

pioneering

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Kelly Young, Executive Director

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Dear Pioneers,

In my last letter, I shared about my son, Tucker, and our exploration of “homeschooling” one day per month. Over the course of just two sessions, he went from expecting me to play the role of teacher (planning the whole day for him) to co-designing the day with me and taking charge of what he wanted to learn. What triggered this dramatic shift?

Last November (a few weeks after our first homeschooling session), Tucker attended Spark-House ([link](#)). As a 9-year-old who attends a school-centered environment, I wasn’t sure how he would handle working in a group of 15-22 year olds from learner-centered environments.

On day one, he was reserved and quiet. As he soaked it all in, he would sometimes hover near me, while at other times join various table conversations. By day two, though, he was acting in a skit and talking like a chatterbox at lunch and dinner. He came alive.

I wasn’t aware of what he gained from the experience, but something had certainly changed. And, weeks later, he shared how frustrated he was in school—the pace, whether too fast or too slow, never fit his needs. With a little encouragement, he reached out to his four teachers with links about learner-centered education, requesting a meeting to discuss their reactions.

The night before the meeting, Tucker wanted to properly prepare. Being in meetings all the time, I didn’t realize how much there was for him to learn—stating the purpose of the meeting, setting an agenda, and anticipating what they might want from him. In a short hour, we accomplished all of these tasks, with me acting as his scribe. Tucker knew his plan backwards and forwards, and when it came time for the meetings, he only had to pull up his Google Doc once to remind himself of his plan.

The teachers listened and asked questions, showing mixed reactions to the materials Tucker shared. But, the outcome of the meeting was less important than the exhilaration Tucker received from the experience. He took initiative, was taken seriously, and had a conviction that something he had done could make for a better future. It was the first time he was allowed to say something about how the learning was happening in school. He realized he didn’t have to just accept the way things are; he could impact how they might be.

I could see this change in our second day of “homeschooling.” His perceived role in learning had shifted from being a passive recipient to one with agency and a voice.

Enjoy this week’s 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.





MUSE School
CALABASAS, CA

“Our students’ passions are the compass that guides their journey. When passions lead the way, we find that students light up about all of their learning.”

— JEFF KING, HEAD OF SCHOOL

WHAT IS POSSIBLE WHEN PASSION TURNS INTO MISSION? Take the story of Suzy Amis Cameron. She began as a mother seeking a place for her children to be celebrated as the unique individuals they were and became a leader of an entire learner-centered environment. Partnering with her sister, Rebecca Amis, they launched MUSE School. Initially focused on young learners between five and seven years old, their mission was to “inspire and prepare young people to live consciously with themselves, one another, and the planet.” After serving just 11 learners in their first year, MUSE School now serves learners as young as three years old and as old as 18 in the Las Flores and Malibu Canyons of California.

At MUSE, “learning is alive, interconnections are critical, sustainability is key,” and the environment is “ever-evolving.” The MUSE School design prides itself on keeping learners engaged every single day through **personalized, relevant, and contextualized learning**, which they call Passion-Based Learning. From the moment a learner is enrolled, they “are encouraged through their interests and passions to learn at a deep and meaningful level.”

Imagine a 10-year-old who is mystified by the mountains along Las Virgenes Canyon road. He wonders how they got there, so he presents his curiosity to his STEAM Orbit ([link](#)) team—a diverse group of learners ranging in ages from 3 to 18. In this **socially embedded** design, they create a plan to incorporate core academics and milestones into this inquiry.

Then, each learner finds an avenue of learning that connects with their interests. Each accountable to the group, **learner agency** is engrained in their everyday work. The original questioner begins by researching tectonic plates, soil erosion, and landslides. His peer dives into the dangers landslides pose to the community. Discovering many local governments ignore the possibility of this cataclysmic event, she embraces **open-walled** learning and heads over to the mayor’s office to explore what the city is doing to ensure her community’s safety.

Another learner connects his interests to the Pacific Ocean and wonders if the salty air has any effect on the topography and vegetation of the mountains. As the eight-week cycle comes to a close, the learners combine all of their efforts into a rich story they can share with their peers.

The freedom to explore individual interests and passions creates a learning community engaged in constant discovery that focuses on Academics, Communication, Passion-Based Learning, Sustainability, and Self-Efficacy. What started as a simple hope has become a dynamic and thriving community of learners. MUSE School continues pushing the barriers of what’s possible with education.

LEARN MORE

[Explore MUSE School](#)

[James Cameron-Backed School To Terminate Meat And Dairy](#)

[One Meal a Day for the Planet and More with MUSE School](#)

[MUSE School Kitchen the Greenest in the World](#)

FACTS & FIGURES

Private

Serves ages 3-18

200 learners

2 campuses (Prime and Middle/High)

Passion-Based Learning

90% of campus power generated by solar

18:1 learner-educator ratio

CONNECT

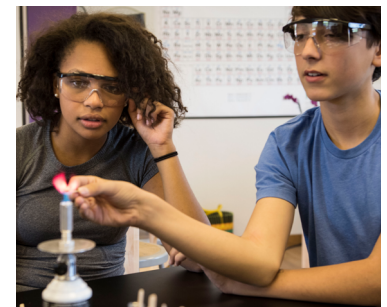
Website

[MUSE School](#)

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INSIGHTS

Why Language is a Catalyst to Transforming Education

“Language exerts hidden power, like the moon on the tides.” —**RITA MAE BROWN, WRITER AND ACTIVIST**

Have you ever felt like something has been around for so long you can't imagine a future in which it won't exist? Televisions are already approaching the century mark. What will we stare at next on a random Tuesday evening? How about the permanence of the wise words of Aristotle, Socrates, and Lao Tzu? The philosophies these men spread seem to have completely defied the aging properties of time—making it easy to assume they will teach us until the sun swallows the earth whole.

Why is it the longer some “thing” or idea sticks around, the longer we expect it to survive? And, what does this mean for the traditional education system as it continues moving along, largely unchanged? That's the question the Lindy effect ([link](#)) seeks to answer.

In general, the Lindy effect looks at ideas—from Stoicism to wireless internet to education—and posits the longer they last, the longer they can expect to last into the future. If an idea has been around for ten years, it's expected to survive ten more. If it's been around for 1,000 years, it's expected to survive 1,000 more. Once the idea finally dies out, its age equates to exactly half of its expected lifespan. And, when that idea has been around for multiple generations, its death causes unpredictable ripple effects across society.

This all illuminates one of the key challenges we face in transforming the traditional education system in the United States.

Each year the traditional system carries on, its robustness determines its likelihood of survival, which makes transformation that much harder. If we say the current system is about 100 years old, the Lindy effect gives it a life expectancy of 100 more years. Can you imagine five more generations of children going through the same age-based, siloed-subject, one-size-fits-all system?

This thought makes our work that much more pressing. What will it take to transform the education system? What if language is one of the keys to making this paradigm shift [\(link\)](#) happen?

If you've had even the slightest taste of Education Reimagined's work, you'll be all too familiar with the certain way we speak. We focus not only on the words we use but, just as importantly, on the words we avoid.

At first glance, it appears this only adds to the malaise of education wordplay. Every "innovator" has a new word that represents "the future" of education—keeping their fingers crossed it will catch on with others. Our intention takes a completely different approach.

We strongly support the unique lexicons—a narrow concentration of language within the education sphere—individual learner-centered communities have created for their local conversations. These sets of unique words or phrases have often been created by the stakeholders in these communities (educators, learners, parents, and administrators) through collaboration and discovery. We would never want to see these efforts go to waste in forced favor of a national model created behind closed doors halfway across the country. That merry-go-round has been running for decades, and we want to hop on a different ride.

What we propose, rather, is a Rosetta Stone for learner-centered transformation—a shared second language all models can find themselves in and that can be used to talk across those models. The ability to cross-connect allows transformational leaders across the country to be in dialogue together.

“Replace the old, Industrial Age words with those that signal a transformation and see the possibilities that emerge.” —[BEA MCGARVEY](#), AUTHOR AND CONSULTANT

Language provides the lenses through which we view the world. And, when those lenses restrict us from seeing beyond the walls we've built, we need to put on a brand new pair and discover the possibilities we couldn't even see before.

One of the easiest ways to capture the importance of language is to ask yourself a few quick questions:

WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD “SCHOOL,” WHAT IMAGES COME TO MIND?

If you attended a traditional school growing up, you might conjure up images of big empty hallways lined with personal lockers, classroom doors shut off to the rest of the world with rigid rows of desks inside, and chalkboards with bullet points of information you need to memorize for the upcoming test.

Now, imagine being asked to wipe clean your canvas of memories and start from scratch. If you were asked what a “school” is, you can't help but paint a strikingly similar picture. And, even if you can get your mind stretched beyond these traditional notions of school, you're still in a single building where all learning occurs, aren't you? The power of language is strong—almost uncanny in its ability to pull us back into old models or norms of thinking, even without our noticing it.

On the other hand, if you were asked to imagine a “learning environment,” you’ll notice the confining walls and traditional assumptions start to slip away. You might think, “Well, our community center is a place of learning and so is the history museum. Oh! And, kids love learning at the library.” It’s invigorating, right?

Let’s try another one.

WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD “TEACHER” OR “STUDENT,” WHAT CHARACTERISTICS DO THESE INDIVIDUALS HAVE?

Going back to your primary school days, you might have seen your teacher as the head of the classroom inside that school you just described above—the keeper of information and conveyer of knowledge. You can point to the “good” and the “bad” ones, but they all generally held the same position of authority.

When it comes to the term “student,” you might note one striking feature—you probably don’t call yourself one anymore. A student goes to school. Once school is over, your identity as a student ends with it. You came into education as an empty vessel and, over the years, had information and knowledge poured into your mind, preparing you for the real world that you only encounter once you cross that graduation stage.

Here we go again.

Take a step back, and ask yourself what it means to be an “educator”—or better yet, a “learning facilitator.” Who is a “learning facilitator”? Words like leader, mentor, parent, and coach begin to grab your attention.

What about “learner”? How does that resonate with you? Do you consider yourself a learner even if you’re not in “school”? Is “learner” an identity just about anyone can claim? We sure think so.

These questions only touch the surface of exploring how powerful language can be in influencing our imaginations. Or, more importantly, in limiting what we believe is possible. By changing the way we speak about education, we can start reimagining a future of learning unencumbered by the assumptions of the current system.

As an added challenge, go ask the questions above to your friends and family. Count how many different generations come up with the same responses.

The traditional education system has remained unchanged for so long the where, what, how, and with whom of learning have evolved very little. Even though America has transitioned from the Industrial economy to the Knowledge and Idea economies of the 21st-century, our education system has not transitioned with it.

If your 90-year-old grandmother walked into her old elementary school as it exists today, she’ll conjure up memories from her past she thought were long forgotten. The familiarity of the environment—almost unchanged after all these years—will strike a resounding chord. And, although the memories she shares are great to listen to, it should be concerning that she found little different from when she was in school over seven decades ago. How many society-wide institutions can make such a claim?

“We think of our new terms/vocabulary as a shared language, and it’s an important part of getting everyone on the same page and changing the entire community’s mindset. It challenges all of our assumptions. You can hear the shift in how we think about learners and learning in the new words. We know that, if we can get everyone on board with this shared language, it will become much easier to create buy-in for what we’re doing.”

—[SONYA WRISLEY](#), **FOUNDING PRINCIPAL OF DESIGN39CAMPUS**

We assert the time has come for a transformation, not a reformation, of the education system. While we recognize shifting the terms of use won’t shift the system itself—or even fully free us from the underlying assumptions we still hold about education, learning, or learners—we see it as an essential and catalytic first step. Education Reimagined has been publishing profiles of learning environments since the end of 2015, and in each, we have shown the “how” of transformation to be unique in each case. But, we have also employed language—our five elements and terms like “learner,” “learning environment,” and “learner-centered” itself—to show that these leading examples of transformation are part of something much larger than themselves.

As each year passes, the Lindy effect is working harder and harder against our transformational efforts. But, through the intentional and consistent use of this reimagined lexicon within the national community of learner-centered pioneers, we are confident this movement will lead the country and all its children into a bright new future.

Language creates our world. So, to transform our world, we must start with transforming our language.



KEYONNA GRIFFIN

Why I Expect to Be Great

by Keyonna Griffin

Before I came to Summit Elementary in McComb, Mississippi, I attended a traditional elementary school from 2012-2015. During those three years, I felt the same limitations everywhere I went. At my other schools, all of the students were working at the same level. Since I was usually the smartest one in my class, I had to help everyone else. When I needed help, there was no one to get help from, except for my teacher. I usually just had to wait until the other students caught up before I could move on. This kept me from learning more, and by the time my friends caught up, I wasn't even interested in the work anymore. I felt like I was trapped in a world where I couldn't decide my future. I felt like other people were controlling my learning.

When I first came to the Summit, I thought it would be just like the other schools I had attended, but I was wrong. I was finally being challenged and was allowed to work at my own level. I've learned more than ever before. I get to work on topics that are more advanced than what other scholars are working on, and the work is at a higher level than what my age would suggest. I also have people who can help me when I need it. We are grouped by our instructional levels, but we don't have to do the same work. This means I have classmates that are working on higher level work like me, so we can collaborate when we have the same work or they can help me when I get stuck. All I have to do is ask for help by using a "Where Am I" board. This board helps us communicate with the teacher/practitioner.



My teacher practitioners (what we call our teachers) focus on one scholar at a time. This happens because we all know what we need to do, so they just have to check in with us throughout the day. Outside the help from my peer scholars, I can get help from my teacher practitioner when I need it. And, sometimes the teacher practitioner will teach us as a class when they think we need it or when we all need to focus on the same topics.

These topics are called learning targets. We all have different learning targets which allows us to work at our own pace. We don't have traditional grade levels. Instead, there are instructional levels. My levels have increased since coming here. I'm a Level 20 in reading and Level 21 in math. That means I'm able to work on high-school level topics while still getting my fifth-grade level work where I need it. All of this is listed on my personalized learning plan. All scholars have a plan to follow.

It took some time to get used to this style of learning, but now I can freely explore many opportunities I'd never had before and be more engaged in my learning. The Summit helped me to focus on my learning, not everyone else's. I have the freedom to move away from people when they distract me, from a table to a bean bag. When we show we have mastered a learning target, we can move to the next target. I don't have to wait for everyone to finish the assignment before I move on. I can move as fast or as slow as I need to.

In the future, I see myself as a caring veterinarian. I want to be able to help all of the animals in the world. What I am able to do at Summit is explore this dream every day as part of my learning. I have programs like "Epic" where I can read stories about animals, fiction and nonfiction, and I can display what I've learned. I once worked on a topic where I had to pick an animal that I had never heard of before. It was called an ocelot, a dwarf leopard. I didn't know this animal even existed. I knew then that I had a lot more to learn. This made me want to be a veterinarian even more.

Now that I'm at the Summit, I feel free to express myself. I've had many opportunities to speak in front of my class about what I've learned, which has made me better at grammar, word pronunciation, and using new vocabulary. People at this school expect a lot out of me and that pushes me to do better than I probably would have if I had stayed at the other schools. Of course, I miss my friends from my other schools, but being at Summit has been an amazing experience for me.

If I were to go back two years, I wouldn't have seen myself at this level. I would have thought that I was average. But, now I realize I'm not, and I expect to be great. I have decided that this was the best choice my family could have made. This school is going to allow me to learn more than I could have ever imagined.

“Now that I’m at the Summit, I feel free to express myself.”

KEYONNA GRIFFIN

Keyonna Griffin is 10 years old and was born in Natchez, Mississippi. She lives with her parents and grandmother, has two brothers, two sisters, and two dogs: Black and Curly. Her hobbies are playing the piano and guitar, sports, reading, singing, and drawing. Her favorite subject is science. Her favorite author is Jeff Kinney (*Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series), and her favorite singer is Sabrina Carpenter. In the future, she wants to be a veterinarian.



Project Zero

On the verge of their 50th anniversary, **Project Zero (PZ)** ([link](#)) has seen an evolution of research and practice that has always been on the edge of what's possible. Housed in the Harvard Graduate School of Education, PZ began by exploring the philosophical and conceptual components of arts education, pivoted in the 1980s to psychological research on the effect arts education had in the development of learning, and has since expanded well beyond their arts focus to dive into how learning and thinking develop in learners of all ages. Their projects, research, and publications challenge education stakeholders to reimagine what learning looks like, how to build a culture of thinking, how to make learning and thinking visible, how to guide learners in solving complex problems, and more. Explore over 75 projects (20+ currently ongoing), 77 books, and a vast resource library.

Projects ([link](#))

Topics ([link](#))

Articles, Books, Tools, Videos ([link](#))

A Guidebook for Success: Strategies for Implementing Personalized Learning in Rural Schools

Future Ready Schools (FRS) just released a brand new guidebook for rural learning environments exploring how they can begin taking their first steps toward transformation—with a personalized learning framework. To keep pace with the ever-evolving demands of the local, national, and global workforce, these environments often have far fewer resources at their fingertips than large metropolises, like New York City, Dallas, or Chicago, do. But, with the acceleration of technology and a focus on leveraging often-untapped community resources, **A Guidebook for Success** ([link](#)) emphasizes the translatability of personalized education to all environments, regardless of geographic location. Using the FRS framework in the rural context—curriculum, instruction, and assessment; personalized professional learning; budget and resources; community partnerships; data and privacy; robust infrastructure; and use of space and time—the guide highlights the importance of learners engaging in learning that matches their passions, interests, and aspirations and directly connects to real-world applications. If you are operating in a rural setting or are curious how learner-centered education can be applied to an environment different than your own, explore this guide.

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.

PERSONALIZED LEARNING SUMMIT 2017

San Francisco, CA
May 10-12

[Summit Website](#)

NEWSCHOOLS VENTURE FUND SUMMIT 2017

San Francisco, CA
May 16-17

[Summit Website](#)

ELEVATE! BY MESA COUNTY VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT 51

Grand Junction, CO
July 31-Aug 1

[Event Info](#)

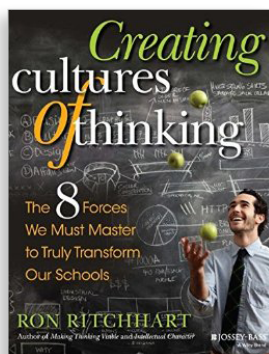
OPPORTUNITY BOARD

Education Reimagined

is hiring for three dynamic, diverse team members! We're seeking an **Associate Director of National Outreach & Community Building**; a **Communications Associate—Social Media**; and a **Personal Assistant**. [Learn more here!](#)

Iowa BIG is hiring for a **Social Studies Educator!** [Apply here.](#)

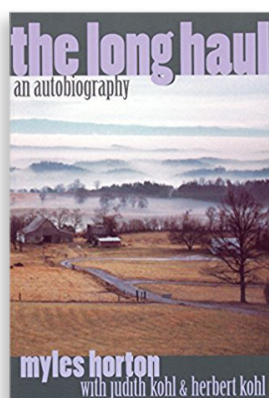
Springpoint is hiring a [Manager of Instruction and School Design](#) and [Network Engagement Associate](#).



Creating Cultures of Thinking: The 8 Forces We Must Master to Truly Transform Our Schools

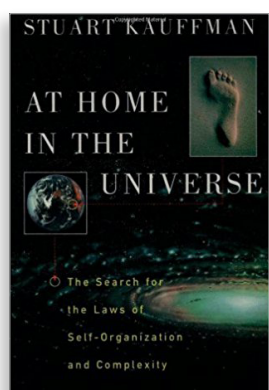
by Ron Ritchhart

As it stands, the traditional education system quickly disengages learners before they ever have the opportunity to fully explore what the world has to offer. As they grow up, their dispositions toward learning often take on negative qualities, and their true passions and interests all too frequently remain hidden from view. In *Creating Cultures of Thinking*, Ron Ritchhart invites educators to inject their learning environments with eight cultural forces that will reinvigorate the positive dispositions toward learning innate in every child. Discover why expectations, language, time, modeling, opportunities, routines, interactions, and environment—when addressed together—can create a transformed environment.



The Long Haul: An Autobiography by Myles Horton

Imagine being able to visit a single place and find yourself in the presence of Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., Eleanor Roosevelt, and many other famous change agents. Now, imagine if you were the person who cultivated such a space. That is exactly what Myles Horton did in 1932 when he founded the Highlander Folk School (now known as the Highlander Research and Education Center). In *The Long Haul*, Horton transparently explores his more than five decades of work in social change and leadership development.



At Home in the Universe: The Search for the Laws of Self-Organization and Complexity

by Stuart A. Kauffman

One of the strangest, most paradoxical things we experience on a day-to-day basis is the coexistence of chaos and organization. With the systems that be, whether natural or man-made, there are often interdependent elements that can't be changed without affecting other parts of the whole. So, how can we determine the long-term impact of our actions? Stuart A. Kauffman, author of *At Home in the Universe*, takes on the challenge of explaining these complex systems and providing insight on where the order lies within them.

WORTH YOUR TIME

Bank robber turned Georgetown law professor

College dropout turned 11-year federal inmate turned Georgetown Law Professor, Shon Hopwood has quite the story to tell. During his time in prison, he finally discovered his passion. Imagine if his learning environment had provided that opportunity. [Read here](#)

15 Moonshots in Education

Working on the edge allows you to stretch your mind to see the possibilities of the future. Getting Smart's Tom Vander Ark took a crack at some futurist thinking and looked at virtual reality, human-computer interface, and more. [Read here](#)

Forget Grit.

Focus on Inequality.

Often times, broad-stroke clichés like “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” allow us to avoid having the difficult conversation. This “Commentary” in EdWeek investigates if a similar thing is happening in education. [Read here](#)

“Learning is addictive
because it’s joyful.”

— **CARMINE GALLO**

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