

pioneering

ISSUE 48 • JANUARY 11, 2018 • EDUCATION REIMAGINED

A NOTE FROM EDUCATION REIMAGINED

Kelly Young, Executive Director

NUVU STUDIO

Profile of their Learning Environment

2017 YEAR-END REVIEW

12 Inspiring Stories from a Dynamic Year
in Learner-Centered Education

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education 
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• connect. share. discover. lead. • pioneering

Dear Pioneers,

What's becoming clearer to me—now more than ever—is that because learner-centered is a mindset or paradigm shift, it impacts how we see and approach everything. One aspect of that shifted mindset is relating to everyone as a learner—not only young people but also the adults who support those young people as learners.

Moreover, we continue to notice that the paradigm has learners and learning at the center at every level of the system. In fact, no matter what part of the system you look at, you will see a fractal of the learner-centered paradigm.

For example, last week, I had the privilege of participating in a panel conversation on the **Shift Your Paradigm** podcast, hosted by Randy Ziegenfuss and Lynn Fuini-Hetten. During our conversation, we dug into learner-centered leadership, one of the many fractals that emerge from this transformational work. To reiterate, this fractal mimics the overall principles of the learner-centered mindset. We discussed how all learner-centered leaders:

- 1. Are learners themselves.** They don't have all (or even most) of the answers. They are actually more interested in asking the right questions.
- 2. Have a vision**—held and shared by them and the community they are leading.
- 3. See people as capable, curious, and wondrous.** When there's a question they don't have the answer to, they are willing to have their teams—adults and young people—discover the answers themselves and share their discovery with the community.
- 4. Embrace failing** as a necessary part of the learning process—for the young people and the adults.
- 5. Put the young learners' interests and learning at the center** of any question or inquiry, rather than emphasizing what is easiest or most convenient for the adults.

These were just a few of the takeaways I've had so far from the Shift Your Paradigm podcast series. Take a listen to [the latest episode](#) and [past episodes](#). I can assure you I've only scratched the surface of what there is to discover.

Continuing this theme of learning, we have a great issue of *Pioneering* to launch us into the new year. Enjoy the story of NuVu Studio in Massachusetts and follow it up with a wonderful collection of stories from 2017 that highlight the multidimensional diversity the learner-centered movement encompasses.

Happy New Year,
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.





NuVu Studio
CAMBRIDGE, MA

“NuVu has let me find a more motivated, more passionate, and happier version of myself. NuVu is the reason I’m happy about getting up before noon...though I’m not a morning person.” – CHRISTOPHER KITCHEN, LEARNER

WHEN YOU PICK UP THE PHONE AND CALL NUVU STUDIO, you’re greeted with a kind “hello” and a raucous environment in the background. The noise isn’t out of the ordinary. As Saba Ghole, Co-Founder and Chief Creative Officer, casually says, “This is NuVu.”

What is NuVu? Beyond the bustle, NuVu is a no classrooms, no subjects, no age cohorts, no A-F grades learner-centered environment that serves young people between the ages of 11-18. Learners take on multidisciplinary projects, most commonly on a two-week timeline, within a **socially embedded** environment that gives “collaboration” an entirely new meaning.

The open-ended projects at NuVu allow learners to make their learning **personalized, relevant, and contextualized** based on their interests and passions. Each project is led by a mentor (they are called “Coach” at NuVu) who is a professional from the field and includes graduates of Harvard or MIT. The Coach provides expertise on the subject matter most relevant to the project. Through this mentoring partnership, learners receive daily feedback and engage in daily reflection on their learning progress. This results in a more natural **competency-based** portfolio structure unabated by state curriculum requirements.

So, what does learning look like in action at NuVu? Let’s use Noah and Devin as an example. These two learners took interest in the motor skill development of children with cerebral palsy. To gain a robust understanding of the challenges these children face, the duo took advantage of the **open-walled** opportunities at NuVu by connecting with occupational therapists. Through these conversations, they learned children with cerebral palsy often have to buy specialized clothing that doesn’t require buttoning or zipping. These common tasks are simply too difficult and frustrating.

Noah and Devin, unleashing the **learner agency** they developed at NuVu, wanted to create a product that would allow these children to practice their motor skills in a fun and engaging way. They wanted to turn “difficult” and “frustrating” into “fun” and “engaging.” Noah and Devin believed with this tool, as the children grew older, they would have the freedom to wear any clothes their hearts desired. After conducting diligent research and producing multiple prototypes, the learners came up with a Skills Vest. This wearable vest has farm-themed objects that, when played with, enhance the user’s development in fine motor skills, bilateral coordination, zipping, pulling, and more.

When it’s all said and done, the learning that goes on at NuVu can’t be described in a single sentence or a single phrase like “project-based learning.” We can hardly express their dynamic learning in these few paragraphs. For their work to be truly appreciated, you must visit Cambridge, Massachusetts and experience it yourself. So, go ahead. Pick up the phone, say “hello,” and imagine what’s being created today as you listen to the sweet sound of learning in the background.

LEARN MORE

[NuVu Projects](#)

[What is NuVuX?](#)

[At NuVu Studios, Learning Is a Hands-On Experience](#)

FACTS & FIGURES

Private/Independent

11-18 ages served

Architectural studio model

340 unique studios (hands-on interdisciplinary courses) designed and run to date

1,300+ learner produced projects across different disciplinary areas

15 graduates gone on to college

Launched NuVuX network in 2016 with seven participating learning environments

3,000 learners reached

CONNECT

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12 Inspiring Stories from a Dynamic Year in Learner-Centered Education

Over the course of 2017, Education Reimagined published 22 issues of *Pioneering* thanks to the support and participation of learner-centered leaders from across the country. As a way to close the books on 2017 and launch ourselves into the new year, we want to use our first issue of 2018 to highlight the powerful voices we had the pleasure of amplifying throughout 2017.

These 12 selections are not just based on popularity from the perspective of our readers or our editorial staff. Rather, they are our attempt to represent the learner-centered movement as a whole. *Pioneering* has always been a publication striving to showcase the great diversity of this movement. Below, you'll find voices of all ages, environment types (public, private, charter, and alternative), leadership levels, and geographic locations. This is only a snippet of who is involved in this transformational work, and we can't wait to showcase even more in the new year.

January

[UNLOCKING THE DOOR TO MY FUTURE](#)

by Jemar Lee

From getting escorted out of school by police officers to taking the stage at national education conferences, Jemar Lee has a learner-centered story too powerful to ignore. Thanks to Jemar's personal drive to find an educational model that fit his needs, he discovered Iowa BIG, which led to opportunities that he (and we) believe should be available to every learner in the United States. Jemar's story is unique, as is every learner's, but his experience within a system that didn't meet his needs can be found in communities from coast to coast.

March

[HOW FIVE EDUCATORS DECIDED TO ACT ON THEIR BELIEFS AND TRANSFORM THEIR ENVIRONMENT](#)

by Danae Secunde

Grassroots-driven and top-enabled. Time and time again, we have seen these two characteristics come up in stories of education transformation. We have seen a single individual or small group (be it young learners, parents, educators, or active community members) create massive change by following their dreams of what

education could be. In March, we had the opportunity to amplify such a story from West Newfield, Maine where five educators decided they were going to lead the way in transforming learning in their community.

April

WHY I EXPECT TO BE GREAT

by Keyonna Griffin

When our Senior Writer, Paul Haluszczak, hopped on the phone with learners from McComb School District in Mississippi, everything was business as usual. The learners were pitching great ideas about potential articles in an energizing conversation. But, Paul began to notice something not so familiar—these learners were speaking of early educational experiences as if they were happening today. To his amazement, he discovered these learners were in fact only 10 years old. Keyonna's story is one of many that will demonstrate the difference learner-centered education makes for learners of all ages.

May

HOW THIS ALTERNATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IS WEAVING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS INTO THEIR LEARNER-CENTERED PRACTICE

by Monique Uzelac and Sarah Giddings

The term "alternative" being applied to a school has often caused people to ignore or overlook the learner-centered ideas blooming in environments serving our most discouraged and disadvantaged youth. Fortunately, as 2017 was seemingly a coming out party for the long-awaited recognition of social-emotional learning, alternative environments are beginning to garner more of the spotlight—deservedly so. There is no better example than the inspiring work of WAVE in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Discover how they have made social-emotional learning a foundation in every aspect of their learners' experiences.

June

A CONVERSATION WITH HENRY COUNTY SCHOOLS' KAREN PERRY

Transforming a single learning environment is a big challenge. Transforming an entire district that serves over 42,000 learners is seemingly impossible. That is, of course, if you don't have the proper support. At Henry County Schools just outside of Atlanta, Georgia, Karen Perry is leading the charge in garnering the support necessary to move the district in unison. As the Special Projects Coordinator, she gave insight on how the district operated before embarking on their transformational journey, how the district distinguishes learner-centered education, how each environment within the district maintains a unique identity, and much more.

August

A CONVERSATION WITH AVESON CHARTER SCHOOLS' KATE BEAN

As learning environments embark on their learner-centered journeys, it is imperative for them to find leaders who have been at this work for many years—hopefully helping them to minimize or, even, avoid future trials and tribulations. Kate Bean is one

“Kids actually want to have the independence to show their learning in a way that fits their interests.”

**KAREN PERRY,
A CONVERSATION
WITH KAREN PERRY**

of those leaders. As the Executive Director and founder of Aveson Charter Schools, Kate has been in the game of learner-centered transformation for 11 years. When we spoke with her, she shared why she was inspired to open Aveson in 2007, what her experience as a financial planner and life coach taught her about education, and how Aveson has cultivated an alumni network that is possibly more involved than that of many universities.

WE HAVE THE POWER TO TRANSFORM EDUCATION

by Grant Lichtman

Grant Lichtman is known for many things within the education field, but in 2017, he wanted you to know him for one message—you don’t need permission to transform education in your community. In education, we often confuse tradition with law. And, when we look at the fine print, we realize it isn’t so fine after all. When we discover how much freedom is truly available to us in deciding how we educate our children, the doors of opportunity fly open. In Grant’s article for *Pioneering*, he quickly addresses the “why” and “what” of transformation and uses the rest of his words to show “how” we can all do it in our own way.

October

A CONVERSATION WITH ONE STONE LEADERS

It’s always a privilege when we find the golden hour in a learning environment’s schedule that allows multiple leaders to join our conversations. Such was the case with the quartet of voices we heard from at One Stone in Boise, Idaho. From the Co-Founder and first official program hire to the Community Engagement Director and School Director, our readers got a chance to see a learner-centered environment from a host of perspectives. Explore the One Stone story from their original identity as a community service non-profit to officially becoming an education environment. Their favorite learner stories are our favorite part.



Left to Right: Ulcca Joshi Hansen, Education Reimagined; Jemar Lee, Iowa BIG, IA; Vanella Tadjuidje, Pike Road Schools, AL; Keyonna Griffin and Jada Rollins, McComb School District, MS; Ikonkar Kaur Khalsa, Lindsay, USD, CA .

“It is not enough to talk about why education must change. And, if we stop worrying too much about the details of “what,” there is enough agreement to move forward with courage and speed.”

**GRANT LICHTMAN,
WE HAVE THE POWER
TO TRANSFORM
EDUCATION**

November

[LUCKY ME: THE UNEXPECTED OPPORTUNITY THAT PUT MY TOWN ON THE MAP](#)

by Colby Mills

We had the pleasure of highlighting many stories from learners at Pike Road Schools in Alabama this past year. Pike Road serves as an exciting story of a brand new environment experiencing growing pains as a community. Colby's experience transitioning from a school-centered environment to a learner-centered one, and the opportunities he found along the way, captures so many elements of the Pike Road Schools journey. It's a must read.

[A CONVERSATION WITH FUTURE SCHOOL OF FORT SMITH'S TRISH FLANAGAN](#)

As Future School of Fort Smith's Superintendent, Trish found herself in Arkansas on her path to building a more equitable world. With her myriad domestic and international experiences, Trish became an expert in bringing communities together, which came in handy when enrolling the Fort Smith community in supporting the opening of the only charter school within a 100 mile radius. From there, community involvement has been a staple of Fort Smith's evolution.

[CAPITALIZING ON THE NATURAL STRUCTURES OF FREEDOM](#)

by Jenny Finn

With learner agency as a key element in learner-centered implementation, one of the biggest questions is how can we marry freedom with structure. Jenny Finn, Co-Founder of Springhouse Community School in Floyd, Virginia addresses this question in a profound way. And, to best describe why you should read her piece, we'll let her words do the talking—"just as a structure that is too tight does not bring forth vitality and authenticity, a learning structure that is too expansive leaves learners parameter-less and not knowing where their edges are, leading to stress, overwhelm, and failure that is not transformative."

December

[A CONVERSATION WITH HIGH SCHOOL FOR THE RECORDING ARTS' TONY SIMMONS AND JOEY CIENIAN](#)

Possibly the most unique learning environment we profiled this year, High School for the Recording Arts is another example of the revolutionary transformation taking place at many traditionally "alternative" environments across the country. Speaking with Tony and Joey captured the true essence of the learner-centered movement. Tony said it best when asked how learner involvement in local politics has helped expose their work—"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."

To explore all of our 2017 issues of *Pioneering*, head over to [our archive of past issues](#). Thank you to all of the incredible pioneers who shared their stories with us in 2017. We can't wait to hear from more of you in the year ahead!

"When things aren't working, we summon the courage and cultivate the skills necessary to make changes that better serve our community."

**JENNY FINN,
CAPITALIZING ON THE
NATURAL STRUCTURES
OF FREEDOM**



Character Lab

The strength of our character, although inconveniently difficult to measure, predicts just as much about the possibilities of our futures as our I.Q.s and socioeconomic status—if not more. Due to the measurement difficulty, however, focusing on character development within our traditional schools is often left unaddressed. The founders of [Character Lab](#) identified this gap between what we know and what we practice and have made it their mission to fill it. As educators and researchers, they have access to both sides of the research-to-practice puzzle and have designed [Playbooks](#) for educators to deploy and adapt as needed to meet the needs of their local learning communities. Targeted for ages ten and up, these playbooks allow young learners to engage in developing character strengths like grit, self-control, curiosity, growth mindset, gratitude, purpose, and zest. Explore what Character Lab has to offer and see how character building can be a foundational piece in your community's learning experience.

Playbooks [\(link\)](#)

Character Strengths [\(link\)](#)

Equity at the Center: A Tool for Assessing Communication about Teaching and Learning

Communication strategies within our learning communities and the messages we share to the broader public can cause inequitable results without us ever knowing it. If our messaging is only constructed from our personal lenses or the lenses of our small teams, we can fall short on providing accessible language for all who come across our work. [The Students at the Center Hub](#) recognized this reality within their own organization and, with an outside consultant, developed a tool called [Equity at the Center](#). This tool was built as a check on their ongoing communications to ensure their work better aligns with their mission “to ensure that education is a lever for both equity and social justice.” They adapted their learnings to accommodate any learning environment or organization that is in pursuit of realizing a similarly equitable future. Discover where your Text and Image Messaging stand using their rubric, then explore what actions you can take to enhance your messaging practices.

Resource Overview [\(link\)](#)

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

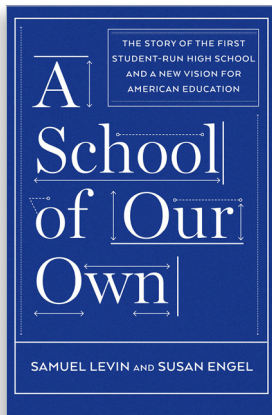
[Conference Website](#)

OPPORTUNITY BOARD

**Eagle Rock School and Profes-
sional Development Center** is

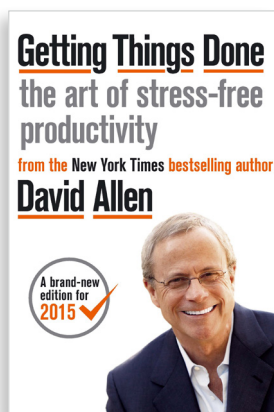
looking for two learner-centered pioneers to join their ranks as a Residential Life Program Coordinator and a Student Services Program Manager. Read more about the positions [here](#).

HundrED is accepting submissions for their 2018 HundrED Schools initiative, which scours the globe for innovative environments changing the face of education. Apply [here](#).



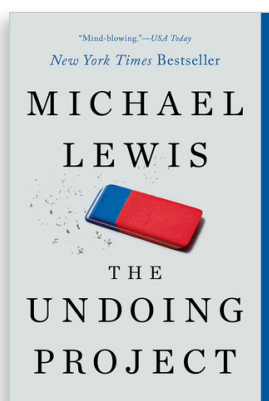
A School of Our Own: The Story of the First Student-Run High School and a New Vision for American Education by Samuel Levin and Susan Engel

Can we really expect young learners to take ownership of their learning—of their future—if given the opportunity? Won't they take advantage of the freedom they're afforded and make unwise decisions? This line of questioning is all too familiar to anyone pioneering their way to a learner-centered future. Although we've all developed our own answers to these questions, *A School of Our Own* might be the skeptic-halting antidote we've been looking for. In Samuel Levin and Susan Engel's book, discover how learners weren't just given the freedom to follow their interests and passions but were actually put in charge of designing and operating the learning environment themselves.



Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity by David Allen

When you consciously decide to jump away from the familiar in hopes of landing on solid ground in a transformative future, you have a 100% chance of experiencing one thing—stress. You'll find stress contemplating the leap itself, hanging in mid-air once you've taken action, and just before you look up after landing. Transformative work can put incredible strain on our primal nature. What's familiar is safe. What's unfamiliar is not. *Getting Things Done* by David Allen can serve as a stress-reducing guide along the way, so you can spend less time worrying and more time doing.



The Undoing Project: A Friendship that Changed Our Minds by Michael Lewis

Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky gave rise to the groundbreaking field of behavioral economics some four decades ago. Their Nobel-worthy work fused their discoveries of the irrational mind with a new age of economic theory. *The Undoing Project*, Michael Lewis' tale of the evolving relationship between these two historic figures, provides two entirely unique insights we can keep top of mind in our daily lives. The most obvious is the litany of cognitive biases Kahneman and Tversky unveiled over the course of their careers (from confirmation bias to negativity bias). The less obvious, yet just as instructive, is watching these biases play out in the relationship between these two pioneers themselves.

WORTH YOUR TIME

9 Charts That Show What Education in America Is Like in 2017

It's impossible to capture everything that is happening with education in the United States due to the lack of data on many significant qualitative elements. However, these charts express an unexpectedly varied set of lenses through which to view our system at every level of learning.

[Read here](#)

Best Jobs Without A Degree in 2017

Learners who graduate from learner-centered environments are often introduced to opportunities that expand well beyond the singular goal of attending college. Here are ten intriguing opportunities that don't require a college degree.

[Read here](#)

'When' Does Learning Happen Best? Dan Pink on the Science Behind Timing and Education

Dan Pink, author of *Drive*, has just released a brand new book about the science behind perfect timing. He applied his research to education in a fascinating talk with *EdSurge*.

[Read here](#)

“Individuals who push their organizations, who inspire other individuals to change the rules, thrive. Again, we’re back to leadership which can come from anyone, anywhere in the organization.” — **SETH GODIN, *TRIBES***

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