

Research Agenda

2024-2029



Overview

By incorporating research, Education Reimagined is positioning itself to have a stronger impact as a catalyst for K-12 education transformation in the United States. At Education Reimagined, research is understood as a systematic approach to gathering and analyzing information to generate learning, wherein a series of scientific principles and procedures are followed to increase the reliability and validity of insight.

Education Reimagined aims to **advance thinking** about learner-centered education and ecosystems by **curating, producing, and leveraging evidence-based research and resources** to catalyze the invention of a new system for public education. Research is conducted internally, with partners, or through commissioned work to curate secondary research (i.e., drawing from existing literature and studies) and to produce primary research (i.e., generating new data). In addition, outputs from these research activities are leveraged to advance learner-centered efforts.

The purpose of this agenda is to guide the direction of Education Reimagined's research work. It serves as a tool that directs the organization's research endeavors, projects, collaborations, and more. Education Reimagined's research is grounded in two primary themes:

- 1 The field of learner-centered education
- 2 Learner-centered, community-based ecosystems

Field Research is aimed at better understanding and documenting the efficacy and impact of learner-centered education as an approach. Whereas, ecosystems research is aimed at investigating and illuminating the systemic conditions that enable learner-centered ecosystems to emerge and their broader impact.



The Field of Learner-Centered Education

Research Focus Areas

Field Research Focus Area 1: Learner-Centered Education & The Key Elements

What theoretical, empirical, and practical evidence contributes to the conceptualization of learner-centered education?

The purpose of this first focus area is to enhance understanding of the learner-centered vision by incorporating a research lens.

Education Reimagined's vision for learner-centered education has been continuously refined since its inception in 2015.

By providing a basis that is enriched with theoretical, empirical, and practical evidence, research investigations nested within this domain establish clarity on the conceptualization of learner-centered education and its key elements.

These five key elements include

- 1 Learner agency
- 2 Socially-embedded
- 3 Personalized, relevant, and contextualized
- 4 Open-walled
- 5 Competency-based

Showing the ways that learner-centered education is grounded in research can support practitioners, movement leaders, and others to advocate for its implementation within the context of their networks and local communities. The work of decision makers, such as funders and policy influencers, may be bolstered by this focus area in that they can assist with the conditions necessary for learner-centered environments to emerge and be sustained over time. Additionally, conceptualization development activities can contribute to a foundation of insight upon which future research endeavors can be proposed, designed, and enacted by Education Reimagined, as well as other researchers and thought leaders.



Field Research Focus Area 2: Learner-Centered Practices

How does learner-centered education manifest in practice?

This second focus area is aimed at exploring how learner-centered education is applied in practice.

Lines of inquiry within this focus area primarily involve the study of the learner-centered practices as they are enacted by practitioners in learner-centered settings and as they are experienced by young people. The intent for these investigations is to explore the many ways that the learner-centered approach can manifest in practice and to

reveal the conditions that give rise to or hinder its full expression in learning environments.

Practitioners who are interested in implementing a learner-centered approach can benefit from these lines of inquiry. Research that addresses this area of study can augment the work of learner-centered practitioners and sites by offering additional ideas on how to translate the approach into practice and the strengths and challenges associated with those efforts. Offering research-backed evidence on learner-centered practices could also inform teacher education and training programs and assist with the design of pre-service or in-service professional learning experiences.

Field Research Focus Area 3: The Impact of Learner-Centered Education

How does learner-centered education influence holistic outcomes for learners, adults who contribute to their learning, and their communities?

The purpose of the third area of focus relates to the holistic impacts of learner-centered education at multiple levels.

Investigations into the ways that learner-centered education impacts learners can involve the study of learners' cognitive, social, and emotional development. Organizational inquiries might involve examining the influence that the approach has on adults' (e.g., parents/caregivers, educators, and mentors) perceptions of learning-environment climate in relation to how it best positions them to support learners. Community-level inquiries could focus both on how learners contribute to their communities and how community entities hold themselves as active players in the learning landscape.

To build the field, and assist with the conditions needed for ecosystems to be created and sustained, there is a need to illuminate the challenges and triumphs related to the impact of learner-centered education. Studies within this focus area can open opportunities for Education Reimagined to partner and collaborate with practitioners and thought leaders in their participation in and co-leading of research endeavors. Practitioners can use evidence gleaned from these studies to further their individual and collective work in the greater field of learner-centered education.

These research investigations can be leveraged to influence the decision-making processes of funders who want to invest in reimagined educational possibilities for young people. They could also be useful for policy influencers who are interested in promoting conditions that could allow for the spread of the learner-centered field. Furthermore, learners, families, and communities who are exploring educational possibilities can be informed by an evidence base demonstrating the impact of learner-centered education.



Learner-Centered Ecosystem

Research Focus Areas

Ecosystems Research Focus Area 1: Components & Functions of Learner-Centered Ecosystems

How do the components and functions of learner-centered ecosystems vary across the country?

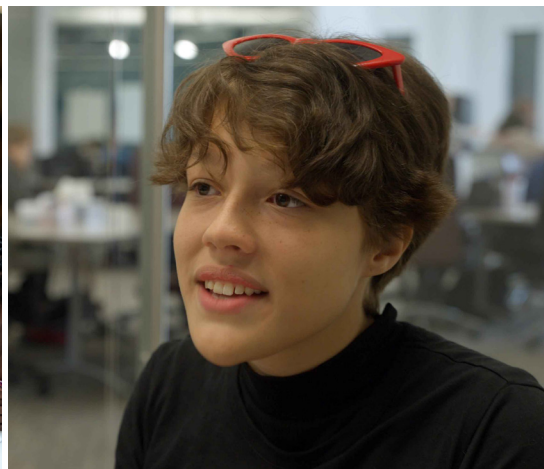
The first focus area is to understand the components of a learner-centered ecosystem, the functions they serve, and how these vary across different community contexts.

Like natural ecosystems, education ecosystems consist of a complex network of various components including educators, learners, families, communities, policies, and more. Education ecosystems show up in various forms across the country, differing in their connectedness and how their components interact within their robust infrastructure. The differences can be seen in the specific roles and functions of various components, as well as how these components collaborate and integrate to support learning.

Education Reimagined seeks to draw attention to learner-centered, community-based ecosystems, which are theorized to have several shared characteristics. These include learner-centered learning journeys, carefully designed learning environments supported by a responsive, structural infrastructure, and an interconnected support system for all ecosystem participants (e.g., learners, advisors, coordinators, etc.). How these characteristics are conceptualized and

operationalized across different ecosystems in the United States will vary based on the unique context of that community's cultural, economic, political, and historical dynamics.

Building clarity around the continuum of ways that community-based, learner-centered ecosystem characteristics show up in communities is critical for several reasons. First, a shared understanding of these characteristics will promote shared learning about their relevance and effectiveness by enabling assessments based on meaningful criteria and benchmarks. Without such shared understanding, there is a risk of exposing learner-centered ecosystems to premature conclusions regarding their effectiveness. Second, a deeper understanding of these characteristics can inform the sketching of emergent ecosystems and practitioners looking for guideposts for direction. Relatedly, funders who are interested in investing in educational transformation can have clarity on when their investments contribute to efforts aligned with learner-centered ecosystems and when they do not. Furthermore, policy influencers are better positioned to contribute to policies that open, as opposed to close, the parameters for these characteristics to exist. Lastly, such clarity is crucial to inform future research, providing a foundation for studies that can further refine and improve our collective understanding of learner-centered ecosystems.



Ecosystems Research Focus Area 2: The Emergence and Sustainability of Ecosystems

How do learner-centered ecosystems emerge, how are they implemented, and how do they sustain themselves across communities?

The second focus area includes deepening understanding of how learner-centered ecosystems emerge and sustain themselves within communities.

Preliminary research¹ conducted by Education Reimagined found that there are four key factors that play a role in how ecosystems unfold in a given community.

Those factors include

- 1 The presence of people who are grounded in a shared vision
- 2 Practices that are aligned and reinforcing a strong network
- 3 Connections at multiple levels to hold the ecosystem infrastructure
- 4 Supporting financial and policy conditions

¹ Education Reimagined & The History CoLab (2023). *Ecosystems for the Future of Learning*. <https://thebigidea.education-reimagined.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Ecosystems-for-the-Future-of-Learning-FINAL-Report.pdf>

This exploration also revealed various entry points (i.e., public district and charter authorizer, district-led programs or schools, homeschool learning center, out-of-school intermediary, and a regional or national network) from which communities can evolve into an ecosystem. In light of these findings, contributing to an understanding of how contextual differences shape the ways learner-centered ecosystems emerge is important. More specifically, it is essential to pinpoint patterns and trends that could lead to success or failure in implementing ecosystems. In addition to studying their emergence, this focus area seeks to explore how ecosystems are implemented and sustained to demonstrate the extent to which such transformation is viable despite varying community characteristics.

The practical examples lifted through this line of inquiry can illustrate the inherent complexity of ecosystem implementation and how associated challenges can be navigated. Disseminating learnings about strategies for initiating and implementing processes toward a local, learner-centered ecosystem vision can inspire ecosystem inventors to innovate and refine their approach for cultivating ecosystems.



Ecosystems Research Focus Area 3: The Impact of Learner-Centered Ecosystems

How do learner-centered ecosystems influence holistic outcomes for learners, adults who contribute to their learning, and their communities?

The third focus area is to understand how learner-centered ecosystems impact learners, adults who contribute to their learning, and communities from a holistic lens.

Education Reimagined believes that ecosystems have the greatest potential to make learner-centered education equitably and effectively available to every child within a community and nationwide. As such, a common set of outcomes for learner experiences is anticipated across learner-centered sites and ecosystems; however, by exploring such outcomes within the context of transformative systems designed to embrace learner-centered education, it is expected those outcomes will be strengthened in an ecosystem. There are also unique outcomes, particularly at the systems level, that are applicable to ecosystems.

Despite decades of research exploring the association between factors that would constitute core components of ecosystems, the application of learner-centered ecosystems is a novel endeavor in the field, thereby rendering this investigation area a critical priority. The paramount importance of exploring the impact of learner-centered ecosystems lies in establishing clarity regarding the degree to which this transformative approach represents

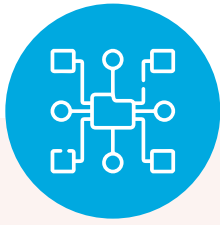
a promising path forward for promoting educational equity—as defined by an educational system that meets the dynamic needs of all learners. This clarity will bolster ongoing investment in allocating resources (i.e., people, time, and money) to operationalize this vision by instilling confidence in whether this avenue is, indeed, worth pursuing. Furthermore, it is crucial to delve into the impact of learner-centered ecosystems to grasp how various facets of ecosystems influence outcomes to inform ecosystem improvement efforts.

Given learner-centered ecosystems are intricate arrangements, there is much to comprehend about the pathways through which they influence learner, adult, and community outcomes. Accordingly, investigations exploring these associations may reveal opportunities to strengthen their effectiveness, including intervening at the local, state, or national level via practices or policies. This insight can further catalyze innovation in the design of learner-centered ecosystems, bolstering their capacity to enhance outcomes via practical examples. Relatedly, exploring this focus area is crucial to cultivate a deeper understanding of the most important outcomes that an education system should strive to produce and value. Currently, there are varying views on the purpose of education. Witnessing the types of impact ecosystems can have may help align thinking about the purpose of education in new ways.



Research Approach

Education Reimagined is committed to centering equity as a core value in its approach to scientific inquiry. More specifically, Education Reimagined aims to ensure that the methods employed are grounded in several equity-aligned principles² including



Leveraging strengths-based frameworks that acknowledge the sociohistorical context of people's lived experience, embrace a holistic view of individuals' lived experiences, and recognize community assets as valuable resources. Example frameworks include Positive Youth Development³, the Integrative Model for the Study of Developmental Competencies in Minority Children⁴, and the Phenomenological Variant Ecological Systems Theory⁵.



Prioritizing collaborative approaches by partnering with involved communities to identify shared learning goals, research questions, research methods, interpretation, and dissemination that are meaningful to them. To this end, Education Reimagined will engage in several key research strategies, such as action research⁶. Strategies can also involve partnering with learner-centered education sites and emergent learner-centered ecosystems to cultivate new relationships and nurture existing relationships, thereby laying the groundwork for meaningful collaboration.



Valuing a wide range of evidence that can speak to the context and proposed solutions for transforming public education and is derived from both quantitative (e.g., survey) and qualitative (e.g., community voice and lived experience) data. Education Reimagined utilizes a diverse range of research methods to gain well-informed insights. These research methods may encompass surveys, observations, interviews, focus groups, and case studies.

This research agenda offers clarity and a rationale for Education Reimagined's research priorities. Given these themes and focus areas, the organization welcomes potential research collaborations and partnerships among those with shared learning goals. By highlighting research needs in relation to the learner-centered field and ecosystems, the intention for Education Reimagined's research undertakings is to impact the transformation of education. As these research endeavors progress, the agenda will evolve to reflect growing understanding and, along with this, inform organizational goals and initiatives.

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²Venkateswaran, N., Feldman, J., Hawkins, S., Lewis, M. A., Armstrong-Brown, J., Comfort, M., Lowe, A., and Pineda, D. (2023). *Bringing an equity-centered framework to research: Transforming the researcher, research content, and practice of research*. RTI Press Publication No. OP-0085-2301. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI Press. <https://doi.org/10.3768/rtipress.2023.op.0085.2301>

³Lerner, R. M., & Lerner, J. V. (2013). The positive youth development perspective: Theoretical and empirical bases. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 23(1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12008>

⁴Garcia Coll, C., Lamberty, G., Jenkins, R., McAdoo, H. P., Cnric, K., Wasik, B. H., & Vázquez García, H. (1996). An integrative model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children. *Child Development*, 67(5), 1891-1914. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.1996.tb01834.x>

⁵Spencer, M. B. (2006). Phenomenology and ecological systems theory: Development of diverse groups. In R. M. Lerner & W. Damon (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Theoretical models of human development* (pp. 829-893). John Wiley & Sons Inc.

⁶Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (2008). Introduction: Inquiry and the practice of action research. *Handbook of Action Research*, 1(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849209838.n1>