

pioneering

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A NOTE FROM EDUCATION REIMAGINED

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Dear Pioneers,

We are three weeks into the new year, and the holidays already seem like a million years ago. We have so much to update you on! We started the year by hosting our third **Pioneer Lab Training in Atlanta**, with 67 incredible pioneers, representing 14 learning environments and efforts, from all over the country. What made this training unique was the number of young learners we had participating: 14. You can read one of those young learner's reflections on the experience in this issue.

Another exciting update for this month: We hope you join us in **welcoming three new pioneers to our team**. **Trace Pickering**, the former Assistant Superintendent from Cedar Rapids, IA and co-founder of Iowa BIG—a learner-centered environment in Cedar Rapids—is now our Associate Director of Practitioner Engagement and Learning. **Lindsay Ogawa**, a former Special Education teacher in Chicago Public Schools, joins us as our new Research and Outreach Associate. Last, but certainly not least, **Neel Pujar**, a student at University of California, San Diego and a member of the founding design team for Design39Campus in San Diego, is our new Fellow, supporting the SparkHouse community of young learners.

Finally, if you haven't already, **check out our new website ([link](#))!** Monica Snellings and Paul Haluszczak took the lead in making this a resource for the community and a place for people to dive into what learner-centered education is all about.

To all those committed to making learner-centered education available to all learners, we hope that you find a home in the growing Education Reimagined community. Please share your feedback on the website, recommend learning environments that we should know about, share your own stories with us, and share Pioneering with your community and friends.

Enjoy this issue of *Pioneering*!

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.





GCE Lab School

CHICAGO, IL

“I am grateful to GCE for giving my son an amazing educational experience—the kind I did not believe existed anymore.” — GCE LAB PARENT

TIRED OF BAND-AID PROGRAMS AND NON-TRANSFORMATIONAL PROJECTS,

Eric Davis was itching for more out of his work with education. Eric launched a pilot program to explore what education built for today's economy could look like.

After the pilot's first year, he and his wife sat in silence while driving back to Chicago from a respite in Michigan, weighing the possibility of taking the pilot into full implementation. When the silence broke, they vehemently agreed the project was worth pursuing, and GCE Lab School was born.

Now six years into their venture, GCE Lab School has a library's worth of success stories coupled with plenty of lessons learned. All of this supports a proof of concept ready to scale beyond a single environment. By focusing on three simple principles—Inspire, Prepare, Connect—GCE Lab School is developing **learners with agency** who have the **knowledge, skills, and dispositions** to take on anything the world throws their way.

Their convenient location—Goose Island in downtown Chicago—offers an **open-walled** landscape too good not to integrate into the learning experience. This flexible environment necessitates the existence of a **socially-embedded** culture, so that learners are in constant communication with their peers, mentors, and community partners.

In an environment alive with constant inquiry, a learner can look at the water coming out of their tap and launch into a months-long project. They might explore where that water comes from, how it's filtered for safe drinking, the checks and balances used to ensure the entire city has access, or how water usage is monitored and given a dollar value by Chicago's Department of Water Management. Or, they might dive into the chemical applications of H₂O in things like cooking, the proper function of the human body, and alternative energy.

By moving beyond traditional standards and curriculum, GCE learners get to ask questions that are **personalized, relevant, and contextualized** to their lives and go forth discovering all there is to learn in a topic area—while also acquiring the attributes needed for post-secondary pursuits. With 100% of their graduates accepted into university programs and 80% earning an average of \$100,000 in merit aid, any reservation about learners being prepared for the next stage of life is quickly resolved.

With GCE Lab School's growing body of evidence, the Global Learning Models (GLM) Experiential Education Design Firm was launched in 2014 to scale the GCE model across the nation and help grow the practice of learner-centered education. With these two initiatives operating in tandem, Eric Davis's dream of developing a learner-centered ecosystem is becoming more and more of a reality every day.

LEARN MORE

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[Reinventing Education](#)

[GCE Voices Blog](#)

FACTS & FIGURES

Private School

Grades 9-12

70% learners on scholarship

38% free and reduced lunch

100% graduation/college acceptance rate

30-60 City2Classroom™ experiences per year, per student

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GCE Lab School: A Conversation with Eric Davis



Eric Davis

Q. What is your background in education? What moments propelled you to start GCE Lab School?

A. It's easy to trace a thread backward, but as a child, my educational experience did not make sense to me. I was a poor student who did not fit the academic mold expected of me and was constantly reminded that I wasn't good enough. I was one of those kids who "has a lot of potential." It's almost comical to look back on 12+ years of the same comment on report cards and wonder why no one other than my mother ever asked if I was simply in the wrong educational setting. Suffice it to say that I did not attend "student-centered" schools. However, I can tell you that—consciously or not—I was cataloging the ways in which my schools/teachers didn't effectively serve me, and all along, I was plotting my strategy to teach and coach the students with more diverse learning styles. Specifically, I attended traditional college prep schools and experienced failure in many ways: I was pulled out of class and sent to "learning resources" (a room in the basement of the elementary school, even when I had matriculated to middle school in a different building). I was told that I couldn't learn foreign languages (I now speak French and Spanish). In place of a real-world context for mathematics, I was consistently informed that Algebra and geometry are easy concepts that I should get by copying the problems or reviewing the textbook (I didn't). Not once in my entire K-12 career was I offered an alternate mode of presentation, even when my documented learning differences clearly warranted it..

Despite these experiences, I'm extraordinarily privileged. I grew up loved and secure. I knew, every day of my life, that I had a future and that I had potential. Yes, even those clichéd comments bespoke of a possibility in which I believed. When I arrived at college, I swiftly discovered that I had learned more of the key foundations than I had realized and that I had a stronger base than most. Lastly, and most importantly, I played sports—3 seasons/year, every year. I had to attend and maintain decent enough grades to play. And, I learned a great deal on the athletic field, in practice and games. I developed the foundations for teamwork, creativity, discipline, hard work, strategy, coping with losing, overcoming failure, and accepting that there's almost always a better team or player out there—this does not absolve me from the pursuit of my or my team's potential.

Mostly though, I knew that I didn't want other students to feel the way I felt in class—stupid, ashamed, and that their only way to take ownership of the experience is through various forms of misbehavior. I was inspired by the world (I felt great as a learner outside of school) and wanted my education to reflect that. I really wanted to know why we were asked to know things. I asked the "so what?" question every day, and rarely did I receive a satisfactory or credible answer. Ultimately, I wanted to build a school model that invited students to learn in school the way that they learn in life: through integrated experience, connection, play and experimentation, and doing. I knew from my experience that until content was practiced, it would not be internalized nor lead to substantive changes in knowledge,

behavior, attitudes, or beliefs.

Chronologically, I began coaching basketball when I was in high school, working as a camp counselor in the summers. I started teaching full-time immediately after I graduated college. I launched my first educational venture in 2001 and my first non-profit in 2003. And, I've been blessed to work with so many different types of learners and organizations over the past 15 years.

Q. What drove your team's decision to expand from GCE Lab School to the Global Learning Models Design Firm? When did you know you were ready to scale?

A. Our intention from day one was to impact the system. And, this simply means that we knew GLM would one day exist. We were repeatedly cautioned to focus only on one thing, so we put our efforts into GCE Lab School. But, we documented how we built the model, how we iterated, and how we learned. This reflective and self-critical process fueled our ability to move from one site to a scalable model. I knew we would have to prove the concept before anyone would believe in our aspirations and vision statements. We also recognized that building the team and network would take a few years, and we weren't in any rush—too many lessons to learn, mistakes to make, strategies to flesh out, money to raise, processes to productize, and students to inspire and prepare.

We knew we were ready for scale when the curriculum and PD trainings lived digitally and had been refined in multiple settings. We had run several beta projects in which we licensed content and trained public and charter school educators, with positive response. Teachers wanted to see our model in their schools.

Q. How do you balance scaling a model and keeping the uniqueness of individual communities intact?

A. People. Our model is totally customizable, and during our PD trainings with teachers, we build on what they already know and do. Our model makes sense when people see that it mirrors a natural way of learning, so schools are able to adapt it to what they're already doing.

We also combine global essence with local context. What matters to everyone, everywhere? How do you experience this uniquely in your environment? Because we tested our model in so many contexts—brick and mortar public and private schools, online, blended learning—we quickly found that localizing the curriculum for our Chicago students wouldn't scale. Now the questions that guide our curriculum are relevant to anyone, anywhere. For example, access to clean water is a concern for everyone, though the concerns are different for a student in Chicago versus a student in Salt Lake City. Our curriculum allows the same questions and resources to be investigated regardless of geographic location.

Q. You knew failures and mistakes would be part of the process. How were you able to get community buy-in, knowing their kids would be put through a brand new, untested system?

A. Trust. But, trust certainly wasn't built overnight. Building an inquiry and project-based learning model that cultivates global citizens instead of graduates isn't easy for most traditional parents and schools to understand—it's not what most of them experienced. Moreover, our language didn't speak to the primary parental concerns: your child will attend college, be prepared for a career, get married, and live a beautiful life. Parents only want to hear that their children will be learning how to solve the world's most important problems if it means they get a scholarship to their college of choice along the way.

“Ultimately, I wanted to build a school model that invited students to learn in school the way that they learn in life...”

ERIC DAVIS

Our model wasn't accepted easily, even though it's infinitely closer to the way people live than the majority of models that have been fabricated in the mainstream education system—a system designed for success in the Industrial age we no longer live in. I think the biggest challenges were, and still are, semantic. Words have connotations, and these words reflect culture. This means that simply describing an educational environment can lead people to believe we are an “alternative” school at best (good for someone else's child), we are for the fringe students and those with learning differences, or we are only for those who couldn't make it in traditional school. Of course, these interpretations couldn't be further from the truth. Our model is as much for the student who seeks to be genuinely challenged as it is for the student who is ignored in a typical classroom.

Q. What have been your favorite stories about learners at GCE Lab School? What about that matters to you?

A. I could tell you the story of Raji, a remote learner in Guayaquil, Ecuador who has discovered in our curriculum his passion for social activism. Or Henry, who was a shell of a person when we first met and became the big brother to all GCE students enroute to earning his degree in public policy. Or Leandre, a Burundian refugee who found himself in Chicago, at GCE, and has since parlayed his deep gratitude and tireless effort into a full ride to university. Or Alexis, a statistical anomaly, whose demographics and domestic challenges indicate that she should have dropped out and gotten pregnant, but who, instead, graduated in three years, earned a scholarship to university, and now volunteers at GCE. Or Jed, who was chronically reminded he was a walking defiant behavior disorder but who, in truth, is a gifted musician, philosopher, and environmental activist. Or Zoe, my own daughter, who I saw come to life as a learner and citizen.

More than the feedback from any one learner or family is the pattern that emerges. Each child shares that we see them, that we know them, that we care about them, and that we honor their individuality and potential as learners. The pattern is that our model is the path toward transformation of their lives, ownership of their learning, and a passport to the world of opportunity, whatever it is they may choose to do. The pattern is these young adults transformed from students to global citizens.

Q. What differences do you see in learners that have attended GCE for some time versus new enrollees that are coming from the traditional system?

A. Culture. Do you know what it feels like to be part of a culture of learning, where the highest end is to own the experience, to be of value to yourself, others, and the world? Do you know what it means to value the question and pursuit more than the answer itself? Do you know what it feels like to discover practitioners of the content you're learning and see the value of the material in context? Do you know what mastery looks, feels, and sounds like? To each of these questions I would stress that the answer is not how long someone has been at GCE but rather how willing they are to open themselves up to possibility and inspiration. Sometimes we see this in moments, and other times it takes months or years.

Q. What should pioneers be looking out for in the coming year(s) with GCE/GLM?

A. More stories of transformation. GCE is a lab school, and we continue to experiment and critique what we're doing to see what works best for students. We have already made major breakthroughs in terms of curriculum, how to structure a school day, how to build an ideal learning environment, and how to turn the city into a classroom. These advancements will continue. In terms of GLM, we are in the process of implementing programs in 40 schools around the country. In the next 10 years, we anticipate impacting more than a million students and thousands of educators through curriculum and professional development.

“...these young adults transformed from students to global citizens.”

ERIC DAVIS

Eric Davis is GLM's CLO and Co-Founder and has developed a unique focus and skillset as an edupreneur through 20 years experience as a teacher, director, and consultant. GLM's model has been built through GCE Lab School in Chicago which he founded and now serves as GLM's physical headquarters and R&D hub.



INSIGHTS

Discovering Distinction and Community in the Learner-Centered Movement

Education Reimagined hit the ground running in 2017 with our first Pioneer Lab Training. Winter storm Helena brought uncharacteristic weather to the south but was unable to prevent our pioneers from making it safely to Atlanta.

The room was filled with new faces from across the country, but it was also filled with learners who had attended our SparkHouse convening last November. There were 14 learners out of the 70 attendees, and the perspective and energy they brought to the room was unmatched. One of our past writers, **Anya Smith-Roman**, was in attendance and was gracious enough to share her experience of the training, so our readers could take a closer look at the type of impact the training makes on these pioneers. A modified version of the following originally appeared in a blog post by Anya: "Community of Learners" [\(link\)](#).

Discovering Distinctions

It's always such a relief to meet with learners from around the nation who really see, and have experienced, the world of possibility that lies in the future of education. In the second week of the new year, I had the immense joy of attending the Pioneer Lab Training hosted by Education Reimagined right in my own backyard—Atlanta, GA. I was blown away by the people in attendance. So much so that I needed to take a full day to reflect before writing about the experience.

In my own words, Pioneer Lab is a gathering of learners (of all ages) from learner-centered environments that come together for inquiry sessions around major components of the education transformation movement. What I attended this past week was the training for this lab. The purpose of the training is to prepare learners for the Lab itself by establishing a common understanding of language to use within the learner-centered community.



ANYA
SMITH-ROMAN

Having common language is really important for a movement because if I tell you “x” is a dog and another person tells you “x” is a giraffe, then you will end up just being confused as to what “x” really means. In the world of education transformation, these misrepresentations are everywhere, so the learner-centered community has created a lexicon which distinguishes key elements of a learner-centered environment.

After spending more than two days with the attendants of this training, I came to realize there isn’t an “easy” or “short” way to distinguish everything these words encompass unless we want to feel unsatisfied with the result. While I could try to summarize these distinctions (I practiced explaining them to others during role playing exercises at the training itself), I would prefer to use this space to reflect on the broader scope of what I learned. However, here is a [link](#) to where you can read more about the context of these words in a learner-centered paradigm.

DISTINGUISHING (NOT DEFINING) A COMMUNITY

One of the important distinctions I learned was the difference between a network and a community. In a network, people are connected through one-to-one relationships because each person has an interest in being connected to the other. A network is similar to a web—each thread is needed for the whole, but all threads are not connected to each other. Jack might know John, and John might know Sally, but that doesn’t mean Jack knows Sally. A network is great for solving one-time challenges and problems, like finding a job; however, a network is not very helpful when trying to do something that requires a lot of people to accomplish a task that will have many little challenges arise throughout the process, like trying to build a house. This is where a community is required.

In a community, individuals elect to contribute their gifts to some greater purpose. A community requires synchronization, timing, and nurturing from others in the community in order for a product to be created. And, the bonds formed among community members are just as important as the final product. A community can build a house.



“In a community, individuals elect to contribute their gifts to some greater purpose.”

ANYA SMITH-ROMAN

This particular distinction stuck with me because I have personally used the words network and community interchangeably without considering their differences. After this training, I now realize that these words have very different meanings.

I have been involved in this movement since 2014. But, I've only been involved on a network-level. I've connected with people through Twitter and my school. However, now, I'm finally starting to feel like a real part of the community outside of my school. Sure, I've been blogging, facilitating, and speaking with groups of people over the past three years, but only since this past summer have I really begun to find myself working with teams of people with an intent to make change outside of just my own school. I didn't fully realize this until the last few days, but it's crazy to think how much has changed since my sophomore year. Now, I show up at conferences already knowing and working with some people!

THE VOICES OF ALL LEARNERS ARE BEING HEARD

To backtrack a tad and give some background context, I came to this training because I am passionate about the movement to transform education thanks to my firsthand experience with how different forms of education can affect learners. I dream of the day when every student has the opportunity to experience learner-centered education because I know it has changed me for the better. It has made me feel more confident in myself, passionate for those around me, and empowered to enact change now, rather than waiting to get to the "real world" after graduating.

Furthermore, I came to this training because I believe it is vitally important to include student voice in this movement because students are one of the primary users of school.

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 and am improving my skills as a learner a little bit more due to the opportunities I have to take ownership of my learning and blur the lines between school and the real world. — The Life of Pinya; "The Movement: Transforming Education"

I was thrilled that out of the 70-some people at the training, there were 14 young-learners in the room; I'm ready for even more! Sometimes when wanting student voice, adults gather a group of only young-learners to discuss education transformation topics. While I love speaking with a large group of young-learners, when adults are still in the room there is still this power struggle with the idea that the adults still have the superiority in the room. Something I loved most about this experience was that everyone, no matter their age, was treated the same. There was no separation of groups or tables by age, there were no limits on speaking time that either inhibited adult-learners from speaking or made an unnecessary space for young learners to be heard. The balance is starting to become more equal, and it is extremely powerful! In all of the conversations, no one felt limited by their age to participate or felt forced to hold the burden of representing all student voices by themselves.

I personally hope to continue to empower more young-learners to be involved in the movement because it's always helpful to have some smaller people in your community in order to hold up the part of the house's wall that's closer to the ground.

“...it is vitally important to include student voice in this movement because students are one of the primary users of school.”

ANYA SMITH-ROMAN

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

Every time we come in contact with young learners, they remind us how important it is to make a particular distinction of our own—we are all learners, regardless of age or professional status. In the past, we have commonly formed a dichotomy between learners and educators to clearly distinguish two groups of people in the learner-centered system.

As we should have expected, this is still too hierarchical in the young learners' eyes. We always have room to learn more, and the more we open ourselves up to accepting the gifts and knowledge of others, “young” and “old,” the more we realize experience has no age limit. This mindset expands our community beyond our wildest dreams, and with their power breeds a sense of place and belonging for all who participate. Such was the feeling evoked inside a former Chicago teacher, now Education Reimagined team member, **Lindsay Ogawa**.

Finding My People

As I continue riding the short and bumpy rollercoaster that has been my education career, I recently found myself partaking in a Pioneer Lab Training in Atlanta, GA. Here I was in Atlanta, a former burnt-out teacher who was only recently re-inspired by the possibilities of education, surrounded by incredible learner-centered pioneers from across the country. With the turn of the calendar, I had officially gone from intern to new hire for Education Reimagined. As the newest member of the team, I had the opportunity to fully participate in the Atlanta training. As a culmination of the last few months I've spent taking a deep dive into the ins and outs of learner-centered education, this training gave me a greater grasp of the language, context, and emerging sense of distinctions that will allow me to speak more articulately about the possibilities for the future of education.

ELEMENTS IN A TRADITIONAL LENS

Speaking of context, here is the context I brought into the room over the course of the training. I became a special education teacher in Chicago Public Schools pumped up and ready to change the world. While education had not originally been on my career radar, I had stumbled upon a K-12 tutoring center down the road from my Hawaii college campus. Our small gatherings were personalized, allowing me to recommend books and articles in areas each student mentioned was of interest. Other times, they shared with me their own accomplishments—videos of their judo competitions, photographs of colorful murals they had spray painted, and even a functioning car made mostly from scrapped parts. I viewed each student as incredibly creative, if not genuinely inspiring human beings, providing unique value based on their own skills and strengths. These individuals were undoubtedly talented, and no below-average standardized test score could convince me otherwise.

These kids convinced me education was the only road I wanted to travel down. After undergrad, I enrolled in a teaching fellowship in Chicago. Shortly after, I pursued and earned a master's degree in Education.

However, as a teacher, I was in for a rude awakening. My story is similar to many other teachers I have spoken with who work or have worked in the traditional school system.



LINDSY OGAWA

We were drawn to this work because of passion but were repeatedly body slammed by the rapid changes, unrealistic expectations, inadequate training, and accountability talks. Yet, we trudged on. We personalized learning by pulling small groups for differentiated lessons and ordering laptops so students had self-paced learning opportunities. Professional developments taught us socially embedded tactics, such as non-verbal hand gestures, to utilize our economy of language. The Gradual Release Model transferred agency to learners through completion of independent work after teacher-modeled lessons. Occasional field trips offered open-walled and relevant opportunities for students to learn about topics they studied a few units prior. Competency assessments with questions from former standardized tests were given bi-monthly to ensure students were prepped and ready.

Test scores were impressively high, but morale was painfully low. Despite personal efforts to improve the culture of our classrooms, students still groaned from frustration or worry. I wasn't faring well, either. At the time, I didn't know as teachers that we were simply tinkering with a system that needs to be tossed and reimagined altogether, that we were attempting to fix a vicious cycle. But, what I did realize was that all the reasons I became a teacher—to learn alongside, grow with, and empower kids—were not feasible in what I now know is an Industrial-era school system.

So, at the end of June, I left. I packed my things, and set out on a journey with a mission to find ways to help the voiceless find a voice. This mission brought me to Education Reimagined, which eventually brought me to Atlanta.



CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING

If Education Reimagined has taught me only one thing, it is this—knowing the context when framing the purpose is vital when creating distinctions. After initially reading through the vision document and learning about the five elements, I thought, “This is everything I believe education should be. Unfortunately, I already tried these things and failed.” I had witnessed time and time again teachers implementing what I translated as personalized learning and learner agency. And, time and time again, my gut knew this was not deep, authentic learning.

“I viewed each student as incredibly creative, if not genuinely inspiring human beings, providing unique value based on their own skills and strengths.”

LINDSY OGAWA

However, I didn't realize I was reading the Vision and elements in a school-centered context, and with time, my understanding would shift. While both contexts view practitioners as people who care about the wellbeing of our children, the traditional lens translates the elements as ways to ensure students have heads full of knowledge and high-enough scores for college acceptance. The learner-centered lens views the elements as starting points to learn about and foster the individuality of each learner—to empower young and adult learners, ourselves, and our communities. Context is everything.

In Pioneer Lab Training, I was fortunate enough to meet, discuss, and listen to people working on and thinking within the learner-centered context. Despite diverse locations, years of practice, and resources, many participants shared a similar sense of hope and responsibility to work for or within an education system that recognizes the potential and worth of each child—a paradigm that naturally envelops equity and diversity because of its belief that we must learn about and understand the needs of each individual.



That said, the work isn't easy. At the training, practitioners informed me elements they struggled with, that their work is far from "perfect." Yet, in this national community contextualized in the learner-centered paradigm, I acknowledged each individual's failures, lessons learned, and accomplishments as one individual's contribution to raising the learner-centered "barn." While the training's objectives were to familiarize participants with the learner-centered paradigm as an entrance point to the Pioneer Lab, my main takeaway was much simpler: I had finally found a supportive community serving a purpose that I believed in and admired.

On one of the days of training, a participant entered the room, raised his arms, and yelled, "My people!" I could not have worded my sentiments any better.

“...a paradigm that naturally envelops equity and diversity because of its belief that we must learn about and understand the needs of each individual.”

LINDSY OGAWA

Lindsay Ogawa is the Research and Outreach Associate for Education Reimagined, an initiative of Convergence. Prior to joining the Convergence team, Lindsay served as an AmeriCorps member through a teaching fellowship that moved her from her home in Hawaii to Chicago. For the next two years, she worked as an educator for diverse learners in Chicago Public Schools. Previously, Lindsay worked several years as a tutor in K-12 and higher education settings and as a writer and editor. Lindsay holds her M.S. in Education from Johns Hopkins University and B.A. in English from University of Hawaii at Manoa.



Education Development Center (EDC)

Sometimes you happen upon a goldmine of research and resources and just don't know what to do with it all. **The Education Development Center (EDC)** is one such goldmine, so we have curated the content most applicable to learner-centered implementation for you. With education as the bedrock of their other, interrelated areas of focus of health and economic opportunity, the EDC “envision[s] a world where all people are empowered to lead healthy, productive lives.” Their worldwide network takes the informational products of rigorous research and transforms them into applications suited for the most relevant environments. They begin each project with intentional design, follow through with careful implementation, and continuously evaluate the effectiveness of their design as it operates in real-world environments. Through this cycle of design, implement, and evaluate, the EDC has produced clear, scalable practices relevant to educators nationwide and to the unique needs of each community.

In Support of Educators: Strategies that Work ([link](#))

Possible Worlds ([link](#))

Integrating Technology with Student-Centered Learning ([link](#))

Guide to the Competency-Based Learning Survey for Students

As your learning environment moves forward with learner-centered, transformational work, the expressed elements—competency-based; personalized, relevant, and contextualized; learner agency; socially embedded; and open-walled—of learning need assessment tools to determine the effectiveness of the strategies being employed. These assessments should include the quantitative and qualitative measurements that provide evidence of success in the development of a learner's knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Included in this broad framework is the learner's ability to transparently recognize the strategies they are actors in. If a learner is unable to identify the framework in which he or she is learning under, they will be hard-pressed to apply their practice independently. The Education Development Center provides such a tool for competency-based assessment. Their Competency-Based Learning Survey measures the effectiveness of competency-based implementation, including the understanding learners have of such a system. By capturing the full scope of your environment's competency-based implementation, you can see a clear way forward for future iterations.

Guide to the Competency-Based Learning Survey for Students ([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.

EDUCON2.9

Philadelphia, PA

January 27-29

[Conference Website](#)

MID-ATLANTIC CONFERENCE ON PERSONALIZED LEARNING

Baltimore, MD

February 27-March 1

[Conference Website](#)

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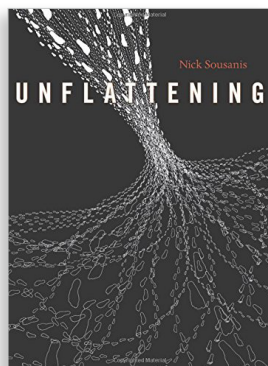
The New Teacher Project

seeks **Project Director**

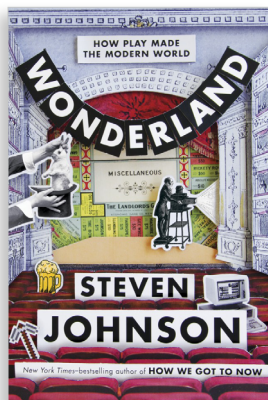
for their New Models team to focus on transforming student learning experiences across the K-12 system. [Apply here](#)

Join the **ReSchool Colorado** team as a **Learner Advocate**

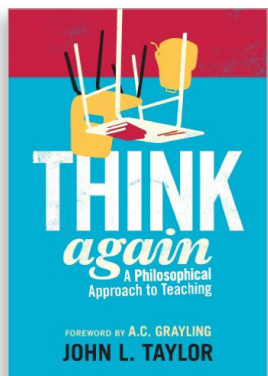
to serve a cohort of learners and their families in Denver for a year-long pilot. [Apply here by February 17](#)

**Unflattening** by Nick Sousanis

There are many instances where we must view complex, yet solvable, problems from a different angle. A first step in doing so might reside in the very way we access the information available to us. Commonly, the only medium through which we learn about the world is through printed words. Nick Sousanis challenges this notion in his work, *Unflattening*, which gained notoriety as the first-ever dissertation presented entirely in comic book format. By combining imagery with words, Sousanis believes we can gain a far deeper understanding about the complex problems we face. Examine his arguments for yourself and see how you might apply it to your daily work.

**Wonderland: How Play Made the Modern World** by Steven Johnson

There is an undeniable aura around the untethered creativity children possess. Through playful imagination, their novel way of navigating the world is exactly how many of the world's most treasured innovations come to life. This idea of play and its historical significance inspired Steven Johnson to explore how the amusement-seekers among us discovered and invented once unthinkable products to share with the world. Discover these stories in *Wonderland* and imagine how you might integrate similar “child-like” behavior in your transformational work.

**Think Again: A Philosophical Approach to Teaching** by John L. Taylor

Developing a fruitful habit of inquiry allows learners to find endless opportunities to accumulate knowledge, skills, and dispositions as they journey along their unique life paths. With that being said, how might we ensure this art of questioning is developed? John L. Taylor, professor of philosophy in the United Kingdom, believes an understanding of philosophical thinking will put educators on the fast track to guiding their learners to a “why” mindset. Taylor’s book, *Think Again*, challenges educators to reimagine their current practices in developing critical thinking and explore the ideas philosophers have been sharing with us for years.

WORTH YOUR TIME

The Hermit Who Inadvertently Shaped Climate-Change Science

The story of Billy Barr allows us to pause and reflect on what the world could gain if all learners felt free to explore their interests in the way most fitting for them.

[Read here](#)

The One Thing I Realized When I Got Older

Do you live every day like it’s your last? See how one man flips the script on this cliché and finds it more fruitful to live every day like it’s his first.

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Finding ‘Personalized Learning’ and Other Edtech Buzzwords on the Gartner Hype Cycle

When language gets overused, it can lose it’s original power and meaning. Explore how this has happened to the concept of “Personalized Learning.”

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“Education is that whole system of human training within and without the schoolhouse walls, which molds and develops men.”

— **W.E.B. DU BOIS**

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