LEARNER-CENTERED HUMAN CAPITAL MEETING

November 30—December 1, 2016

INTENDED OUTCOMES

We began a national conversation on the challenges of preparing and enabling educators who work directly with learners to play their roles effectively in a learner-centered environment. During these two days, we:

- Confirmed our shared understanding of the learner-centered education movement and the implications for educator preparation;
- Explored how a range of learner-centered organizations and networks are currently defining educators' roles and associated competencies;
- Assessed the likely growth in demand for learner-centered educators and community members over the next five years, the capacity of existing providers to meet that demand, and the potential to expand that capacity if necessary;
- Identified conversations and actions that might serve to accelerate the movement, who else could make a difference if they were involved in those conversations, and what next steps there are.

SUMMARY

In November 2016, Education Reimagined hosted a learner-centered human capital meeting to kick off a conversation about how to prepare and enable educators who work directly with learners to play their roles effectively in a learner-centered environment. This unique gathering consisted of learner-centered individuals from schools, districts, professional development providers, higher education institutions, professional organizations, networks, and foundations who are grappling with the multifaceted opportunities and challenges we currently face when enabling these educators.

Throughout the conversation, there was a shared commitment to standing firmly in the learner-centered paradigm. This was a reminder that everything we say about the paradigm must also hold true for adult learners.

Learning Environment Presentations

The meeting began with three presentations from learner-centered environments deeply engaged in preparing and supporting their own (and other) educators: Boston Day and Evening Academy (BDEA); Lindsay Unified School District; and Camden Big Picture Learning Academy. Each presentation spoke to the following guiding questions:

- What is most distinctive about the roles, competencies, and dispositions needed in your learner-centered learning environment?
- How do you identify and recruit educators? What do you wish you saw more of in the applicant pool?
- How do you identify the educator's strengths and challenges and help them advance in your learner-centered environment?
- What professional development seems to be most useful (and for whom)? What other kinds of professional development support do you wish existed?

Brian Connor, lead teacher and REAL (Responsive Education Alternative Lab) coach from BDEA, kicked us off by sharing about BDEA's model. Designed for learners who are overage or under-credited, BDEA has created a unique system that provides learners with the flexibility and support they need to build their competencies toward graduation.

- BDEA educators must bring creativity, humor, flexibility, and a focus on building relationships with their learners. They must see their learners as human beings.
- Keeping learners at the center, BDEA relies on learner input for hiring decisions. They gather it by having potential hires conduct demo lessons.
- Staff collaboration, particularly around shared content areas, serves as the key professional development component for both new and seasoned team members. Staff share best practices and develop norms that create a strong, supportive staff culture. This is particularly important given the challenges of BDEA's limited resources.
- Transparency in assessing educator effectiveness was identified as an area for new growth in BDEA.

Amalia Lopez, a Performance-Based System Curriculum & Instruction Specialist from Lindsay USD, led the second presentation. Setting the context for her presentation, Amalia shared that Lindsay USD is a performance-based district in rural California of nine schools serving 4,300 learners. With their community-generated strategic plan for transformation, Lindsay has been shifting their culture and systems toward learner-centered education since 2007.

- Mindset stands as the most important element for a Lindsay educator. They must have the shared belief: "All learners can learn." Humor, flexibility, and perseverance were also noted as key dispositions for a successful Lindsay "learning facilitator."
- Potential hires at Lindsay go through scenario-based interviews, and staff utilize rubrics based on the Adult Learning Curriculum to assess candidates' reactions. Developed over time, these scenarios and rubrics are designed to illuminate candidates' willingness to shift control to the learners and fit for Lindsay's culture.
- Lindsay USD has an overarching commitment to creating a transparent culture of learning for all Lindsay stakeholders—from the learners to the superintendent. They are creating learner-centered professional development for educators, principals, district staff, and superintendents. Specifically not one-size-fits-all, this will allow staff to identify their strengths and weaknesses and provide avenues for competency development.
- Educator turnover was identified as a major challenge for Lindsay USD.

Last but certainly not least, Tim Jenkins, Principal of Camden Big Picture Learning Academy, closed out the presentations. Part of the Big Picture Learning network, Camden BPL Academy is a competency-based school that heavily integrates the outside community into learners' pathways. Relevance, rigor, and relationships stand as the key elements of their model.

- Camden BPL educators must seek to understand the context and circumstances from which each learner is coming. Another key factor for these educators is their willingness to "unlearn." There are many commonly held assumptions about learners, learning, and education that are actually inhibitive to the model's success. Perseverance, flexibility, and a readiness to work hard were also noted as vital dispositions.
- Like at BDEA, learners are heavily involved in the interview process for new staff. They provide tours to potential hires, participate in the panel interviews, and provide reactions to candidates' demo lessons.
- As a Big Picture school, Camden BPL has access to the national BPL network and professional development opportunities. There is also an emphasis on staff growth. Each educator creates an individual staff learning plan and participates in weekly one-on-one coaching. There are also weekly, optional in-house professional development sessions run by different staff members.
- Due to district policies, Camden BPL's hiring pool has recently shrunk considerably, causing them to be more creative in how they recruit and prepare new staff.

Though each of these environments has their own model and focus, the presentations surfaced a number of common themes. When seeking new staff, each environment focuses on a set of values, skills, and dispositions.

Additionally, learners—whether through direct input or scenario-based strategies—played an essential role in the hiring of new staff. The importance of staff collaboration and environment culture was also brought up again and again as cornerstones of successful professional development for each environment.

Professional Development Panel

Shifting focus from these individual environments, we then hosted a panel of professional development providers: Jim Rickabaugh from the Institute of Personalized Learning; Jean Garrity from LEAP Innovations; and Jessica Agus from Summit Public Schools. While each of the panelists came from a different perspective, they each emphasized that any professional development for learner-centered educators must be learner-centered itself. The panelists saw the need to identify educators' "pain points"—places where they are struggling to implement or understand learner-centered practice—and develop from there. Professional development is not about providing the "how-to" or "implementation checklist" of learner-centered education. Instead, it is a means of sharing learnings from other educators already on the journey to creating learner-centered environments.

Turning their attention to the necessary skills and dispositions for learner-centered educators, they spoke to the shift in the educator's role: from being the "sage on the stage" to serving as the "meddler in the middle." Educators must serve as mentor, supporter, encourager, and guide—elevating the learner's capacity to take control of their own learning. To do this, educators must be willing to share power with learners. The panelists identified this as a uniquely challenging mindset shift for many educators. They also saw adaptability and an eagerness to continuously improve and iterate as essential dispositions for learner-centered educators.

With all of this food for thought, the group then reflected on what they had heard throughout the day. Insights and learnings discussed included:

- Just as learner-centered education must begin with the learner, "learner-centered" professional development must begin with the adult learner's interests, passions, strengths, needs, and circumstances and should embody the five elements of the vision.
- There must be a transparent process—with opportunities for input from many levels—for determining the necessary competencies for learner-centered educators. Educators must then be supported with the right set of tools, resources, and networks to develop them. They must also be given autonomy and space to create and innovate.
- A new narrative for what it means to be an educator must be developed. Educators must be seen as risk-takers and lifelong learners by both those in and out of the profession.
- Technology will play a key role in both learner-centered environments and professional development. While learner-centered experiences can be created in low-tech circumstances, any scaling (for young or adult learners) requires technology.

Imagining Educator-Centered Professional Development

Testing out one of these insights, the room split into small groups to take on the challenge of imagining what true "educator-centered" professional development might look like in practice. Developing their own educator profile, each group identified an individual educator's passions, interests, challenges, circumstances, and aspirations. They then brainstormed what professional development supports and systems that unique educator might both need to further their practice and be able to contribute to their community. Each group's resulting work can be found in Appendix A.

The experience of focusing on one professional surprised many participants whose focus is generally on scaling opportunities for educators. They saw the difference it makes to start with who the person is and build a pathway that makes sense for them. They also raised a simple (but profound) recognition: Adults learn the same way kids do. Acknowledging the implications of this statement, they again reiterated the need to remain cognizant of the paradigm in which they were standing, no matter the focus of their conversation.

Interestingly, all groups selected an educator either in a traditional district or in one only just beginning to consider learner-centered transformation. Many created profiles of educators who felt alone and in need of outside support. However, the group posited that, regardless of the environment's paradigm, educators must have access to networks and communities of fellow learner-centered educators. Relatedly, the group saw that much of the educator's professional development occurred informally through peer-to-peer collaboration and community engagement.

Thinking At Scale

Returning for the second day of the meeting, the group reflected that their conversation thus far revolved around four types of educators, those:

1. Already in learner-centered environments;
2. In learner-centered pilots within traditional schools that have the support of administrators;
3. In classrooms in traditional schools; and
4. In open-walled experiences—"outside-of-school" community members participating in learners' pathways.

They recognized the needs of each group would be vastly different and the support required to prepare educators for each category would also range dramatically. However, there was also alignment that the movement needs networks and communities of practice capable of collectively serving individuals from all four categories.

Allowing for this variability, the group turned their attention to the question of scale. The importance of paradigm again led the conversation. Without ensuring that everyone involved (educators, parents, learners, administrators, district leaders, professional development providers) is coming from a learner-centered mindset, there can be no true systemic transformation. This observation went hand-in-hand with the acknowledgement that all of these stakeholders must be involved in creating the new systems to support learner-centered education. This was seen as a critical piece: These systems and structures must respond to the challenges of actual learner-centered practice, rather than to assumptions created by those at the top about what will be needed.

The shifting and expanding role of the educator was also acknowledged as a key piece of the conversation. Recognizing them as advisors, mentors, learning advocates, coaches, facilitators, and much more shifts who is attracted to the profession, how they are prepared, and how they are supported to grow in their capacities and competencies. Trust from all directions and the space for agency were identified as necessary factors for learner-centered educators to thrive. This also demands educators feel safe to experiment, test, and (sometimes) fail.

The group also pondered the chicken-and-egg challenge of demand. They saw that pre-service and professional development providers would not start preparing educators for learner-centered environments without demand from schools and districts; however, on the other hand, schools and districts need educators who are both prepared for and supported in learner-centered practice to make the shift. Many posited that demand would actually be generated, not by higher education institutions or professional development providers, but by businesses and communities calling for what learner-centered environments offer. This spoke to the need to identify the outcomes toward which learner-centered education is striving. Identifying and achieving on these outcomes would spur the necessary public demand for this paradigm shift.

This rich conversation led the group to self-organize around the questions those in the room felt most eager to tackle. They created four inquiries and began to delve into them. However, with limited time, everyone acknowledged they were only scratching the surface of their selected questions. The room agreed each inquiry could be a stream of work unto itself.

1. How do you provide learner-centered education for educators—both during onboarding and ongoingly?

- Educators must be able to see themselves as lifelong learners, committed to iterating and growing in their abilities and capacities. They must, therefore, be supported in knowing how they learn best and in finding avenues to pursue their development.
- Partnerships must be created between professional development organizations (i.e. New Teacher Network, NEA, AFT, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards).
- Professional development networks must be generated and grown to increase sharing and learning across environments. These networks must provide opportunities for educators to both serve as resources for others and develop their own competencies.

2. What does human capital development look like for those outside of the system who are engaged in education?

- There is a wide diversity of roles played by people outside the formal education system. It is important to identify both that diversity and the diversity of competencies those players need. It will not be one-size-fits-all.
- Some of the key skills and dispositions for these "out-of-school" actors might include: ability to collaborate with educators; knowledge of the standards and outcomes for the learning environment they are dealing with; and a basic understanding of learning science.
- There is an outstanding question of how to integrate the insights generated by those already creating learner-centered after-school or expanded learning time experiences into the conversations underway about learner-centered human capital.

3. How do you gather evidence for learner-centered human capital development?

- There is a cycle to this process: 1) Adopt the learner-centered paradigm; 2) State the outcomes this paradigm is seeking to achieve; 3) Choose the metrics by which to measure these outcomes' success; 4) Cull data, reflect, and adapt systems and practices; and 5) Share evidence for the paradigm's ability to achieve on its stated outcomes.
- It is important to note that the paradigm shift must come first, as it will directly influence the choices at each step.

4. What district-level systems and structures are needed to support learner-centered education?

- Educators must identify the "pain points" that could be remedied through district action, rather than having the district impose where systems are needed and how they are structured.
- District leadership must be responsible (with stakeholder input) for generating and holding the vision for the district's transformation.
- The interconnected nature of systems must be acknowledged when considering any one aspect of transformation. For example, finances, human resources, and professional development structures all directly impact the question of human capital.

Coming to the end of the meeting, the group reflected on the depth and breadth of their conversation over the two days. They recognized the difference it made to be in the room with those in a common paradigm— all dedicated to realizing the same fundamental shift to learner-centered education. They left seeing each other as allies and potential partners and collaborators in a journey just begun.

APPENDIX A: IMAGINING "EDUCATOR-CENTERED" PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Exhibit 1:

Bryan has had 20+ years of teaching. He teaches 7th grade social studies and American History. Bryan is very focused on the content in his discipline. He has no real autonomy and resists real individualization, even when peer collaboration/ coaching.
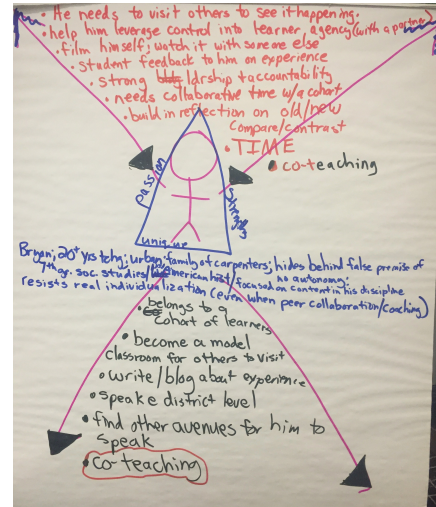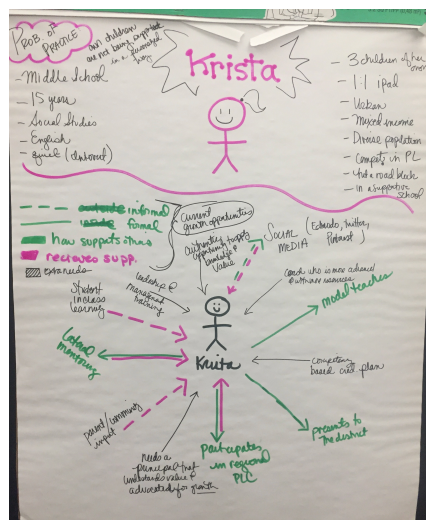

What does Bryan need to support his own development?	What is Bryan doing to support the development of others?	What does Bryan need that he is also doing to support others?
• Visits to others to see learner-centered education in action • Help in leveraging control into learner agency (with a partner) • Film himself and watch it with someone else • Student feedback on the experience • Strong leadership and accountability • Needs collaborative time with a cohort • Build in reflection on old/new (compare/contrast) • Time	• Belongs to a cohort of learners • Become a model classroom for others to visit • Write/blog about the experience • Speak at the district-level • Find other avenues for him to speak	• Co-teaching

Exhibit 2:

Krista is a middle school social studies and English teacher with 15 years of teaching experience. Her district is urban, mixed income—serving a very diverse population. They have 1:1 iPads. Krista is quiet and introverted with three children of her own. She is concerned because her own children are not being supported in an individualized way in their school. She has competence in personalized learning but has hit a roadblock, although her school's culture is very supportive.

NOTE: It is indicated that some of Krista's supports come as formal opportunities, while others are informal. Those that are informal are indicated as such. Otherwise, they were seen as formal learning opportunities.

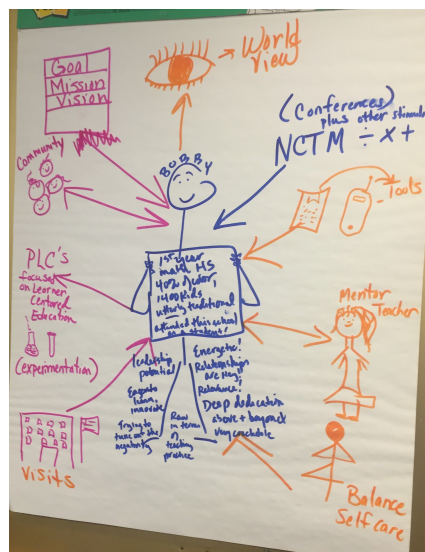| What does Krista need to support her own development?	What is Krista doing to support the development of others?	What does Krista need that she is also doing to support others?
• Authentic opportunity to apply knowledge and value • Coach is who is more advanced and with more resources • Competency-based credits and plans • A principal that understands, values, and advocate for her growth • Leadership and management training • Parent and community input. (informal) • Student in-class learning. (informal)	• Model teaching • Presents to the district	• Social media (Edmodo, Twitter, Pinterest) (informal) • Participates in regional professional learning community • Lateral mentoring

Exhibit 3:

Don is a 17-year veteran teacher. He teaches history in comprehensive, non-personalized learning high school, serving a diverse population. He teaches 170+ students each day in a lecture-based style and uses projects to assess lessons. He loves history and is an expert amongst his peers expert. He has a very authentic rapport with kids, never giving up on them. Don is part of both IB and AP networks; however, he is tired and frustrated with the lack of student ownership. There is not much structural support for collaboration and change in his school. He has had exposure to learner-centered education through media. He is a voracious reader and enjoys seeing models to understand. He generally doesn't find PD useful, preferring to focus on content-specific conversations.
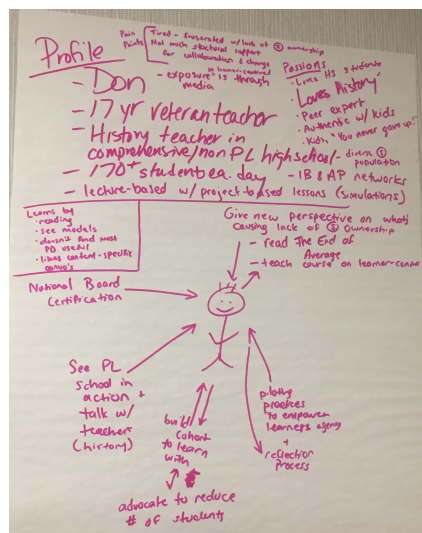
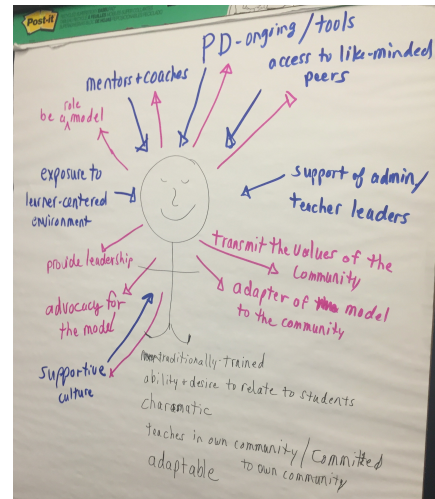| What does Don need to support his own development?	What is Don doing to support the development of others?	What does Don need that he is also doing to support others?
• National Board Certification • Give new perspective on what's causing lack of student ownership • Read *The End of Average* by Todd Rose • Teach course on learner-centered education • See personalized learning school in action and talk with history teacher • Piloting procedures to empower learner agency	• Reflection process	• Build cohort to learn with advocate • Cohort might advocate to reduce the number of students

Exhibit 4:

Bobby is a 1st year math high school teacher. He is serving a student population of 1,400 kids (40% of color). His school is utterly traditional, who attended this school as a student. He has a lot of leadership potential and is eager to learn and innovative. He is trying to tune out the negativity. As a new teacher, Bobby is very raw in terms of teaching practice but is very energetic and has a deep dedication to the kids. He believes strongly that relationships are key and focuses on creating relevance for his kids. He is very coachable.

What does Bobby need to support his own development?	What is Bobby doing to support the development of others?	What does Bobby need that he is also doing to support others?
• Goal, Mission, Vision • School and classroom visits • Experimentation • Conferences plus other stimuli (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics) • Tools to support his work • Work-life balance, self-care	• Professional learning communities that are focused on learner-centered education • World view	• Community • Mentor teacher

Exhibit 5:

This teacher was traditionally trained. They have an ability and desire to relate to students and is very charismatic. They teach in their own community—and have a strong commitment to that community. They are adaptable.

What does this individual need to support their own development?	What is this individual doing to support the development of others?	What does this individual need that they are also doing to support others?
• Support of administration and teacher leaders • Exposure to learner-centered environment	• Transmit the values of the community • Adapter of model to the community • Advocacy for the model • Provide leadership • Be a role-model	• Mentors and coaches • Professional development with ongoing tools • Access to like-minded peers • Supportive culture