REIMAGINING EDUCATION TOGETHER

So that all young people can thrive in a world of constant change
INTRODUCTION

Education is our greatest lever for human, social and economic change. At a time when our society faces poor social mobility, unacceptable gaps in attainment, rising mental health issues and a lack of the skills needed for 21st century careers, we must question whether the education systems we’ve created are meeting our needs. If they fit our purpose.

There has been a lot of change in education, but despite the best intentions and efforts of those involved many of these changes have inadvertently narrowed education’s purpose, scope and impact.

Reimagining Education Together began with a recognition that change was needed, but an open enquiry into how it could happen. We deliberately sought out a wide range of opinions and expertise from teachers, policy experts, employers, technologists, neuroscientists, parents and young people. We found a growing consensus in that in order to support all young people to thrive in a world of constant change we needed to think differently about what we are educating for and how we are going about it. If we are to truly prepare young people for life, work and citizenship in the modern world we need both a broader view of success and a broader view of the learning ecosystem.

We found brilliant examples of teachers, schools and leaders creating change, but too often they faced huge systemic challenges. It was our aim to shine a light on the bright spots where ecosystems are working together for transformative change; to recognise their leadership and learn from their experiences in order to inspire others to step into the possibility of change.

With the help of a range of global experts and their networks we identified an initial twenty educational pioneers who are successfully driving transformative change within their own systems.

As we spoke to these pioneers of educational change, we became as interested in how change occurred as what that change could be. Shared experiences, hard-won lessons and similarities in approach to creating change emerged from around the world, regardless of whether the innovation was at a national, city or school level. Through their stories, we recognised a new model of transformative change that is human-centred and built on foundations of trust, experimentation and open conversation.

This shared practice demonstrated that not only is change necessary; it is also possible. It showed us that the answer to how change happens is together.

FOREWORD

How we approach education – what we prioritise, how we learn and who we value – sets the tone for many patterns throughout society. Yet it is often seen as someone else’s problem, something too entrenched to change, or simply just the way things are done.

Through exploring global bright spots of change we have seen that the journey to reimagining education starts with people from across the education ecosystem who are not prepared to accept the status quo. They question not only the process but also the purpose of education. They have the vision to look at what we collectively need for the long term. The courage to start the journey when there isn’t a road map. And the humility to recognise that it can’t (and shouldn’t) be done alone. To lead in this way requires an ability to share power in an unusual way. The results are far more powerful when done ‘with’ not ‘to’ the community.

We have learnt much from these pioneers and the way they have approached change. This is a summary of some of those findings. It has certainly given us hope that big change is possible. We hope this report reawakens the potential in each of us to play an active role in how we lead change and support the next generation.

There is no simple solution, no silver bullet. We are the system.

They say it takes a village to raise a child. We wholeheartedly agree, but it also takes a whole child to raise a village. We must make sure every child gets all they need to thrive, so the next generation can lead the way in navigating a fast changing world – for the sake of all our futures.

Essie North
CEO, Big Change

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REIMAGINING EDUCATION TOGETHER

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Front cover photo by Jonas Jacobsson on Unsplash
The case for change is a question of purpose. To reimagine what education can be, we must first question what it is for. The success of current systems of education are primarily judged by the academic attainment of students in standardised tests, covering individual subjects. This is what our education systems are designed to deliver on.

New research commissioned by Big Change with YouGov and TeacherTapp shows that academic success in exams is only one part of what we hope for from our education system. Parents, teachers and students want education to prepare young people for life, work and citizenship.

70% of students want to learn life skills such as effective communication and money management, but less than a third believe school provides this. 87% of teachers wish that school prepared children to make a positive difference to society, but only 36% think this is the case. Parents care more about education preparing their child for getting a job and finding their passions, than they do about passing exams.

Whether we look at it from an economic, a social or a moral point of view there is a compelling case that we must think differently about how we are supporting the next generation to thrive. The world today is more complex, more connected, and more volatile than ever before. It is filled with huge possibility, but also a new responsibility. We have unwittingly narrowed education’s purpose, scope, and impact.

We need an education system that is as interdisciplinary as the problems and opportunities we face; as innovative as the interventions and solutions we need; as inclusive as the world we want for our children; as broad as the dreams we have for our future and as unique as every one of us.

There are many teachers, schools and programs leading the way. But those changes we seek are too often happening despite the broader system rather than because of it. We wanted to explore what and how it would work if the system was supporting change rather than hindering it.
One of the growing trends we have observed is the changing narrative and evidence around what education (in its broadest sense) is aiming to achieve.

International economic organisations such as the OECD and World Economic Forum, alongside social, youth and educational think tanks have convened experts, studied data and surveyed employers, teachers and students to try to answer fundamental questions about the kind of education systems we need to support learning for the future.

Their sense of urgency is informed not just by our current needs, but by the potential impact of major social and economic trends, such as the rise of AI and automation, shifting geo-political landscapes, climate change and rising economic inequality.

There is a great deal of consensus in their conclusions. To tackle the challenges of the future, we need to look to education systems for a broader set of outcomes that support ‘whole child’ development and help young people develop the capability to thrive through change and become agents of change themselves.

Their findings touch both on curriculum and delivery and the actors involved in young people’s learning.

We have identified five common themes that unite these new visions of learning.

1. **Broader Measures of Success**
   - Pursue a broader set of educational goals valuing cognitive, social, emotional and physical wellbeing so young people are set up to thrive and contribute positively to the community around them.

2. **Building Agents of Change**
   - Build transformational capabilities in young people such as reflection, creativity, responsibility and resilience that allow them to be agents of change in their own lives.

3. **Learning to Learn & Relearn**
   - Support young people’s metacognitive skills and cultivate an appetite for lifelong learning and the ability to re-learn throughout their career.

4. **Knowledge, Skills & Attitudes**
   - Design teaching and learning experiences that support growth in knowledge, skills and attitudes without compromising focus, rigour or transferability.

5. **Many Points of Learning**
   - Recognise the role and value of people and places working together to support learning: teachers, parents, peers, communities, businesses and civic institutions in a connected ecosystem.

By 2022, no less than 54% of all employees will require significant re- and upskilling. ‘Human’ skills such as creativity, originality and initiative, critical thinking, persuasion and negotiation will … retain or increase their value.

**World Economic Forum 2018**

Future-ready students need to exercise agency, in their own education and throughout life. Agency implies a sense of responsibility to participate in the world and, in so doing, to influence people, events and circumstances for the better.

**Future of Education and Skills Education 2030, OECD**

Our education systems must move from batch processing and ranking students to understanding and nurturing the full potential of every individual. All children deserve to be known and nurtured, and in doing so we give ourselves the best chance to cultivate the broad range of talents we need to thrive individually and collectively.

**Todd Rose, Director of the Harvard Graduate School of Education Mind Brain and Education Program Author of The End of Average and Dark Horse**

Practitioners need to conceptualize life skills as a range of competencies (what one can do that enable girls (and boys) to function, thrive, and adapt in their lived realities, rather than a narrow set of skills for life.

**Translating Competencies to Empowered Action - Brookings 2017**
In a world of constant change there is no identifiable end state. The shift to change-readiness is to move from a relatively static system to one that is adaptive and able to evolve as needs and learning change. From change as an event to be managed, to change as a muscle to be built and a practice to be honed. From change that happens to people, to change that happens with people.

Poorly managed change can be very damaging, and lead to ‘change fatigue’ and a resistance from those most affected by the process. Many changes to education are reactive. These changes tend to respond to isolated symptoms of problems at a moment in time, like updating a new element into the curriculum, or introducing new programs, tests or accountability measures. While well intentioned the sum result can be a system under strain with growing pressure and constantly changing demands.

This reactive process has a negative impact on the wellbeing of educators. As Carl Ward, President of the UK’s Association of School and College Leaders, said in his annual speech, “Our workforce is exhausted. Because we are exhausted... [we need] a new way of constructing and implementing education policy that is about how we manage change in a different way... It must be cohesive and co-constructed.”

Adaptive systems require a cohesive long-term strategy that can be co-owned at all levels. This way a transformative vision can be developed beyond any single electoral cycle. In Finland it was a long-term strategy, cross-party consensus and national buy-in that enabled the nation to make meaningful changes to their education system over time and continue to adapt and experiment in sustainable ways.

### Change as an Event

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**Short policy cycles do not allow for the time that it takes for sustained positive movement in one direction... when somebody comes in with a particular political agenda, then everybody has to shift to the next best thing.”**

**Connie Chung, Education 2030 Working Group Leader, OECD**

**We decided together... that education is to build a nation — that it goes beyond the politics and the political powers...this main idea of providing a good education, publicly financed education, for every single child.**

**Pasi Sahlberg, Former Director General of Finland’s Ministry of Education and Culture**
A broader vision for education should not and cannot fall solely to teachers and schools. To truly change outcomes for young people we need to put them at the centre.

A broader set of actors already play a role: from learners and peers, to parents and communities, teachers and leaders, media and influencers, employers and civic leaders. There already is a broader learning ecosystem. However, it often isn’t working together particularly well – which is at best a lost opportunity and at worst, severely damaging to a young person’s development. Understanding and supporting the needs and roles of the people and players involved is key to preparing young people to thrive in life, work and citizenship.

Successful collective impact requires actors to play a role that is aligned to their unique strengths and position, and equally to recognise their limitations and the valued contributions of the other players. Teachers can be powerful agents of change if empowered and given the space and support to do so. Peers can be an untapped learning and support resource. Parents and carers can create a supportive environment to shape learning in and out of the classroom. Funders can support long term innovation. Local government can join the dots between services.

A growing number of initiatives show that this ecosytemic approach to education is happening at a city or place-based level. Innovation Unit director Valerie Hannon calls them ‘Local-Learning Ecosystems’. At a national level countries like Finland and New Zealand are showing the importance of a joined up approach, with a national conversation about the purpose of education for creating a sense of co-ownership of the system in order to deliver on its promise.

Many actors contribute to the learning process, and they all face their own incentives. The direct inputs to the learning process include the choices made by learners themselves, as well as by their parents, teachers, and other school leaders. Each actor in the learning process reacts to the others.

LEARNING TO REALIZE EDUCATION’S PROMISE – WORLD BANK, 2018

EDUCATION IS EVERYONE’S BUSINESS

Everyone has a role to play in transforming education, working together to create new eco-systems of learning, in and outside of school.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT
supports cross-sector collaboration to improve young people’s learning and development

TEACHERS
have the agency and support to teach in the ways that work best for their students

PARENTS & CAREGIVERS
support young people to learn both in and out of the classroom

COMMUNITIES
actively connect formal and informal learning opportunities to local people and places

EVERY YOUNG PERSON
is set up to thrive in a world of constant change

NATIONAL POLICY
is driven by long-term strategic goals and enables the conditions for adaptive growth

PEERS
actively learn from one another in a supported and constructive way

SCHOOL LEADERS
empower staff and build effective partnerships while stewarding a vision for teaching and learning

BUSINESS
connects with educators to provide new opportunities for learning and inclusive pathways to employment

FUNDERS
work together to coordinate ongoing support for research, learning and innovation

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There is no one size fits all. Either when we look at young people – as Todd Rose clearly demonstrates in his book *The End of Average* – or when we look at communities and broader national context. The needs and infrastructure of different places will always be unique to that community. This has implications for how to scale and reproduce successful examples of educational change. Many brilliant transformative practices and ideas stay small because they cannot easily be packaged and rolled out.

There is not a perfect system that can be transposed identically from one context to another. This does not mean that it is impossible to share a mission and resources or model good practice. However, it does mean that straightforward replication will not achieve the same outcomes in every context. There has to be flexibility built into any framework for learning that allows for adaptation to local needs and concerns.

Just as evidence of impact and efficacy have a growing role in defining education policy there is also the need for communities of practice to share information not just on ‘what works’ but also for whom, in what context and when.

At a global level, this means we can learn a great deal from alternative systems of education and where they have found success. But we must always seek to understand the context in which they operate. Even if the contexts have little in common, learning how people came to design a particular system to meet their own needs could be as useful as the system itself.

Wherever possible knowledge sharing should enable nations, places or schools to avoid mistakes that have been made elsewhere and to use the best possible examples of global practice to shape their own, ‘leapfrogging’ over key challenges and blockers that have been solved elsewhere.

"Learning must enable individuals to strive and thrive in every aspect of their life beyond the workplace: as citizens, as local residents, and as family and community members. The centrality of place and locality is vital if we are to achieve such an outcome." — *A Place for Learning* - RSA, 2016

"While building a learning city may differ based on individual cities' significantly different contexts, they do also share a few common factors. Most cities recognise education and community as interacting elements of city growth." — *Learning Cities: Unlocking Potential in Urban Communities* - UNESCO, 2015
HOW CHANGE HAPPENS

To better understand how transformative, system-wide change can happen, we identified and interviewed twenty global pioneers of educational change who have pursued transformative projects and developed new ways of harnessing collective energy to achieve their mission.

The leadership for these examples of system change came from many places – from a brilliant school and leader in the case of Big Picture Learning and Campbelltown Performing Arts; from teachers in the case of The Teachers Guild; from a funder in Remake Learning from the insight around a new skill and need from Voice 21; from parents in More than a Score; from government in the case of New Zealand. This new wave of leaders have a lot in common, despite the diversity of their context and their solutions, and this is what we wanted to capture in our initial framework of transformative change.

PIONEER STORIES

The final 20 pioneers were selected based on the following six criteria:
- recognizing the whole child
- real-world problem solving
- preparing learners for working life
- tailored learning experiences
- promoting purposeful and sustainable lives
- long-term strategy design

This is not an exhaustive list, but represents a cross section of pioneers. We will be continuing to explore, identify and learn from system change pioneers going forward.

Full pioneer stories can be found online on our website: www.big-change.org/reimagining-education/

LOGAN TOGETHER + QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

Improving the developmental outcomes of all Logan children aged 0-8.
Change Initiator: NGOs and charitable organisations. Third sector
Scale: Community

CAMPBELLTOWN PERFORMING ARTS HIGH SCHOOL + NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

Developing agency in young people, both as learners and as citizens of the world.
Change Initiator: Learning Frontiers. Schools innovation network
Scale: City to national

NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION + NEW ZEALAND

National conversation to co-create a world leading education strategy
Change Initiator: Central government
Scale: National

ASHE’S UNIVERSITY + GHANA, AFRICA

Educating ethical, entrepreneurial leaders in Africa
Change Initiator: Patrick Awuah, Educator
Scale: National to continental

STANFORD CENTER FOR ASSESSMENT, LEARNING AND EQUITY + CALIFORNIA, USA

Transforming learning by transforming assessment
Change Initiator: Linda Darling-Hammond and Ray Pachide. Stanford University. Academic
Scale: Regional to national

CAMFED ALUMNIAE ASSOCIATION + SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Combating the post-graduate abyss through peer-to-peer support
Change Initiator: CAMFED funding recipients, Peer network
Scale: National to regional

REMAKE LEARNING + PITTSBURGH, USA

Preparing young people for the digital age
Change Initiator: Grable Foundation, Funder
Scale: Regional to national

EASYPEASY + UK

Empowering parents as the primary educators of their children
Change Initiator: Jon Leemond, Entrepreneur
Scale: National

BIG PICTURE LEARNING + USA

Learning tailored to the needs, interests and passions of each learner
Change Initiator: Elliot Washor and Dennis Littky. School leaders
Scale: National to global

DREAM A DREAM + BANGALORE AND DELHI, INDIA

Overcoming adversity through a child-centred, life skills approach
Change Initiator: Vishal Talreja. Business leader
Scale: Regional to national

TEAM DONCASTER + DONCASTER, ENGLAND

Making Doncaster the most child-friendly borough in the country
Change Initiator: Multi-stakeholder partnership
Scale: Place-based

THE TEACHERS GUILD + USA

Empowering teachers to be agents of change in their schools
Change Initiator: Holly McMahon & Emma Scripps. Teachers
Scale: National to international

INNOVATION UNIT, NATIONAL AGENCY FOR EDUCATION + FINLAND

Creating the conditions for innovation and real world learning in higher education
Change Initiator: Faculty. Tecnológico de Monterrey University Faculty
Scale: Regional to national

TECNOLÓGICO DE MONTERREY UNIVERSITY + MEXICO

Changing the way children are assessed and schools are judged
Change Initiator: Madeleine Holt, Co-Founder Parent
Scale: National

MORE THAN A SCORE + ENGLAND

Bridging education and the business community
Change Initiator: Junior Achievement. Global youth organisation
Scale: National to international

LONG + USA

Communities providing learning and opportunities designed for youth
Change Initiator: MacArthur Foundation, Philanthropy
Scale: City to national

VOICE 21 + NATIONWIDE, UK

Putting young people finding their voice at the heart of learning
Change Initiator: Schools, Pioneering school
Scale: National to international

LOUISIANA BELIEVES + LOUISIANA, USA

Putting teachers back at the heart of policy making and change
Change Initiator: John White, Louisiana’s State Superintendent
Scale: Local to regional
‘Systems change’ sounds like a mechanical problem with an engineering solution. But our systems are made of human beings and what we’ve learned about change is that it is a deeply human process; built on trust, relationships, support and learning. It is a transformation of relationships and purpose.

Like all tools of change, the following framework is a work in progress. The framework aims to capture the lessons from these brilliant pioneers who have bold ambition for the futures of the young people they serve and the humility and pragmatism to recognise that we all need to work together and stay open to learning along the way. We hope these practical insights can help those emergent leaders who want to reimagine education and pioneer change together.

**SAMPLE PIONEER SPOTLIGHTS**

We have chosen one real-life example to illustrate each of the seven characteristics needed for systems change. You can read more about how each of our twenty global pioneers created change at [www.big-change.org/reimagining-education/](http://www.big-change.org/reimagining-education/)

1. **UNIFYING MISSION**
   - Logan Together, Australia

2. **REPRESENTATIVE ALLIANCE**
   - Remake Learning, USA

3. **SERVANT LEADERSHIP**
   - Campaign for Female Education Alumni Association, Africa

4. **CO-OWNERSHIP**
   - New Zealand Ministry of Education, New Zealand

5. **EXPERIMENTATION & ACTIVE LEARNING**
   - Big Picture Learning, USA

6. **FLEXIBLE GOVERNANCE**
   - Team Doncaster, England

7. **NETWORKED GROWTH**
   - 3D Schools, USA

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**UNIFYING MISSION**
A vision of change or call to action that is bigger than any single organisation, but which allows space for each to make its own.

**REPRESENTATIVE ALLIANCE**
Actively engage with players from diverse disciplines, building on the energy of the willing and grappling with the challenges of sceptics.

**SERVANT LEADERSHIP**
Leadership in service of change and in service of others, empowering others to be leaders in their own right.

**CO-OWNERSHIP**
Favour action over endorsement, all actors have a purposeful role based on their strengths and assets.

**EXPERIMENTATION & ACTIVE LEARNING**
Create a disciplined culture of continuous learning, experimentation that continues throughout the journey, not just in the design phase.

**FLEXIBLE GOVERNANCE**
Long-term stewardship of the vision combined with the flexibility, patience and permission to experiment and evolve.

**NETWORKED GROWTH**
Grow through networks aligned by values, supported by communities of practice and scaffolded by shared tools and frameworks.
A vision of change or call to action that is bigger than any single organisation, but which allows space for each to make its own.

Transformative change cannot happen in isolation. People from different backgrounds and organisations must be motivated enough to change their own behaviour in service of a greater goal. Articulating this mission in ways that inspire collective action and purpose was a key feature of the initiatives we spoke to.

Building compelling stories of why change is needed.
It’s important to be able to tell the story of why change is needed in different ways for different audiences, adapting the language and key points to suit a deep understanding of the priorities of that group. This can involve a mix of data, evidence and human stories. Connie Yowell of LRNG said “The most important thing is storytelling, being able to talk about the vision in a way that is meaningful to the people we’re trying to engage.” Gregg Behr of Remake Learning calls these ‘sticky narratives’, the aim being that they stay with people enough to pass on. Jen Lexmond from Easy Peasy says it’s important “other people are telling the story - it’s not just us.”

Uniting the collective based on context or value.
A powerful trend we observed among our pioneers was crafting an identity that made partners feel part of something bigger than themselves. Often these were based on local identities. Examples include Logan Together, Louisiana Believes and Team Doncaster. José Escamilla of Tecnológico de Monterrey, reflects on how “it depends on your context – what public do you serve, your mission, where you are based in the world.” More networked approaches to change enabled educators with similar aims and values to share tools and feel part of something bigger. Voice 21 gave an identity and focus to an existing desire to teachers interested in oracy. Big Picture Learning offers affiliation and support to schools that want to design for student engagement.

Having a North Star Goal.
Successful projects had often identified a simple, memorable goal, that was broad enough for groups of people with different priorities to identify with their mission, and specific enough to hold their work to account. For Logan Together it was ‘Every child should have a shot in life’. Team Doncaster committed to be ‘the most child-friendly borough in the country’, Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser of Networks of Inquiry and Indigenous Education identified three key goals: ‘Every learner will cross the stage with dignity, purpose and options. Every learner will leave more curious than when they arrive. Every learner will develop an understanding of, and respect for, Indigenous ways of knowing.’ These visions are the North Star that everyone in a project navigates by, regardless of the routes they take.

THE BIG VISION FOR LOGAN TOGETHER IS:
By 2025 Logan Kids will be as healthy and full of potential as any other group of Queensland kids. This will be achieved by an extra 5,000 children doing well through their early years. The Logan Together Roadmap identifies what needs to happen by 2025 to achieve this outcome.

APPROACHES TO CREATING A UNIFYING MISSION:
Invest time with local people to understand the needs of cultural groups
Logan Together recognised the importance of getting to know and build relationships with different cultural groups. Community members are deployed to help lead change and are involved in the co-design of solutions.

With around 216 different cultural groups in our city, we have to spend time, effort and money on a very active community engagement and community listening programme. We’ve got numerous, hilarious stories about how we’ve done completely the wrong thing or had huge cross-cultural misunderstandings that have happened over simple things. You need people to go out there with intent.

Establish galvanising outcomes and goals, instead of processes or activities
Logan Together built their coalition by developing a ‘galvanising goal’ – an uncompromisable goal that unites multiple groups.

The galvanising goal they identified, which guides the team at Logan Together and partners through everything they do is ‘Every child should have a shot in life’.
Actively engage with players from diverse disciplines, building on the energy of the willing and grappling with the challenges of sceptics.

Engaging a network of alliances with different stakeholders from educators and parents to businesses and policy makers was not only important to understand but also to help drive their mission.

Actively convening and listening to the needs of potential allies.

Convening and listening to different groups is vital for change. Spending time listening to different voices to understand what they need and can offer to a process of change. Jack Harris at JDE brought schools and business together to map out areas for partnership by “really thinking about what are the core competencies that each entity most brings to the table”. Raymond Pechecene, at SCALE convened academics, designers and business leaders to innovate around teacher assessment. At a country level, the Finnish Innovation Unit engaged people from a range of sectors. “We need a whole system transformation. That requires working through each part: Government, Municipal, school, students, parents, anyone with an opinion.”

Stakeholders will act in their own interests. Always thinking about ‘what’s in it for them’

To bring diverse organisations into an alliance you must identify ways to connect outcomes to their differing needs and values. For Louisiana Believes that’s about connecting a project narrative to existing cultural stories rather than technocratic cases for change. “The things that Americans or Louisiana or Britons, are telling themselves about themselves, matters. You’re going to be ten times more successful if you’re swimming with the stream.” For Dream a Dream it was about getting partners to experience the change themselves, when engaging stakeholders from across the ecosystem the Dream a Dream team would put teachers, volunteers, business leaders, or government officials through the new learning model to broaden their perspective of what is possible.

Building momentum with a ‘coalition of the willing’, but continuing to engage with sceptics.

Connecting early with supporters of a mission can bring power and momentum to projects that are hoping to make change. For example, Beccy Earnshaw, of Voice 21, quickly built an alliance of interested teachers who had already been thinking about oracy in schools. To drive innovation in Finland, Anneli Rautiainen first reached out to municipalities who she knew were interested in trying something different to collaborate with. But each of these groups continue to engage with sceptics, using their ‘coalition of the willing’ to test theories and build evidence that can help turn detractors into advocates. In Campbelltown, Australia, Stacey Quince notes “We always ensure that within that community of practitioners there are sceptics who we can use as a ‘barometer’ and who provide valuable insights on potential problems.”

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Connecting early with supporters of a mission can bring power and momentum to projects that are hoping to make change. For example, Beccy Earnshaw, of Voice 21, quickly built an alliance of interested teachers who had already been thinking about oracy in schools. To drive innovation in Finland, Anneli Rautiainen first reached out to municipalities who she knew were interested in trying something different to collaborate with. But each of these groups continue to engage with sceptics, using their ‘coalition of the willing’ to test theories and build evidence that can help turn detractors into advocates. In Campbelltown, Australia, Stacey Quince notes “We always ensure that within that community of practitioners there are sceptics who we can use as a ‘barometer’ and who provide valuable insights on potential problems.”

Stakeholders will act in their own interests. Always thinking about ‘what’s in it for them’

To bring diverse organisations into an alliance you must identify ways to connect outcomes to their differing needs and values. For Louisiana Believes that’s about connecting a project narrative to existing cultural stories rather than technocratic cases for change. “The things that Americans or Louisiana or Britons, are telling themselves about themselves, matters. You’re going to be ten times more successful if you’re swimming with the stream.” For Dream a Dream it was about getting partners to experience the change themselves, when engaging stakeholders from across the ecosystem the Dream a Dream team would put teachers, volunteers, business leaders, or government officials through the new learning model to broaden their perspective of what is possible.
Leadership in service of change and in service of others, empowering others to be leaders in their own right.

We saw a distinct type of leadership at the heart of our pioneer stories, that differs from the kind seen in educational reform agendas of the past.

Turn competition into community – actively reach out to and work with others. Empowering a broad group of people to contribute solutions and take action leads to better ideas, builds a sense of ownership and lays foundations for sustainability. The Big Picture Learning model explicitly invites families and communities to play an active role in supporting the learning of each individual student. In Doncaster, the council convened political leadership and system-wide partnerships across private, public and school sectors to take on reform agendas of the past.

Recognising the power of others and how that can fuel change. Rather than keeping power close, leaders of transformative change leverage the power and contributions of others. As Superintendent of Louisiana, John White mobilised grassroots Teacher Leaders to play an active role in designing and implementing the Louisiana Believes plan. “It’s been our attempt to dialogue with teachers, to organise teachers, and to directly work alongside teachers in the formation of plans for change.” In a similar vein, Finland’s reform journey has in part been driven by a decentralisation of authority. A highly skilled teaching profession is entrusted with, and supported to, drive quality, improvement and innovation. Judy and Linda’s experiences establishing the Network of Innovation and Indigenous Education have reiterated their belief that you should never lead change in isolation. Relationships matter, and relationships are built on mutual respect and sharing the space.

Demonstrating moral courage, humility and growth mindset. Transformative change requires leaders to be brave, acknowledge they won’t ever have all the answers and that they’re on a continuous learning journey. Patrick Awuah and his fellow leadership team recognise that the vision and mission of Ashesi University to build ethical leaders for Africa can’t be held by any one person, but that it’s important they model the behaviour they want others to exhibit along the way. José Escamilla of Tecnológico de Monterrey University encourages leaders to be bold and embrace differences that make them stand out from the crowd as an innovation center. Similarly, Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser showcase stories of courageous leadership at their NOIIE symposiums. They reflect on how many teachers, including themselves, grew up being taught many forms of fixed thinking. “When teachers are introduced to growth mindset in a sensible way, it makes strong, intuitive sense to them.”

A powerful pan-African network of more than 120,000 young, educated women, using their education to benefit others, and working to break the cycle of poverty for good. They combat the ‘post-graduate abyss’ after high school where young girls face no prospects, no job opportunities and no clear path in terms of continuing education.

THE BIG VISION FOR CAMA IS:
To support millions more vulnerable children to stay in school, learn and succeed. They do this by connecting and supporting each other and using their experience and expertise to support more girls and young women to do well in school, and acquire the skills, tools and access to resources to lead independent and fulfilling lives after school.

APPROACHES TO SERVANT LEADERSHIP
Recognising all contributions CAMA works in a way that ensures the problems and solutions are owned by the community they are working with and the people on the frontline. They make sure they cost the investment that everybody is making in education, whether financial or non-financial, so that contribution is recognised and shared.

“Support Peer networks and knowledge exchange. CAMA members connect with people they work with locally, regionally and nationally. They see value in supporting colleagues to share learning and bounce new ideas off one another, as well as in the sense of comradery that comes from connections with peers.

Bring achievements to the attention of policy makers CAMA proactively engages ministries in understanding the achievements of communities and what investments have been made by parent support groups, for example, who set up meal programmes at schools, build infrastructure, and ensure girls’ safety. Together, they make the case for governments to further support the great work, and feed best practice into the school system as a whole.”

A powerful pan-African network of more than 120,000 young, educated women, using their education to benefit others, and working to break the cycle of poverty for good. They combat the ‘post-graduate abyss’ after high school where young girls face no prospects, no job opportunities and no clear path in terms of continuing education.
Co-ownership is different to collaboration. The pioneers we spoke to didn’t simply keep allied organisations informed on progress. They shared ownership and action across people, organisations and stakeholders.

Enabling different stakeholders to play a meaningful and purposeful role in the change process.

Rather than seeing stakeholders as recipients of change, our pioneers have created authentic opportunities for them to contribute. For Carried Alumnae Association (CAMA), parents and guardians, community and civic leaders, government officials all have a role to play in supporting girls’ education. They seek to involve everybody who has anything to do with the children they work with, even if they are a blocker rather than a champion. In Doncaster, change is championed by a community of stakeholders in addition to the providers of learning opportunities. The council deliberately shifted the dynamics of the system so “the demand side has got a voice, particularly in terms of the business sector, we have key business representation on the opportunity area board”.

Leveraging the strengths and assets of new and surprising or unusual partners.

It’s important to build contribution and ownership on the strengths of partners. Some of their assets will be already apparent, others will need uncovering. Logan Together use explicit collective impact methodologies to mobilise and organise the different strengths and assets of partners, while Dream a Dream have leveraged strategic partnerships leg. In measurement) to draw in expertise when required rather than growing their own operations. 3DE’s ‘joint venture’ by design outlines the respective strengths, weaknesses and responsibilities of partners.

Using engagement strategies that seek to shift mindsets of teachers.

Sharing information isn’t enough. Engagement must change how stakeholders view the problem and the solution, before they can lead change themselves. The Teachers Guild see teachers as untapped agents of change and support them to shift their mindsets through an empathy-driven process. NOW use their spirals of enquiry process as a way of enlightening stakeholders, particularly educators, to the realities and perspectives of their learners. In a slightly different vein. More than a Score worked with a creative agency to develop ideas that both capture the attention of parent and teacher groups and mobilise them to take part in events or campaigns that are likely to capture the attention of mainstream media outlets. “You have to be sure of getting stuff in the papers or on BBC online, otherwise parents won’t get engaged. Content has to be really short and really visual, because people’s attention spans are becoming shorter.”

Sharing truly representative and diverse perspectives

The Ministry is looking at how to continue to include reforms of parts of the system, setting medium term objectives through large scale public consultation, as well as some key initiatives for things to get underway now.

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.Create a disciplined culture of continuous learning, experimentation that continues throughout the journey, not just in the design phase.

Transformative change is a conscious evolution. Across our pioneer stories, we saw a commitment to iteration, learning and renewal.

Rigorously understanding the problem they are trying to solve and seeking out insights from those with lived experience.

Pioneers invested time in continually building a detailed picture of the problem, by gathering evidence from both quantitative and qualitative sources. Logan Together drew on a broad range of public knowledge, research and data to fully comprehend the needs of the people and place they sought to serve. CAMA harness the lived experiences of their membership, acknowledging the unique contribution they could make towards understanding the problems faced by girls and young women like them. “Whenever we went back, we knew that the same challenges that threatened to keep us out of school were still bedevilling our communities we realised that the same challenges that threatened to keep us out of school were still bedevilling those that remained behind”

A culture of continuous improvement by prototyping and testing solutions and learning from both success and failure.

Pioneers built a culture and practice of productive and safe risk-taking that developed high quality solutions in real-time. At Campbelltown Performing Arts High School, disciplined innovation is the norm. Teachers engage in short-term, user-centred research projects and rapid-cycle prototyping that develop new approaches that work for their students. A similar design process informed Easy Peasy’s app development, aligning it to the lived experiences of its users, their children and early years practitioners. Both Finland and Doncaster have put themselves on an experimental footing, recognising the need for continuous reform and a new mentality of being risk aware, not risk averse. Anneli of the Finnish Education Agency reflects how “education systems cannot remain isolated from the world and rapid change is taking place. In order to provide equal opportunities for everyone, we have to be on the move all of the time”

Being open minded to learn from different practice and ideas from outside.

Innovation for change can come from anywhere at any time. You have to be ready and willing to listen, learn and adapt. Both Patrick Awuah of Ashesi University and José Escamilla of Tecnologico de Monterrey University encourage their faculty to stay up to date with what’s happening beyond the walls of the institution and the sector more broadly. Both SCALE and Remake Learning have remained open to their approach to change being iterated over time, and influenced by people from different disciplines and vantage points. Gregg Behr of Remake Learning reflects on how “the common threads from 2006 and 2007 remain, but the work is constantly iterating”

A global network of schools where learning is tailored to the interests, needs and passions of students. It re-establishes the connection between the real world and the world of school to improve outcomes for young people who are disengaged from mainstream education.

THE BIG VISION FOR BIG PICTURE LEARNING IS:

All students live happy and successful lives of their own design supported by learner-centred communities, caring mentors, strong interpersonal relationships, and equitable opportunities to achieve their greatest potential.

This is being achieved through a model in which learning focuses on a student’s passions and interests, and involves significant internships in the ‘real-world’. The BIG VISION FOR BIG PICTURE LEARNING IS:

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Flexible Governance

Organisations built on co-ownership and experimental learning models need governance that enable them to develop over time. We observed ageing instruments of governance being replaced by new, agile and inclusive models.

Aligning different parts of the system where people and organisations are trying to achieve similar things.

When pioneers have recognised a learning system to be fragmented and disjointed, they have tried to re-align them in productive ways. Doncaster unlocked funding and buy-in for their work by finding common ground between the priorities of their local Education and Skills Commission and the Department for Education’s national focus on social mobility opportunity areas. In aid of Louisiana Believes, John White and colleagues sought to bring together different parts of the federal and state departments who were working towards the same goals but weren’t aligned. “We work concurrently to engage local brokers, local actors, local leaders, in efforts to try to change the way that players were arranged locally, in order to make teachers’ work more successful and their impact. LRNG were held accountable through qualitative feedback in monthly focus groups with their target users. Connie Yowell notes, “We think about accountability to our users. In order to be adaptive, iterative and sustainable over time, we have to continue to meet the needs of our young people. They are at the core of everything we do.”

Taking a long term and patient approach to change. Pioneers who have made significant and sustained progress in order to make teachers’ work more successful and their change processes were held to account and based in evidence. Some organisations worked in partnerships with trusted institutions to create frameworks for success. Voice 21 worked with Cambridge University to develop the Oracy Framework while Dream a Dream developed a life skills assessment scale with prominent clinical psychologists. Others looked for quantitative evidence of impact. EasyPeasy worked with Education Endowment Foundation to prove efficacy with an early Randomised Control Trial. 3DE developed their school-within-a-school model deliberately ensuring their students matched the demographic make-up of the whole school in order to show their impact. LRNG were held accountable through qualitative feedback in monthly focus groups with their target users. Connie Yowell notes, “We think about accountability to our users. In order to be adaptive, iterative and sustainable over time, we have to continue to meet the needs of our young people. They are at the core of everything we do.”

Designing new models of evaluation to aid learning and improvement and demonstrate impact in new areas of practice. Pioneers took care to design models of evaluation to ensure their change processes were held to account and based in evidence. Some organisations worked in partnerships with trusted institutions to create frameworks for success. Voice 21 worked with Cambridge University to develop the Oracy Framework while Dream a Dream developed a life skills assessment scale with prominent clinical psychologists. Others looked for quantitative evidence of impact. EasyPeasy worked with Education Endowment Foundation to prove efficacy with an early Randomised Control Trial.

Long-term stewardship of the vision combined with the flexibility, patience and permission to experiment and evolve.
7 NETWORKED GROWTH

Grow through networks aligned by values, supported by communities of practice and scaffolded by shared tools and frameworks.

To scale beyond the impact of one brilliant school or district, pioneers often formed networks of practice, combining the sharing of knowledge and expertise with a deep understanding of local context.

Context is too important for systems to scale through top down control or direct, franchised replication.

It’s important to balance fidelity to a vision for change with the need to flex to local agendas and demands. Suchetha Bhat, CEO of Dream a Dream, attributes the adaptability of their life skills approach to its success at scale. “We shouldn’t get caught up in wanting to standardise or fix a certain approach to it, or having this one size which can help scale it.” CAMA achieves similar adaptability, instead through a shared ownership model. They commit to working in a way that ensures the problems and solutions are owned by the specific community they are working with and the people on the frontline. Campbelltown Performing Arts High School ensure the new practices and approaches they develop flex to meet the local context through their deep, authentic engagement of community stakeholders, who play meaningful roles in the iterative process.

Building networks of shared values and interests with others.

Pioneers find strength in numbers and benefit significantly from building and being a part of networks of like-minded colleagues. Ashesi University are expanding their idea-shaping platform by convening African university leaders and stakeholders to learn about and co-design best practices aligned to their vision and mission. Elliot Washor, co-founder of Big Picture Learning recognises the limitations of one-off schools swimming against the tide. “Being in networks, organic and relational, is very important. I would encourage everyone to be in a network where they feel some affinities and affiliations that support them.” Similarly, Judy and Linda of NOII see even the loosest of networks being fundamental to their work, in the spirit of building trust, courage and curiosity. Voice 21 built a nationwide, and now international, network of oracy practitioners sharing tools and experience to build the efficacy across the group.

Providing scaffolds and structures that allow others to act and lead in their own context.

Networks and communities of practice need to support their members to both leverage the collective expertise and equip them to make change happen in the communities. Practical tools and resources, such as The Teachers Guild’s ‘Design Thinking for Educators’ toolkit, provide effective scaffolds for teachers to experiment and lead change in their own classrooms and schools, while belonging to a broader community of educators. Stacey Quince of Campbelltown Performing Arts High School has been involved in programmes at a system level which provide methodologies and expert coaching to participants. On a more local level, Stacey has placed scaffolds and structures in her school to support her teachers to surface fears and provide them with the reassurances they need to take risks and lead change themselves.

3DE strategically blends the core competencies of School Districts. Junior Achievement and the broader business community to connect learning to the ‘real world’. They source case studies from business partners to anchor interdisciplinary pedagogy, relevance and authentic project-based learning with exposure to a variety of industries and careers. 3DE’s model is ‘school within a school’. Initially it is introduced to a designated section of each host school, with the intention of expanding the methodologies and strategies throughout the broader school and district.

3DE Schools
Georgia, USA

THE BIG VISION FOR 3DE SCHOOLS IS:
To re-engineer high school education to unlock academic potential and expand economic opportunity for all students.

They seek to do so through a high school model that breaks through traditional barriers and redesigns the framework to create equitable access to high quality education.

APPROACHES TO NETWORKED GROWTH

Prove effectiveness on the ground, with scale in mind.
The 3DE school within a school implementation model was explicitly designed to break down barriers to change in existing schools.

Proofs of concept allows people to trust and start to lean in. They don’t have to necessarily accept this whole big new world at once, but they’re able to start stepping in carefully.

On-the-ground support
3DE put two of their own personnel on site at every school they work with, to support the team through the change process.

Balancing codification with local identity
To replicate and scale their impact from five schools in Atlanta to thousands across the US, they recognise the need to find a balance between codifying key aspects of the model, while being respectful and faithful to the power of local partnerships.

“We really need to think through how we codify bits like the business community engagement, so that there’s consistency school-to-school without taking away the local integration and authenticity that drives student engagement.”

JACK HARRIS
PRESIDENT & CEO

“There are inflexion points or forks-in-the-road where people can either continue forward or they say ‘forget it, it’s too hard’ and go back to old ways of doing things. If there’s not somebody on site with a helping hand to guide them through that process, then the whole thing flips backwards.”

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CONCLUSIONS

The limitations and symptoms of a struggling education system have been felt in all sections of society by employers, parents, students, educators, policy makers and charities. The message of Reimagining Education Together is that these issues can be addressed but only when each of these stakeholders becomes involved in the change.

The initial energy for change can come from leaders across the ecosystem; educators, employers, parents, students or policy – but it must be shared. The job of a change leader is to help disparate groups work together, to find shared purpose and to feel ownership of the change they create, celebrating successes and learning from failure.

Pioneers from New Zealand to Delhi to Ghana to Louisiana showed us that change is a human and relationship driven process. It requires empathy, a mindset that is open to possibility and resilient to challenge; exactly the kind of human competencies that we hope to teach young people.

Powerful learning environments constantly create synergies and find new ways to enhance professional, social and cultural capital with others. They do that with families and communities, with higher education, with other schools and learning environments, and with businesses. That is why we need to make education everybody’s business.

And if education is everyone’s business, it is also our shared responsibility. We are all part of a learning ecosystem and we must all play our part in shaping it – from building a new common sense of what education is for, to connecting our communities to schools. This is a liberating vision of change. We don’t have to wait for permission. We can start reimagining education together, right now.

BIG CHANGE.

For Big Change, this report represents emergent insight on approaches to change. We will continue to learn from pioneers and experts around the world to challenge and inform our thinking and practice. In the short term, our aim is to identify and target systemic barriers to change at a local and national level in the UK. We will work with actors across the system to create tangible, practical support on key issues and help them work together to reimagine education and create conditions for change.

NEXT STEPS

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GET IN TOUCH

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@bigchange_charitabletrust
This report was made possible by the time and contributions of an amazing community of experts and pioneers, most of whom would never consider themselves in those terms.

We are deeply grateful for the insight, inspiration and guidance of many people. Here are some of those who have helped us. They are already out there making change happen in the world and have been instrumental to informing our understanding of what change can and should be.

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And there are many more... thank you for challenging our assumptions, pushing our horizons and constantly inspiring us. This is very much a journey to see what we can learn and do together to help support positive change, and keep learning from setbacks...