

pioneering

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A NOTE FROM EDUCATION REIMAGINED

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Dear Pioneers,

We are ready to say farewell to 2017 and welcome the opportunities that lie ahead in the new year. Two weeks ago, the entire Education Reimagined team came together for an intense two-days of strategic planning and came away feeling reenergized and wholly committed to accelerating the learner-centered movement across the country.

At the core of our strategy session was the framework that to make the shift to learner-centered inevitable and irreversible, there are three levers that have to be pulled simultaneously—building public will, creating enabling policy conditions, and demonstrating proof of concept. Levers that take a movement to pull. When our two days came to a conclusion, we had a strategic vision for our next three years of work. One that we will share in the new year.

At its heart, our work is to foster connections, relationships, and partnerships among pioneering practitioners, learners, leaders, and organizations across the country. It truly takes a diverse community of learner-centered pioneers to make this transformation a reality.

We believe that how you do the work is as important as what you are doing. To accelerate the emergence of learner-centered systems, our work has to be done in a human-centered way. That's why we build connections among pioneers inside of communities.

Being in community means welcoming and celebrating the gifts of every education stakeholder—young learners, parents, educators, administrators, employers, community leaders, policymakers, and more. Just as we want to build socially-embedded learning communities where learners and adults are seen for their unique potential and rich gifts, it's important that we, in the movement, see each other for our unique gifts and contributions. We are the leaders we have been waiting for, and, together, we are unstoppable.

If you find this to be as inspiring as we do, we'd love for you to share our work and the work of the movement with your friends, family, and colleagues over the holidays. Whether you pass along this issue of *Pioneering* or [make a donation](#) yourself, we appreciate your support and can't wait to bring you more issues of *Pioneering* in 2018.

Happy Holidays,

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.





High School for the Recording Arts

SAINT PAUL, MN

“Creating spaces where students can express themselves creatively and learn through doing allows them to explore the deeper structures of their creative minds and interact with the outside world.” – JOEY CIENIAN,

DIRECTOR OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

IN 1996, A BRAND-NEW RECORDING STUDIO OPENED IN ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA.

Its owner, David T.C. Ellis, was ready to take his experience as a recording artist and find young talent to represent. The clients started rolling in. However, they didn't quite fit the profile he was originally seeking.

Rather than attracting burgeoning stars on the adult-side of their lives, the studio was attracting young teenagers with a pure passion for hip hop and rap. They were strikingly creative, talented, and resourceful in ways that reached beyond the narrow lens of music. But, it was music that brought them there. Impressed, and concerned, David realized these kids were ditching school. Their reason? School was boring. They couldn't explore their passions.

Fast forward 20 years later, and that little recording studio has been transformed into a high-functioning learner-centered environment called High School for the Recording Arts (HSRA).

Learning through music is a simple way to present the model at HSRA, but that wouldn't do it justice. Music is but one small doorway into an immense world of possibility. The **personalized, relevant, and contextualized** nature of HSRA's approach to learning allows every learner to find strength and confidence within their life story and use it to connect with the real world. When learners are ready, they are able to launch themselves into **open-walled** opportunities that connect their passion for music and other emerging interests with community needs.

One group of learners, fully aware of the miniscule number of educators who looked like them, wanted to start an inter-school dialogue around why young people of color and American Indians weren't going into the teaching profession. They immediately recognized an issue that has affected multiple generations; took advantage of their **socially-embedded** learning environment to collaborate and design a project to address it; and acquired the **knowledge, skills, and dispositions** needed to implement a high-impact dialogue across St. Paul.

This display of **learner agency** is no exception at HSRA or in the work they take on within their community. And, with access to community groups, therapists, social workers, and housing liaisons, learners are given the resources they need to succeed. HSRA leaders appreciate what they've been able to accomplish since their official opening in 2001. And, they are ready to take their lessons learned and assist communities throughout the country to establish similar programs that match their unique learners' needs.

LEARN MORE

[Essential Learning at Hip Hop High \(HSRA Story\)](#)

[Hip Hop High Crosses the Continental Divide](#)

[Breath Project](#)

FACTS & FIGURES

Independent Charter

100% college acceptance of those who graduate from HSRA

92% free and reduced lunch

72% graduation rate

60% of learners have been in contact with the criminal justice system

40% of learners have been expelled from their previous schools

30% of learners are currently homeless or have experienced homelessness

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A Conversation with Tony Simmons and Joey Cienian



TONY SIMMONS



JOEY CIENIAN

Education Reimagined recently caught up with High School for the Recording Arts (HSRA) leaders Tony Simmons (Executive Director) and Joey Cienian (Director of Educational Programming) to discuss their learner-centered work with St. Paul, MN youth. With nearly 25 combined years of experience at HSRA, they expressed incredible insights on the power and practice of learner-centered education.

Q. To lead off, Tony and Joey, could you give a brief overview of how you found your way to High School for the Recording Arts (HSRA) and what roles you've played there?

TONY: I assisted the founder (David T.C. Ellis) in starting the school and have served as the program or executive director since 2001. There was a short period of time where I primarily focused on development, but I've always been in a leadership role in terms of the mission, support, and direction of our school. Before I came to HSRA full-time, I was a practicing entertainment attorney. That's how I met David—representing him while he was a recording artist with Prince.

JOEY: I've been at HSRA for seven years. I have been an advisor; social studies, math, and language arts teacher; and lead academic coach. For the last two years, I've been the Director of Educational Programming. In that capacity, I work with all of our teachers and shareholders who provide programming in the classroom and help create projects that are student-focused, creative, and continue to build the infrastructure to fulfill our mission.

Q. What about this work inspires you to wake up every day and go after it?

TONY: I see so much of myself in the work. Growing up, I saw myself as an artist who had a passion for music. That drove me to come to school every day. But, I was one of those kids who tuned out almost everything that didn't involve music. I can totally relate to our young people who have a strong creative side, a desire to express themselves, and are hungry to find a place they can be their authentic selves.

If it wasn't for my strong family structure, I may have dropped out. For our young people, unfortunately, they deal with a lot of unstable family systems. In fact, some are already living on their own, so the prospect of dropping out is very real. That's unfortunate. Educating young people should be about knowing their passions and interests—student motivation is key to engagement. They should be able to come to school and feel like they are truly being seen and heard. That's how I relate to our young people.

As an African-American, I also understand many of the conditions our students confront on a daily basis (both inside and outside of school). When those two things—

student motivation and issues of race—came together at the inception of our school, it was something that really moved me to understand how to get these young people the best type of experience possible. An experience similar to what I had growing up in the New York City public school system.

The NYC system does a pretty good job of appreciating the arts and exposing young people to it. From elementary school, we had a pretty rich musical program. I was fortunate to be in schools that really valued that side of how young people learn. The other side of it is that these weren't just music teachers. They were great relationship builders. They took the time to get to know me well. Music has a wonderful way of individualizing. Having that individualization be an integral part of the creation process at HSRA is what drives me every day.

JOEY: I share a lot of the same perspective as Tony when it comes to student focus and engagement. We are designing a creative and therapeutic space that is set up to foster patience and work with young people where they are, in engaging ways.

As for my personal background, I grew up in a very structured, traditional system all the way through college, where I became interested in activism and getting involved in social justice causes. I worked in the community as a political organizer for a while. When I became interested in teaching, I came at it from the same social justice lens. For me, teaching is politics at a very local level. There is a political component to patience and compassion. There's a political component to bringing in therapy and wraparound services. There's a political component to listening to youth and letting them have a position of prominence and power in a structural system. That's so important in our school systems, and it's often lacking.

As an educator and administrator, creating spaces where students can express themselves creatively and learn through doing allows them to explore the deeper structures of their creative minds and interact with the outside world. I've found an enormous amount of energy, motivation, and connection to my community because, in the contemporary world, the school is where so many different sociological problems come to be solved. The modern school often doesn't have the capacity or structure set up to handle all of the needs and opportunities that our students bring.

Through HSRA, I find an enormous amount of inspiration. It's such a wonderful spot to do the work every day and keep pushing forward because I see the American school system as being extremely experimental. There's a lot of room right now for growth, development, and sharing.

Q. As an “alternative” environment, do you feel this label prevents your work from spreading?

TONY: It's certainly something we have to battle. Oftentimes, particularly in an urban setting, when people talk about who the “alternative” students in the “alternative” schools are, essentially what they mean are the brown, black, and poor young people who are often from family systems that are strained or dissolved. These young people have been abandoned and are often just pushed along their educational journey or pushed out altogether.

I say that as a premise because engaging them has us (HSRA) take on their stigmas. Their marginalization is usually cast upon us in certain circles. It commonly shows up in terms of accountability and evaluations, but it even shows up in the broader perception of the community. Because of that, we have been very intentional in confronting it.

“Educating young people should be about knowing their passions and interests—student motivation is key to engagement. They should be able to come to school and feel like they are truly being seen and heard. That's how I relate to our young people.”

TONY SIMMONS

At the forefront, we talk about the brilliance of our young people—their high-level creativity, resourcefulness, resiliency, and entrepreneurial skills. We do that first for our students so that they know we see that in them. We want them to know they have lived and thrived within their unique circumstances and have acquired skills that become obvious to anyone who is willing to pay attention. That helps us in terms of the learning journey we want to take our young people through and the types of relationships we want to build.

As a result, we've been able to prove to the student and the community that they are able to perform at a very high level when given the right space and opportunity. The arts are a great way to express that. Beyond that, what we allow learners to do—take ownership of the learning space, develop student leadership, collaborate and put together projects and enterprises, and create products that are disseminated throughout the community and world—makes people's lives better. Doing it in those alternative ways allows us to best know who our students are and how to best engage them as learners. That term, "alternative," is aptly applied but has two sides to it.

JOEY: We believe that school doesn't end at the walls of our building. The community is rife with experiential learning. Our students can transcend and flip some of the stereotypes that are often thrown upon them when given a chance to show their inherent genius, skillset, and leadership qualities.

Right now, we have students who are volunteering as student mentors for our grade school and middle school students, and just the other day, we had one of the principals tell us that our youth participation has led to significant engagement and broader ramifications for a few students who were previously having problems.

We have students who are collaborating with local businesses and have built projects around music, art, and entrepreneurialism. Right now, a few students are working with a local business to write a song and produce a viral video. We have students who are participating in the city council and school board, even though we're an independent charter. They are presenting at meetings and are engaged in community events. Our school is known and respected by local politicians, and our students' voices are heard and respected in that space.

Q. We often hear about learners (and educators) who struggle transitioning from a traditional environment to a learner-centered one like HSRA. How do you train your educators to assist new learners in harnessing the possibility of learner-centered education?

JOEY: We have a very different pedagogical practice here than what most people have experienced. It's a different type of teaching. There are a lot of things we do in training that help people detox as traditional educators.

Most importantly, we spend an enormous amount of time examining privilege and having courageous conversations with staff about our personal identities in the space. We talk about issues of social inequity that we are seeing and might be perpetuating, depending on who we are as individuals. We really take the time to deal with ourselves before getting in front of our students.

We spend a lot of training time on best practices in project-based, competency-based learning. Our staff uses [Schoolology](#) and a flipped classroom model such that we are oftentimes building pedagogical structures that resemble a lab-based atmo-

“We want them to know they have lived and thrived within their unique circumstances and have acquired skills that become obvious to anyone who is willing to pay attention.”

TONY SIMMONS

sphere—there are a lot of hands-on, direct transactions with teachers but not in the traditional format of a 50-minute teacher-led lecture.

All of this takes a lot of planning and recalibrating. We ask our educators to take student voice into account as they are building their classes. So, while they might start the year with a plan for how the class is going to go, the structure might remain but the content might shift dramatically depending on their classroom environment and the community they are serving. We have a system that asks our teachers to be versatile, adaptive, student-focused, and creative. We want to minimize airtime, maximize student voice, and get students physically engaged in the learning. We want them leaving the classroom, doing things, building things, and collaborating. A lot of these ideas come from the principles of deeper learning.

When it comes to students, it starts out the same way—it's a detox process for them as well. You're transitioning from sitting in class, not having to engage with the teacher, filling out a worksheet, turning in work sometimes, and moving on to the next class with a "D." Now, they are in a space where they're told you have voice, accountability, autonomy, freedom, and the opportunity to take creative steps in different directions to showcase your learning. This is a daunting transition.

Our teachers are trained to build scaffolding into all of the lessons, leading further and further to independence and freedom. For our students, we take all of this into account. Some need more time to understand our educational models and will work more closely with our teachers. And, with the help of graphic organizers and online resources through Schoology, they can bridge that gap and push themselves towards owning their education.

For new students, they are sometimes not ready or interested in diving into an independent school day where they're building their own projects, setting up meetings with advisors and teachers, and going out into the community on their own. They need a hand. When students are ready for that freedom, we have an enormous amount built into the model for them to explore their interests.

Q. Joey mentioned that HSRA has learners who are active in local politics (working with the city council and school board). Tony, have you noticed any measurable impact at the community or political level?

TONY: We have made an impact in the community as it relates to how we serve our students and why we serve them the way we do. We have been able to express how policy needs to adjust to better understand, appreciate, and hold accountable a program like ours. When you're dealing with young people who, from a traditional perspective, are already academically behind, you need something more aligned with a growth model, and I think we've been able to make that case.

When you have a system of evaluation and accountability that only looks at your school for a moment in time, that clearly doesn't work. That kind of evaluation can send some misleading messages about the work we're doing. It can be harmful to our students, our standing in the community, and our ability to raise funds and expand. We know there are many other young people across the country who could benefit from our practices and what we have learned. Not getting the evaluation and accountability systems right has held back programs like ours, preventing more models from taking on populations like the one we are serving and doing it in the way that we do it.

“It’s really immoral that we have allowed something like inappropriate accountability measurements to hinder our innovation and our ability to be truly student-centered. So, we’ve done intentional work to shift the way policy operates.”

TONY SIMMONS

To me, this has led to an injustice. It's really immoral that we have allowed something like inappropriate accountability measurements to hinder our innovation and our ability to be truly student-centered. So, we've done intentional work to shift the way policy operates. We've been involved in lobbying and building strong networks of people in various stakeholder positions to come and get to know us, see our practice closely, and be able to speak to it in certain significant circles. I want to emphasize, too, that it's not me going and talking about the difference we are making. It's our students. Having our learners be highly visible has really made the best case.

Q. What's on the horizon for HSRA in the next couple of years?

TONY: We're about to celebrate the 20th anniversary of our student-operated record label, Another Level Records. We started in 1998, with our students' first CD called "HIV Ain't No Joke," which was a collaboration with a local community-based organization called Check Yo' Self Health and Wellness Center who did an HIV/STD peer training and prevention campaign. Our students created a CD related to it and became peer educators themselves. The lyrics in the songs were all research-based as a result of their participation as peer educators.

Since then, we've put out 12 other compilations. We're releasing all 20 years of music worldwide on all the music streaming services (e.g. Pandora, Spotify, Apple Music, etc.) through our partnership with TuneCore. It's such a great time to reflect and think about what our students are going to create over the next 20 years. I want for us to continue doing this better in Minnesota. We're a community on a continuous improvement plan. We're transparent and open to constructive feedback. But, I also know there is a huge dropout crisis across this nation, particularly affecting young people of color who are poor, and I know we can make a difference in their lives. I want to be a part of making that happen and building communities across the country in certain areas where we could bring a model like HSRA.

JOEY: I'm excited to keep doing what we're doing and communicating with awesome educational movements across the country to keep building better practices for deeper learning and student-centered engagement. Internally, I want us to check ourselves on what we're doing and improve upon it. Externally, I want us to evangelize on stuff we think is working and keep sharing the information. Our young people speak for themselves. We're pumped to do another 20 years.

"I want to emphasize, too, that it's not me going and talking about the difference we are making. It's our students. Having our learners be highly visible has really made the best case."

TONY SIMMONS

While working with numerous national recording artists and record companies as an entertainment lawyer, **Tony Simmons** met David "T.C." Ellis and assisted him in the formation of Studio 4/High School for Recording Arts. During that time, he co-founded Another Level Records, the first national student-operated record label. In addition to his duties overseeing the day-to-day program at HSRA, Tony continues to work with students in exploring the Business of Music and mentoring those involved in Another Level Records.

Joey Cienian serves as the Director of Educational Programming at HSRA. The focus of Joey's work has been in building out HSRA's advisory structure, a site-wide commitment to social justice programming, innovative pedagogy in the classroom, competency-based assessment models, and dynamic project-based learning. He is passionate about researching and implementing creative re-engagement techniques that help young people build positive relationships, develop resiliency skills, start to work through the effects of trauma, and learn topics they find provocative in ways that match their needs.



The Paradigm Shift: This is What Happens When You Grow Up in a Learner-Centered Family

by Ulcca Joshi Hansen

At Education Reimagined, we are collecting stories from education stakeholders who have experienced an “ah-ha” moment when the paradigm shift from school-centered to learner-centered education happened for them. Here is the story from our very own Ulcca Joshi Hansen.

In some ways, my journey to learner-centered education started before I was born. My parents immigrated from East Africa and brought with them a non-western view of the world. While they were both born and raised in Tanzania, my grandparents hailed from western India, part of a large migration during British colonial rule. The Indian presence in numerous east African countries birthed a unique culture that blends elements of Indian and native African cultures and language that seeped even into their speech—English sprinkled with hints of Swahili and Gujarati.

When I was born, I was immediately buffered from the strong post-Enlightenment, western paradigm that has sustained school-centered education in the United States for more than a century. This buffering was all the more present when, during my earliest years, I went to live with family in Arusha, Tanzania. The mother tongue of my childhood home was rooted in Sanskrit, the tongue of eastern poets and mystics; a language that carries within it distinctions, emotions, and concepts not readily translatable within modern western languages. I didn't learn English until I returned to the US to begin school. It makes for an interesting exercise to reflect on the ways in which language shapes how the brain accesses and makes sense of the world, but I digress.



ULCCA JOSHI HANSEN

The fusion of western thought with my family's eastern roots was unmistakable. One need not explore any further than the bookshelves in our Millington, NJ home. American classics and a leather-bound Encyclopedia Britannica set (a must-have purchase for many South Asian immigrant families of that era) were proudly displayed. Yet, nestled among these western classics were books of poetry and philosophy by Rabindranath Tagore and Jiddu Krishnamurti. There were stories of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Vedas*, the Buddha; thick books on Indian philosophy.

These stories and traditions came to life when relatives and friends came to visit. Sometimes there were evenings of chanted prayers and songs, words like those of the *Gayatrimantra* that felt awkward in my mouth:

**om bhūrbhuvah svaḥ tatsaviturvareṇyaṃ bhargodevasya dhīmahi
dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt.**

They offered tantalizing wisps of ideas: interconnectedness, interdependency, the unity of existence, and the illusion of separation from oneself and others.

It took me years to appreciate how some of the things that made me embarrassed among my peers growing up were actually reflective of a much more socially- and ontologically-advanced ethic than what the American world held up as “normal” and “better.” Things that were “weird” during childhood—eating vegetarian, re-using, upcycling, and consignment—are now all the rage. America’s emerging acknowledgment that environmentalism, conservation, and ecological justice matter because human beings are not separate from the world has been my “normal” since birth.

The same goes for practices such as yoga, mindfulness, and meditation. These are activities grounded in a belief that process is primary and that knowledge and mastery unfold from it; they sit in tension with Industrial Era ideals of linearity, efficiency, and easily quantifiable data. They are ways of being that are about a slowed down and expanded awareness of time, totally at odds with campaigns and devices that reel us into the illusion that it is possible or desirable for us to maximize the productivity of each minute of our day, making a time-bound notion of efficiency our master.

RECONCILIATION: BALANCING MY EASTERN EXPERIENCES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A WESTERN WORLD

Like many immigrants, my parents learned to navigate the American school system without the benefit or baggage of prior experience. Their personal educational trajectories did not overlay neatly on the standard kindergarten through twelfth grade pipeline. They had experienced formal schooling, though neither had gone to college. They had acquired an enormous amount of their knowledge and skills through work and practical experiences. So, while they instilled in my brother and me a level of deference and respect for schools and teachers, they held a flexibility in their understanding of when and how learning happened. This flexibility played out in numerous ways for me as I grew up.



Ulcca, age 3; in Arusha, Tanzania

“It took me years to appreciate how some of the things that made me embarrassed among my peers growing up were actually reflective of a much more socially- and ontologically-advanced ethic than what the American world held up as “normal” and “better.”

ULCCA JOSHI HANSEN

My parents supported my foray into a wide range of activities—community theater and acting; poetry and playwriting; martial arts; study abroad programs that took me to Russia, France, and eventually to Germany for my entire senior year of high school. My father pushed me to talk to my teachers and school administrators about getting “credit” for what came out of these experiences—the plays I wrote for state competitions; travel journals and reflections on cultural differences; papers on the political upheaval that was roiling eastern Europe in the early 1990s. My parents instilled in me the idea that learning happens all the time.

Even so, I happily and fairly easily excelled in the game of school. But, I’d be remiss not to mention an important variable that led to my academic and personal growth as a child, one that is much harder to find in today’s education system due to factors like high teacher turnover. I was given the freedom to explore myriad topics of interest under the experienced and watchful eyes of many teachers who had collectively seen thousands of students grow and learn. My teachers’ experiences enabled them to embrace the “normal” variation that exists in the growth, interests, capabilities, and challenges of young human beings. Their wisdom coupled with the much needed time to make school a full set of experiences (e.g. play, recess, art, music, open-ended conversations, space for the social dramas of childhood and adolescence to unfold) made my experience in traditional school far more learner-centered than what can be found today.

As early as middle school, I was intrigued by western concepts that seemed to reflect the mysticism of the eastern ideas I was beginning to explore more consciously. Lucky for me, my middle school teacher, Mrs. Olinger, was willing to let me research and write about seemingly random topics, like extrasensory perception, astrology, astral projection, and ghosts. She trusted my forays into these topics would eventually lead me somewhere meaningful, and with her guidance, they did. How many learners in today’s school-centered system are able to explore such non-standard subjects?

My interests evolved into wanting to understand what we knew about the human brain and its capabilities; questions of consciousness and what it meant to be a person; the history of witchcraft; and the social implications of the tensions that emerged between pagan, mystical, and native cultures and the rise of organized Christianity in the US and Europe. Throughout middle and high school, I used every open-ended writing assignment to thread together a study of the unusual: fractals; chaos theory; post-traumatic stress disorder and its impact on the body and learning.

The scientists and writers I found most compelling were, at the time, slightly off the beaten path. They framed things in ways that pointed to the interdisciplinary nature of ideas—so different than the way classes and school were structured. Some teachers found it hard to understand the connections between the ideas I was exploring. But, I found it strange that school kept wanting to separate things out in ways that seemed to miss obvious and important connections. I had the nagging sense that these separations often led us to focus on the wrong questions or miss potential explanations. This sense grew as I embarked on post-secondary pursuits.

RECONCILIATION OVERLOAD: RETURNING TO MY ROOTS FOR DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

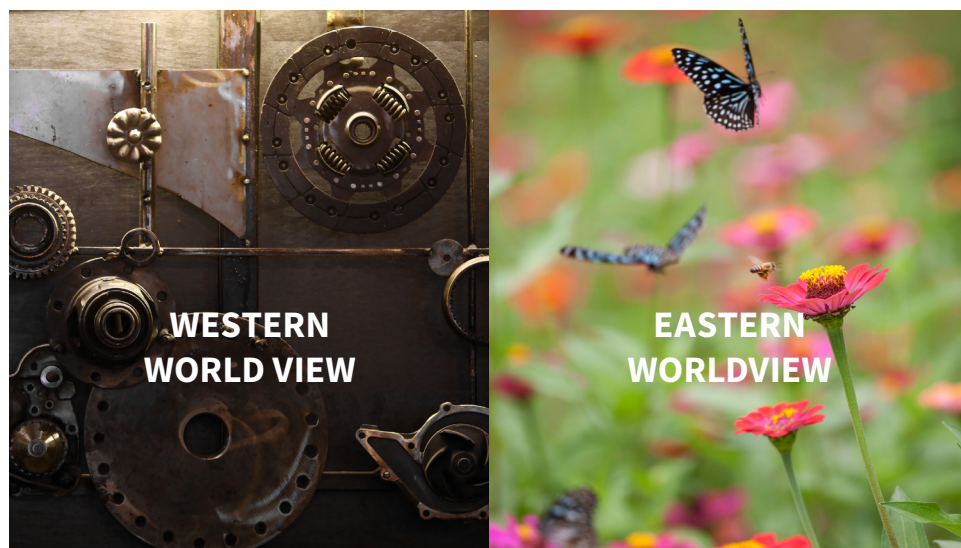
It’s probably not surprising that in college, I gravitated towards the study of philosophy, in addition to training as a teacher. I felt constrained by my department’s focus on analytic philosophy, a British school of philosophy deeply embedded in formal logic, conceptual analysis, and mathematical principles. To simplify, for the sake of

“I found it strange that school kept wanting to separate things out in ways that seemed to miss obvious and important connections. I had the nagging sense that these separations often led us to focus on the wrong questions or miss potential explanations.”

ULCCA JOSHI HANSEN

comparison, the analytic tradition strives to understand the world by considering individual pieces, believing that to try and understand ideas in total relationship to one another is far too complex a task for the human mind. This flew in the face of my gut instinct, which was that things are interconnected and that the arguments we were having in class had absolutely no value in the real world where it is impossible to disconnect things from each other.

Needing to break away from this narrow lens of the world, I established a set of independent studies for myself that would allow me to travel to India for a summer to take a self-designed course on Indian philosophy and religion. While delving into Hinduism, something critical clicked for me. What the post-Enlightenment, western tradition perceived as polytheistic was actually monotheistic in the sense that it seeks to describe a unified ultimate reality, of which there are infinite manifestations. This was the same notion of reality that had been described by ancient and medieval philosophers and mystics in the west and is at the heart of many eastern traditions and most indigenous cultures throughout the world. But, the idea that One ultimate reality can encompass every possible distinction within itself was something that the prevailing paradigm of modern, western analytic thinking found nearly impossible to accept.



I wanted to understand the roots of this paradigmatic divide in the world, and I was, even then, beginning to see the implications these two views of the world had on debates within education. My philosophical gears start churning when I bring this idea of paradigms up, so to make it more digestible, I've laid out the two paradigms in a table on the following page.

Because these ideas were becoming conscious for me at the same time I was studying education and learning to be a teacher, I realized the approach I wanted to take as an educator was in tension with what I was being taught and what I was seeing happen in schools. The pendulum between the two paradigms and their corresponding educational approaches has been swinging in America since the late-1800s. The progressive movements of the 1960s and 1970s had launched the teachers who taught me, which explains why their approach to education felt more human-centered, both as a student and as a young teacher. However, I was coming into the profession at a time when the pendulum had swung against what some people saw as too much “looseness” in the public system.

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CARTESIAN-NEWTONIAN PARADIGM IN SCIENCE (DOMINANT IN THE WEST)	HOLISTIC-ECOLOGICAL PARADIGM IN SCIENCE (DOMINANT IN THE EAST)
Embraces the idea that human beings and Nature are separate. It is an acceptable ethic of science to view Nature as a resource that is to be understood and controlled for the benefit of mankind.	Believes in an ecological ethic, which points to the mutual dependence of human beings and Nature. Focuses on the need for cooperation, sustainability, and non-violence.
Subscribes to the notion that the rational mind alone can understand the world and that emotions and the “non-rational” are of lesser value. Scientific knowledge can be accepted as certain and “objective”—that is, independent of the human observer and the process of acquiring knowledge.	There is a shift from the pursuit of objective science and knowledge to epistemic science and knowledge. What we see in the world is always a reflection of how we look at the world and involves both the “rational” and “non-rational” aspects of ourselves.
Knowledge is a building with solid foundations and fundamental building blocks. Science is about identifying these discrete and basic building blocks of matter: the fundamental principles of nature, etc.	Starts from the space of relationship and interconnected parts, rather than fundamental building blocks. Knowledge is viewed as a network of interrelated information, rather than a building with solid foundations.
Complex systems are the sum of their parts and can be understood by breaking them down to their component parts.	A system is more than the sum of its parts. There is a dynamism and interconnectedness that cannot be captured by breaking things down into component parts.
“Industrial” Model Approach to Education The primary purpose of education for the vast majority of children is a generally utilitarian one. It is about producing workers and malleable citizens who will take their predetermined place in society. A system is designed to improve the efficiency of educational delivery. Experts decide what is worth knowing; content is broken up into discrete subjects; the focus is more on the measured outcomes, rather than the process of learning. There is a utilitarian lens for relationship building in and socio-emotional aspects of school.	Human-Centered Approach to Education The primary purpose of education is developing the individual potential of each child. Education should develop knowledge, skills, and intellectual excellence; but also self-knowledge, spiritual development, and individual freedom. Learning and growth are viewed through an ecological, developmental lens, meaning that it is jagged and individual. The process of learning is as valuable as the outcomes of learning. Knowledge/content is interconnected and interrelated. Education is about helping to develop people, and this makes relationship critical. The individual and the community grow together in a dialectic process.

“Because these ideas were becoming conscious for me at the same time I was studying education and learning to be a teacher, I realized the approach I wanted to take as an educator was in tension with what I was being taught and what I was seeing happen in schools.”

ULCCA JOSHI HANSEN

There was an increased emphasis on “the basics,” the worshipping of “objective” measurements of student progress and outcomes, and a belief that the “right” structures, systems, programs, and curriculum could right the ship. This didn’t sit well with me, in addition to not aligning with what I knew about human beings and learning. I went on to spend years in graduate school understanding the emergence of what people today talk about as the “industrial” model of education, which I have come to believe is too narrow a lens—a topic for a whole separate article.

RECONCILIATION OVER: THE TIME HAS COME TO TRANSFORM EDUCATION

Suffice it to say that it has been a tenuous 15-20 years thinking and talking about ideas that have felt so counter to the predominant debates and discourse within education circles. So many other arenas of our lives have been totally transformed by the shift to an holistic/ecological paradigm over the last fifty years—the digital world would not exist without a shift away from the Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm nor would the fields of ecology, nanotechnology, and systems theory to name just a few. Yet, the prevailing minds in our public education system have been unable to see beyond the old paradigm.

Here’s the good news. History tells us it’s not uncommon for the social and educational spheres to lag behind the scientific. And, there are many indications that we have arrived at a moment when the values that undergird holistic, human-centered education may be able to disrupt the architecture of America’s public education system for good. First, these ideas have always gained traction at moments of social, economic, and political unrest. This tends to occur, in part, because people are more willing to look to education as something that can be socially transformative and not just utilitarian. Moreover, everything mainstream science has confirmed about human growth and development—how the brain works, how human development happens, what learning really looks like—reflects what human-centered education has always asserted and sought to build from.

And, most promising to me is that unlike any other moment in modern human history, the world demands what learner-centered education produces. The idea that we want to develop human differences, that education should be about human fulfillment and freedom, that mutuality and interdependence needs to be understood and valued—these have always been deeply counter-cultural. No longer. In a rapidly changing environment, we need to nurture human difference in order to adapt to changes we cannot predict. In a world of machine learning and artificial intelligence, we *need* individuals who possess deeply human capabilities like adaptability, empathy, compassion, authenticity, and human connection. And, most of all, the world needs human beings who accept that their individual well-being and the well-being of their fellow neighbor and the ecological collective are intertwined.

This is a movement whose time has come.

LEARN MORE

Ulcca’s journey continued on the TEDx stage last month in Colorado.
Listen to her talk on [“The Future of Smart.”](#)

“Most promising to me is that unlike any other moment in modern human history, the world demands what learner-centered education produces.”

ULCCA JOSHI HANSEN

As the Associate Director of National Outreach and Community Building, **Dr. Ulcca Joshi Hansen** will be helping build the ecosystem of partners needed to ensure educators pioneering learner-centered learning are supported in their efforts. Regardless of her role, Ulcca is guided by the principle of promoting and supporting student-centered learning experiences that celebrate and maximize the unique potential of every child.

Essential Skills and Dispositions Framework

Paramount to un-muddying the waters of learner-centered transformation is developing a language that can be used across models without the fear of misinterpretation. **The National Center for Innovation in Education** ([link](#)) and the **Educational Policy Improvement Center** (now known as Inflexion) ([link](#)) recognized this need in 2015 and co-developed their **Essential Skills and Dispositions Framework: Developmental Frameworks for Collaboration, Communications, Creativity, and Self-Direction** ([link](#)). This tool is for pioneering educators looking to assess "the elements of postsecondary readiness already integrated into student learning opportunities and where there is a need to enhance educational practices and environments." This framework acknowledges two key points when it comes to providing a holistic, learner-centered experience. One, the skills and dispositions developed during the learning journey are just as important as the knowledge obtained. Two, learning is a journey with no final destination. As you explore the framework's perspective on developing an environment focused on collaboration, communication, creativity, and self-direction, take note of how measuring these qualities goes from Beginner to Emerging Expert—always leaving room for growth.

The School of Life Project

Raising the social-emotional I.Q. of an entire generation of young learners is within our grasp. And, educators are becoming astutely aware of this opportunity. With the figurative library of SEL research piling up, **The School of Life Project** ([link](#)) has carved its own path in this space through an entirely different medium—film. Director and Founder Rick Stevenson initially set out to "interview 60 children in the Seattle area annually for 13 years (5,000 days) and ask each one a series of questions that would reveal what it's like to grow up in America today." This project not only grew far beyond the initial objective but also provided an enlightening framework that educators everywhere could implement in their local learning environments. It turns out that opening the space for learners to self-assess over the course of their childhoods, gives them the opportunity to reach revelations about life and their past experiences many adults never come close to attaining. The story of this project and what it provides young learners is worth every educator's consideration.

The School of Life Project Story ([link](#))

UPCOMING EVENTS

EDVISIONS ED°EXPO 2018 TWIN CITIES: FUEL YOUR VISION!

Falcon Heights, MN

Jan 26

[Conference Website](#)

7TH ANNUAL PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION SUMMIT

Baltimore, MD

Jan 27

[Register](#)

EDUCON 2018

Philadelphia, PA

Jan 26-28

[Conference Website](#)

MID-ATLANTIC CONFERENCE ON PERSONALIZED LEARNING

Pittsburgh, PA

Feb 26-28

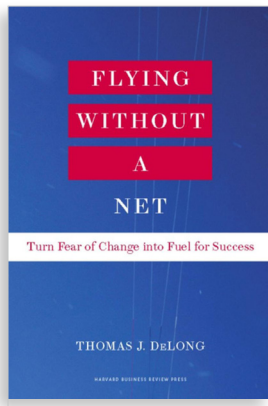
[Conference Website](#)

OPPORTUNITY BOARD

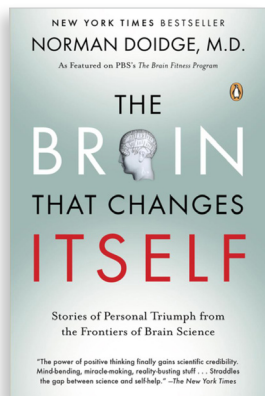
Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center is looking for two learner-centered pioneers to join their ranks as a Residential Life Program Coordinator and a Student Services Program Manager. Read more about the positions [here](#).

The Bezos Scholarship Program is seeking applications from high school juniors to participate at the Aspen Ideas Festival in June 2018. Learn more about this opportunity [here](#).

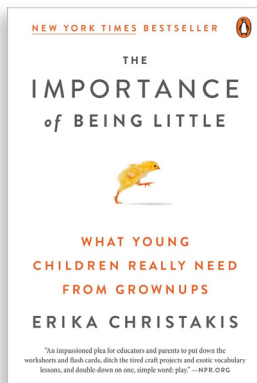
Crosstown High, a brand new learner-centered environment set to open July 1st, 2018, is hiring for a variety of educator positions. Find out more and apply [here](#).

**Flying Without a Net: Turn Fear of Change into Fuel for Success** by Thomas J. DeLong

Before any of us are able to take on monumental challenges, we must first understand ourselves. What is the root of our anxiety when looking to achieve great things? What are our go-to destructive behaviors when that anxiety shows up? How can we find strength in vulnerability and push ourselves to unrivaled success? In *Flying Without a Net*, Thomas J. DeLong invites you to explore the space between your ears and develop a self-awareness that, preventing you from going off the deep end of your anxieties, might instead lead the way to a transformative future.

**The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science** by Norman Doidge

As we venture our way into the vast unknown of the 21st century, advancements in neuroscience are likely to raise our eyebrows year after year. The final frontier of human anatomy, the brain used to be thought of as an organ to be studied on the assumption that it remained much the same throughout a person's life. However, as Norman Doidge displays in his book, *The Brain That Changes Itself*, the discovery of neuroplasticity has thrown that assumption out the window and opened a brand new understanding of just how remarkable our brains truly are.

**The Importance of Being Little: What Young Children Really Need from Grownups** by Erika Christakis

The majority of learner-centered transformation is occurring in secondary environments. Much of this is due to the arbitrary limits we put on our younger learners. Can they really “own” their learning? Can they experience open-walled learning beyond the traditional field trip? These leading questions allow us to kick the can down the road and worry about perfecting our new systems with older learners first, without thinking too much about the new generations in waiting. Erika Christakis invites us to break away from this mindset in *The Importance of Being Little* and reconsider the possibilities of our youngest learners.

WORTH YOUR TIME

The Future of Smart

Last month, Education Reimagined's Associate Director, Ulcca Joshi Hansen took the TEDx stage to deliver a rousing speech on “The Future of Smart.” Sharing her personal story and in-depth research, you won't want to miss a single second. [Watch here](#)

Want to Set Students Up for Success? Make Room for Vulnerability

Two months ago, we featured the transformational work happening at One Stone in Idaho. Check out why vulnerability is a celebrated state of being at this remarkable environment in this *EdSurge* story. [Read here](#)

Will Robots Take Our Children's Jobs?

Our ability to set reasonable expectations for the future of work is diminishing. And, although this topic gets a lot of airtime, it's worthy of our continued interest. How is automation already impacting industries in wildly unpredictable ways? [Read here](#)

From our families to yours, we
wish you a very special holiday
season filled with love and joy.

— **EDUCATION REIMAGINED TEAM**

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