific exercises.

At every age, learners have ownership in their learning which allows for the transformation of the learning environment to reach into our community and beyond. In our 5th grade studio, the learners partnered with the department of conservation, and several times during the year, their learning takes place in a stream. We dream big. School is a launching pad to the world for our learners. There might be walls in our building, but there are no bricks or mortar surrounding our learning.

Q. It is clear learning is different at EPiC. How has EPiC's innovative learning environment been received by the community in Liberty, MO? How do learners apply their learning in the community?

A. EPiC believes that learning goes beyond the walls of the building, so EPiC learners are active participants in the greater community as they work to solve real-world problems that exist in society. This provides them with access to the world beyond the classroom to learn relevance and usefulness of content both in and out of school. The ongoing community and business partnerships create opportunities for students and teachers alike to be a part of authentic learning as they create, collaborate, and develop critical thinking skills. A few examples include:

- The fifth grade launched a hunger awareness campaign culminating in an Empty Bowls event where students shared their learning, hosted a silent auction and soup dinner, and raised over \$2,500 for two local organizations that help the hungry in Clay County.
- The third grade researched the global water crisis and raised over \$800 for water.org ([link](#)) by selling creative art pieces they made for the cause.

“There might be walls in our building, but there are no bricks or mortar surrounding our learning.”

Dr. Michelle Schmitz

- The second grade worked with butterfly experts and local businesses to transform a dilapidated district memorial garden into a flourishing butterfly memory garden.
- Through a Lowe's for Education Toolbox grant and a partnership with Kansas City Community Gardens, all EPiC learners participate yearly in garden-based learning experiences.
- Through a growing partnership with the Liberty High School science department, each grade level experiences at least one full immersion STEM day facilitated by the high school science students.

In addition to community partnerships, EPiC encourages family involvement and service through required volunteer hours, which increases partnership in learner education and success. Instead of traditional parent/teacher conferences, EPiC hosts two showcase nights during the year where students share their learning with parents and the community. EPiC has moved from presentations of products to presentations of learning. We have an active PTA that provides additional funds for field trips and other needs in the school. We have developed partnerships with Hyvee, our local grocery store; Lowes; Martha LaFitte Nature Sanctuary; Missouri Department of Conservation; and our sister school across the street, Liberty High School.

Q. What do you see going forward as EPiC continues to evolve? Do you see this transformation occurring through the district in the near future?

A. As the world continues to evolve, EPiC will continue to adapt and match the world around us to best meet the needs of today's learner. Going forward, we will continue to explore possibilities for community partnerships and real work within our community. We have permeated the very fabric of our community—changing the way many think about about education and what they believe learners can do. When our learners walk into school, they are walking into community because we believe that school is no longer a building but a launching pad for learning in our city, in our state, and in our world. We want our learners to develop real-world skills and the belief that their ideas, voice, and thinking matters to create a better tomorrow.

EPiC Elementary serves as an incubator school for our district. Many ideas are born and tested in this environment with a scaled, system-wide implementation. Our district leaders have seen the importance of real-world learning and have taken steps with a phased-in training model to make sure all educators are equipped to best prepare learners. For example, as a result of our work with project-based learning, teachers and administrators in our district are now being trained by the Buck Institute for Education. In addition to our district, we serve as a lighthouse for people across the state to inspire and help others change.

EPiC will continue to be an incubator school for Liberty Public Schools. We are truly pioneering a path in education for our learners and for others to see our learning environment. Many people can only see that a new narrative will work when they see the manifestation of it. Oftentimes people have to see change to implement change. Our environment has served as a place that redefines what, when, and where learning can happen.

Dr. Michelle Schmitz is the founding principal of EPiC Elementary where Every Person is Inspired to Create. Her personal drive is founded in reimagining and rethinking education to meet the needs of today's learner. In her 12th year as an administrator and 21st year in education, Dr. Schmitz believes that, as we navigate through the 21st century, there is an incredible sense of urgency to foster a culture of learners who will continue developing our complex world. She believes it is our responsibility and obligation to teach learners the acquisition process of redesigning existing ideas and developing new ideas. Schmitz believes EPiC Elementary fosters an environment where, "together, we can transform education."

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REFLECTIONS

SparkHouse: Unleashing the Learner-Centered Future for All!

Photos by Alyson Sullivan and Sara Willi

ON NOVEMBER 3RD, EDUCATION REIMAGINED TOOK OUR FIRST

true step toward a future we have been striving for since the launch of our vision in 2015—“In this future, the education system is structured with the learner at its center.” After spending the last year convening pioneers from across the nation to explore the mindset shift needed to transform the education system, we are thrilled to have unleashed the true core of our community. Enter SparkHouse—42 learners from 12 states and 15 learning environments sharing their unique learner-centered experiences.

Over the course of the two days, learners took the wheel and drove the learner-centered conversation to new heights. There wasn't any questioning on whether the movement should or shouldn't happen—the question was “how quickly can we get this to all learners?” Every learner immediately began exchanging contact information, discovering the unique strengths everyone brought to the table, and formulating ideas on how to introduce and expand the movement in their communities. They came to the event as leaders of their environments and left as leaders of a movement. Their voices were so powerful that we could do little more than simply have you read about their ideas and excitement yourself.

What do you wish to see in this movement?

“First and foremost, instead of student, we should say learner. Learners can teach, learn, they can do anything. We can break away from the segments of teacher, student, and school, and just have a community of learners. Everyone's focused on learning and helping each other learn.” —**Michael, Manchester, NH**

“I think it's important for us to develop this common language we're building on. We're all calling the same thing different things which can be confusing to us and traditional schools. So if we stick together, they will do it, too.” —**Hannah, Cedar Rapids, IA**

“A lot of people claim they have the 'right' model. Replacing the system with another one won't work and is dangerous. There needs to be infinite models. The key is variety and options.” —**Alexander, Floyd, VA**



“There are still systems at play in a learner-centered environment. The SAT is a barrier for me. I can publicly speak and create business plans, but then the ivy leagues say my skills are good but my SAT scores are too low. How do you take those barriers away? How do you restructure the system? There’s no correlation between the score on your SAT’s and your success in college.” —**Naseem, Bronx, NY**

“In a traditional environment, if you miss one day, you don’t get that day back. You’re on chapter 2.6, but missed 2.5, so you don’t understand 2.6, and then you realize you don’t even understand 1.9, so you can never move on. That needs to go away.” —**Corinne, Grand Junction, CO**

“I think it’s important for students to be self-directed. In a traditional environment, people are just listening to the teachers and following teachers. That’s not what real life is like. Out of school if that’s your expectation, you won’t know what to do.” —**Gabby, Floyd, VA**

What is the leadership you want to contribute to the movement?

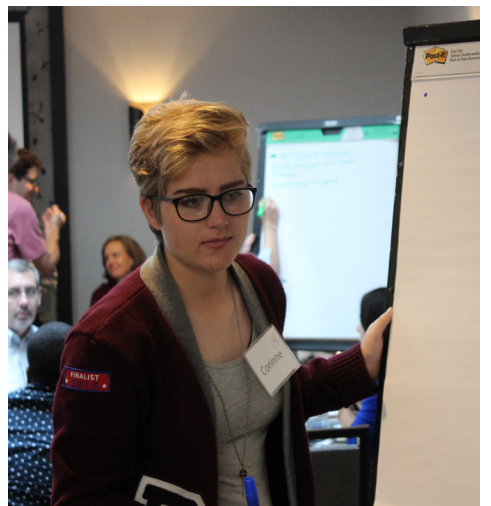
“One of the things about believing in yourself and believing in others is taking the empowerment to move it forward. It’s not going to be easy, it’s going to be scary. It’s taking the baby steps forward to not just find your own empowerment, but bring it out in others. They might not be able to see it, but you can bring it out. Bring the empowered person you’ve been these last few days back to where you’ve come from. We’re all learners. Anyone you see, anyone you meet, treat them like human beings and spread what you know.” —**K.J., Atlanta, GA**

What would you want to say to our readers about learner-centered education, learners in general, and/or your experience at SparkHouse?

“SparkHouse was a great experience for me because it broke the stereotype that adults know everything and that youth voices don’t matter or that we cannot make a change. Now I know that student voices matter as much as the adults and I believe we are really the future of our community. We can make a change and give everybody a chance to be successful at school and outside of school.” —**Krishna Jean, Boston, MA**

“It was inspiring to see so many passionate individuals dedicated to influencing national educational change. Experiencing the energy in the room made me believe in the possibility that the learner-centered shift is going to happen, and that learners will play a critical role in leading the way! Can’t wait to see what we’ll accomplish together :)” —**Neel, San Diego, CA**

“My experience at SparkHouse was one of a kind. It brought to my attention how much learner-centered environments are already affecting schools around the country and how important it is that we continue to strive to make our communities aware of this topic. There are many reasons why we need to continue this movement, but the main answer is that learner-centered environments give all learners the chance to fully succeed and build themselves.” —**Jemar, Cedar Rapids, IA**



“My experience at SparkHouse was one that will go down in the books. It has completely changed my mindset on education. I met great people and felt blessed to have been invited to SparkHouse. I can’t wait to see where we all can go with learner-centered education!” —**Angel, Camden, NJ**

“Attending SparkHouse allowed for me to be surrounded by learners and educators passionate about knowledge and united in a common goal: to revolutionize education. Learner-centered education allows for the learner to feel appreciated within the classroom and gives them the opportunity to learn in a manner that highlights their strengths and interests. If learner-centered education was implemented worldwide, learners would become more excited to learn and would develop the skills necessary for their personal success.” —**Lexi, Campbellsville, KY**

“When teachers talk about learner-centered education people ask, ‘Where’s the evidence of this working?’ But, when students talk about learner-centered education, we are the evidence. It is working. Everyday I feel like I know myself a little bit better. I am constantly improving my skills as a learner a little bit more due to the opportunities to take ownership of my learning and blur the lines between school and the real world. SparkHouse solidified for me that students are ready for education to change, and this new community of learners is done waiting for others to change it for us.” —**Anya, Atlanta, GA**

“Students are special because they are the future—filled with the creativity to have new ideas, the optimism to challenge the status quo, and the drive to make the world a better place. SparkHouse reminded us of that, showing us that the real leaders of this movement are already doing their part to change their schools and communities. Now it’s our job to work to make their dreams for today a reality for tomorrow.” —**Kushal, Durham, NC**

“What an amazing privilege to be in the midst of such inspiring teenage leaders! #SparkHouse facilitated conversations that created a deep sense of empathy for the experience of young learners across our country—their educational needs, desires, and dreams. The sense that a profound movement is galvanizing around these young leaders becoming agents of change was palpable.” —**Emily (chaperone), Atlanta, GA**

“Learner-centered education is an exciting initiative that truly helps to make teaching and education about the most important part of it: the learner. SparkHouse allowed me to see learner-centered environments from across the country, and it made me excited for the possibilities that can come from this initiative. I can’t wait to see where education goes from here!” —**Danielle (chaperone), Pittsburgh, PA**

They've also been writing on their own blogs about what their experience at SparkHouse meant for them:

The Movement: Transforming Education (series of three) [\(link\)](#)
Sparking a Change in Education [\(link\)](#)





Scaling Education Transformation through Learner-Centered Design

A Conversation between Education Reimagined's Paul Haluszczak and Springpoint's Senior Director, Anna Hall. ([link](#))

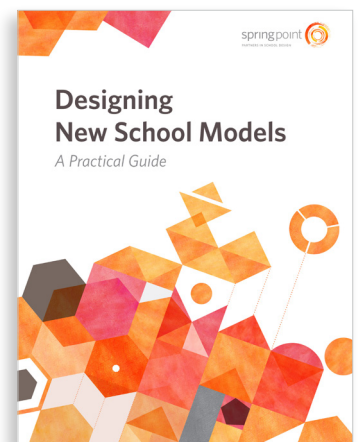
WHEN LOOKING THROUGH THE TIME CAPSULE THAT IS A FAMILY PHOTO ALBUM, it can be overwhelming and inspiring to see how much has changed from generation to generation. But, hidden behind all this change is the striking homogeneity among everyone's educational experience. Pictures with changing faces in the foreground but the same hallways, classrooms, curriculum, and teachers in the background.

With all of this "sameness" unseen elsewhere among the documented memories, why doesn't it stick out like a sore thumb? Why don't we question why the foundation on which our minds are built has seen so little innovation, while the rest of the world has accelerated into a Jetson-esque era of possibility? Is the current system aiding in this acceleration or acting as an inhibitor?

When we begin approaching questions that strip away over a century of "normal," we start to feel like unwanted trespassers inside our own minds lurking in the mysterious shadows of dreams and ideas we never knew existed. Is it ok for us to rethink education? Should we seek to disrupt a system that was so fruitful when it was first devised? We think so, and so do many other education leaders across the country, including a small team with big ideas, Springpoint.



Anna Hall



Springpoint has spent the last four years taking action on their “disruptive” plans—working with 12 learning environments in six cities to rethink the design of their respective school models. Springpoint’s experiences have been tediously documented and analyzed in order to scale their work and develop a practical guide for educators across the country who are looking to rethink and transform their environments.

In early October, Springpoint officially published *Designing New School Models: A Practical Guide* ([link](#)). An intentional and inviting guide, Springpoint wanted to make sure they left the door open for all educators to explore the possibility of redesigning their environments from scratch, while also making it clear that everyone must start with the learner. We had the opportunity to speak with Anna Hall, Springpoint’s Senior Director, about this topic and more.

“ [The language in this guide] is something we wrestled with a lot. Our process has taken various shapes depending on different factors and the people we work with. We settled on this idea that developing a strong understanding about students’ and families’ ambitions, expectations, what they’ve been through—that is a foundational design piece. We don’t think anyone can design a strong learning environment without that understanding.

What we strongly recommend is that the understanding come from layered inputs. People spend time on the quantitative data (credits, grades, test scores) that provides useful outside parameters. However, the numbers don’t help bring an understanding to the nuances and unique experiences of each learner. Until you sit down with students, you can’t really understand the quantitative data. So, we are also observing classrooms, field research activities, student interviews. The quantitative and qualitative data helps us make more concrete recommendations. We strongly suggest students and families sitting with the design team. This way, the voice and priorities of the learner will influence and inform the design of a school.

Springpoint’s approach seeks common understanding among all education stakeholders, so the final product addresses the needs of every learner. If the central actors are not included in these discussions, a new look will not result in new outcomes. So, the initial challenge for leaders wanting to redesign their environments is to walk out of their professional silos and invite new voices into the discussion. To make this invitation genuine (not just to check off a box), Springpoint presents design teams with a challenge.

“ We ask folks to think about students they know and map a portrait with questions and assumed answers describing how the learners might respond. We want folks to see how they view and assume their views on students. Then we have them actually go out and ask the questions to the students and compare their assumptions with actual conversations. We want folks to get into the habit of testing assumptions. This presses adults to think positively and creatively.

Once the framework of looking through the eyes of the learner is established, the gears are ready to start churning. The uniqueness of each community means each environment’s implementation will be strikingly different. Through their process, Springpoint believes everyone should prioritize Young People, Great Practice, and Iteration. And, with these priorities set, the unique identifiers of each community will shine through.

With young people at the center, leaders are encouraged to identify great practices in a variety of settings within their community and around the country that can be adapted

“We want folks to get into the habit of testing assumptions. This presses adults to think positively and creatively.”

Anna Hall, Senior Director,
Springpoint

to the design of their new environments. Of course, there is no such thing as a finished product, so Springpoint always keeps the ability to evolve at the forefront of the design conversation. Just as iterations are seen before launching a new learning environment, room should be left to continue as times change and new lessons are learned.

“ We’re the boss of no one during the process, we’re the guide. We begin our engagement with partners as they develop a proposal. Here, we try to understand the development’s history, resources, and politics so the collaboration process and our guidance is embedded within their regular practice—so our advice is authentic. We fill in the gaps from there and help them with their challenges.

One thing we struggle with is administrative change. We can never assume the ecosystem is static, and we look to help developers pivot with changes. It is helpful to have relationships with every single stakeholder. It makes us better positioned to understand various elements and have established relationships that radiate out. So, we can always support the mission at its core—and collaborate with others and build layers in relationships.

Keeping with priority number one—the learners—the results Springpoint has seen thus far are best expressed by the learners themselves. The new dispositions learners bring to their environments on a daily basis shows how transformation can reignite the flame they once felt for learning.

“ Before the process begins, we commonly ask students to define what success will look like in their lives. The responses vary from “I want to go to college,” “I want to explore my passions,” and “I want to find who I am.”

Once the schools launch, we constantly hear from students, “Our school is like a family, people know us here. They know what I want. Someone will ask what I need if I’m struggling; people care about my interests.” Learners need the context that they are known and cared for.

We also hear students talking about transparency. They often say in detail how they’re being measured and how they’re successful. There’s agency with that. If they want something, they know how to ask and advocate. For example, learners can say, “This is how I’m doing in my English class, and I didn’t do well on competency tests, so I went to my teacher and asked for help.”

Creating an environment that allows the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to grow and develop in all learners is a tall task that demands attention to detail, transparency, and active involvement from all stakeholders. There are leaders everywhere reimagining what their ideal environment could look like if they had the right guide to put ideas into action, and Springpoint’s new publication is a reputable resource to consider.

As pictures of the next generation of learners starts filling our family albums, let’s make sure the changes in the background are as exciting and inspiring as the changes in the foreground.

“We’re the boss of no one during the process, we’re the guide.”

Anna Hall, Senior Director,
Springpoint

Anna Hall has experience developing and leading a range of institutional, state, and national initiatives. As a founding teacher of a successful small public high school, she helped design and build an innovative and rigorous secondary program for students in the South Bronx—and then, as principal, she led the school’s expansion and redesigned its academic programs. Prior to teaching, Anna worked as a writer, researcher, and project manager at several policy, politics, and technology firms.

Anna holds a B.A. from the South Carolina Honors College at the University of South Carolina and an M.S. in teaching from Fordham University. She is a graduate of the New York City Teaching Fellows Program and the New York City Leadership Academy.

LEARNER VOICES

Discovering the Excitement of Learning Through Collaboration and Community

by Lauren Gennerman

BEFORE I JOINED THE KETTLE MORAINÉ SCHOOL FOR ARTS AND PERFORMANCE,

otherwise known as KM Perform, my high school experience could be summed up in one word: boring. Not because my classes were necessarily easy—I had gotten into the honors sophomore level of English and an AP class during my freshman year—but because I was just gliding through. I didn't have to work hard to achieve top grades, and the pace of learning, while it fit for many people, was much too slow for me. I could daydream through entire classes, and then pass tests and finish projects with ease. The only parts of my classes I actively enjoyed were those that had to do with the arts. Thankfully, one of my teachers noticed all of this and recommended I enroll in KM Perform the following year.

KM Perform is an arts-based charter high school. Students go into one of four focuses: music, theatre, visual art, or creative writing—my personal focus—and spend their time studying academics through the lens of their chosen art. Credits in KM Perform are earned through interdisciplinary seminars and workshops, rather than year-long, single-course classes. Though the school operates through an “arts lens,” students still address and are measured by the same standards as kids in a traditional, or legacy, high school.

When I first joined KM Perform, I would have preferred to work alone just as I did in my previous environment. At that time, I didn't trust that other people would fulfill their responsibilities, let alone add value to anything I was doing. This singular mindset was common among high-achieving, AP track students. However, upon arriving in Perform, I was immediately placed into three different group projects and given a hard deadline to complete everything. Having to communicate with other people and depend on them for the first time in my life was not only terrifying but also significantly more challenging. To subdue my anxiety, I attempted to work through everything by myself, which was ultimately unsuccessful. As other assignments began piling on from other classes, I didn't have enough time or ideas on what to do a particular project on. Getting started on it—let alone finishing it—was out of the question. Fortunately, the fear and stubbornness eventually gave way: All of my groups not only finished each project but also created incredible works of art, such as audio podcasts and short story horror films. It was only then I began to understand why KM Perform was set up the way it was.



Lauren Gennerman

“No longer is it a bore to have to go to school every day but a privilege I am honored to be a part of.”

Lauren Gennerman

During the creation of KM Perform, teachers wanted a place where students could learn core academics and dive deeply into the arts they were passionate about. They understood that collaboration and communication were the skills universities and employers suggested young people lack the most. There doesn't seem to be a job in existence that doesn't require working with other people, and KM Perform recognizes that practicing these skills will help us in the future just as much as being able to read and write.

Moving through my high school experience with this culture of intense collaboration, I have been able to create, be a part of, and lead many amazing projects. My personal favorite so far has been creating a literary magazine, *Ampersand Pages* ([link](#)). A few writing focus students were appalled that there wasn't a way for us as students to physically publish our writing. Theatre focus had their productions, art focus had their art shows, and music focus had their concerts. But, what did we have? In order to fill this void and design a way to showcase the incredible work we were doing, five of us got together and created a literary magazine. The magazine invites students to share their writing—poetry, fiction, or creative nonfiction—or a piece of artwork, and have it all published in a free book. The project was a huge success. We received over 30 submissions for our first publication, and we plan to release our second edition next May.

But, it isn't just intensive projects we work on together. Usually, collaboration is a bit more discrete in our everyday lives. So, every Wednesday, we have a studio day that uses collaboration a bit differently. The writing focuses put our names on pieces of paper, put the papers in a hat, and the mentors (teachers who lead each focus) draw from the hat to select a speaker. The person chosen will stand up and share what they are working on, what they need help in developing, or lead a brainstorm on a concept for an assignment. Freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors are all able to provide feedback, and it is through this process that the best ideas come to fruition. Working on our studio days provides more real-life context, like one could see working in an office. People aren't always just doing their own assignments. They are bouncing ideas off one another all of the time, and fostering this environment will only prepare students for life outside of school.

In KM Perform, the culture is less "every man for himself" or "winner takes all," and more about seeing how each person can improve by pairing complementary strengths and weaknesses to produce the best art possible. I have noticed this culture not only motivates me not only to simply do my assignments, but also to work harder and harder each time to exceed my performance on the last project. I know the purpose is to continue improving, and learning is neither solitary nor ever really finished.

While our legacy school offers different paths for learners (i.e. more AP and honors courses), there are some experiences that cannot be replicated. Being able to go to a school where I feel comfortable sharing what I'm working on and learning is an entirely different practice. When I was in a legacy school, I focused only on my own improvements and pushing myself to be the best. While competition is still a factor in KM Perform, the overall community wants each member to improve because the group will benefit as a whole. Learning with a community who genuinely wants to see me grow and succeed changes how I, and many people in KM Perform, think about learning. No longer is it a bore to have to go to school every day but a privilege I am honored to be a part of.

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 Lauren'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](#))

Lauren Genneman is a senior at the Kettle Moraine School for Arts and Performance where she is currently studying creative writing. Her passion for writing started early in her life when, in 2012, Lauren co-wrote and helped publish *Phoenix* by the Seed Writers. Since then, she has been a reporter, historian, and web editor for KM Perform's *Express* newsletter and is currently co-editor-in-chief of the literary magazine, *Ampersand Pages*. For her capstone project to graduate KM Perform, Lauren is currently writing a research paper on the direction of education reform. She plans to attend Winona State University next fall to study secondary english education.



Dignity & Respect Campaign

Transitioning to a learner-centered environment demands a reimagined culture of learning, relationship building, and a safe space for all stakeholders. This requires fostering a climate of dignity and respect. So, how can we ensure these two components are embedded in our environments? The **Dignity and Respect Campaign** [\(link\)](#) was born from this question because just saying we want these qualities in our spaces was not enough. They believe dignity and respect need to be intentionally practiced before they can become a habit or a subconscious default. With their vision in place, they created seven pillars to guide anyone and everyone to be leaders in their communities and cultivate dignity and respect in the spaces they want to change for the better. Discover how you can develop a culture in your environment founded in dignity and respect and how that can translate into so much more!

What is the Dignity & Respect Campaign? [\(link\)](#)

The 7 Pillars of Dignity & Respect [\(link\)](#)

Ready to Get Started? [\(link\)](#)

Google Education

Technology is an undisputed game changer in this new age of learning—and **Google** [\(link\)](#) is getting ready to enter the conversation. After launching Apps for Education in 2006, Google began building an internationally friendly platform to bring their free products to learning environments everywhere. Ten years and 50+ million users later, the Google for Education platform has come to a crossroads: keep producing and improving their product for standard classrooms or take on a transformational vision of education and produce for that future. As they begin exploring this possible position, they are seeking input on their products from innovative education leaders across the country. Have you used Google's services in your environment? Do you have ideas and suggestions to send their way? Bring your and your learners' voices to the table and reimagine the future of education technology.

Meet Local Educators [\(link\)](#)

Training Center [\(link\)](#)

Productivity Tools [\(link\)](#)

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.

City Neighbors' 6th Annual Progressive Education Summit

Baltimore, MD

November 12

[Conference Website](#)

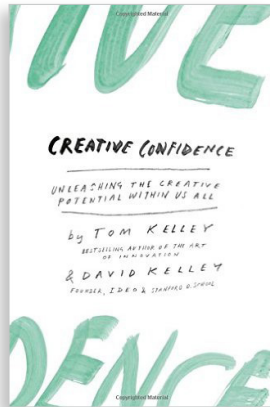
OPPORTUNITY BOARD

Yidan Prize for Educational R&D

The Yidan Prize for Educational Research and Development is accepting nominations for its inaugural award—recognizing an individual or small group whose work transforms education in an innovative way. Learn more and apply here. [\(link\)](#)

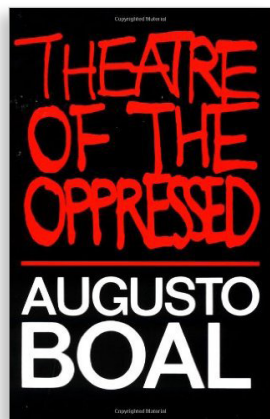


ON OUR BOOKSHELF



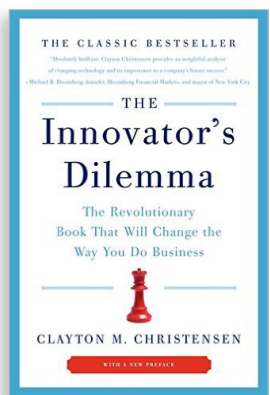
Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All by Tom Kelley and David Kelley

You are creative. This is the simple message brothers Tom and David Kelley want you to know about yourself, regardless of your profession or self-characterization. The reason we like to segment society into “creatives” versus “non-creatives,” *Creative Confidence* argues, is because many of us have allowed our creative identity to go dormant. Rather than identifying strategies to train and develop our creative capacities, we have opted out of the process altogether and claimed it doesn’t matter in our lives. As pioneers of learner-centered transformation, we all need to tap into our creative side for new ideas to develop and flourish. Explore how the partners at IDEO can reawaken this lost self in you!



Theatre of the Oppressed by Augusto Boal

Equating our individual experience to that of the rest of the world is a dangerous game to play. In a way, this is how the current education system is structured—one model with one set of outcomes everyone must achieve. What would happen if we became the spectator of our lived experience? What might we see differently from this viewpoint? These are the themes Augusto Boal highlights in his everlasting work, *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Through the lens of theatre, discover how shifting our vantage points from lead actor to back row spectator can expand our understanding of the world around us.



The Innovator's Dilemma: The Revolutionary Book That Will Change the Way You Do Business by Clayton M. Christensen

Working toward system-wide innovation in a grassroots fashion can cause feelings of anxiety and impatience. The more we believe an idea needs to be implemented nationwide, the harder it is to wait for the movement to build large enough to reach critical mass. However, as Clayton M. Christensen shows in his book *The Innovator's Dilemma*, identifying the right market to attract is better than identifying the biggest or flashiest one. As the learner-centered movement grows, this idea of quality over quantity will be important to hold onto, so education transformation doesn’t fall into this common trap of reformation once again.

WORTH YOUR TIME

The Power of a Dinner Table

To be “here in the now.” To connect face-to-face. To share a story. These basic tenets are all it took for Kathy and David to find 15+ kids at their dinner table on any given Thursday night. Find out why! [Read here](#)

85 Canadian Schools Lead an Edtech Charge

The more connected the world becomes, the more we discover how much we can learn from all communities—even those far different from our own. Discover 85 Canadian learning environments leading transformation in their hometowns. [Read here](#)

What if students controlled their own learning?

What if “yes” were the default? What if we approached new ideas and innovations in education with the frame of “yes”? That is exactly what they do at Templestowe College. Discover how this unique environment in Australia is changing things up.

[Watch here](#)

“If one lights a fire for others,
it will also brighten one’s
own way.”

— **13TH CENTURY BUDDHIST PROVERB**

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www.education-reimagined.org



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