Equitable Community Based Learner-Centered Ecosystems: A Transformative Vision of Education

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Equitable Community Based Learner-Centered Ecosystems:

A Transformative Vision of Education

Doctorate of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)

Capstone

Submitted by

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We have to recognise that human flourishing is not a mechanical
process; it's an organic process. And you cannot predict the
outcome of human development. All you can do, like a farmer, is
create the conditions under which they will begin to flourish
—*Sir Ken Robinson*

how do we carve out the space to continuously be learning and creating? to be
part of a body of people learning together how to be humans? how do we open
up enough room to not know – to really have no idea – and start from there,
leaning into what is most beautiful and most true, leaning into all the changing
conditions and articulating the moments and the time we are in?
—*adrienne marie brown*
(2012, How We Liberate Ourselves, website)

Things can change.
So the attempt to create a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-class
multi-representational democracy means the citizenry have to be visionary
enough and courageous enough to come up with the kind of changes that build
on the best of the past.
The past still has the best now, the past has the worst too.
The present has the worst. The present has the best too.
And it's up to the citizenry.
—*Cornel West (Harvard Lecture 2019)*

"[T]he more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so
that, knowing it better, he or she can transform it. This individual is not afraid to
confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the
people or to enter into a dialogue with them. This person does not consider
himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the
oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at
their side."
—Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Thank you and Acknowledgement Page

To my husband, Rob, for helping me see the pollen path. Beauty all around us.

Thank you to my Dad, Herb, for holding me and looking at me the way he did. I still feel loved by him everyday. He would love this. He would be telling the guys at the gas station, and the guys down by the pier fishing, sitting on overturned buckets and listening to the Cubs game on transistor radios. This is for you, Dad.

Thank you to my Mom, Nan, for modeling radical living and a zest for joy and happiness and for always focusing on the children in the family and making it special and fun and filled with good food and stories and loud laughter. My mom had me memorize Langston Hughes like it was a sacred text. You are the best, Mom.

I feel grateful to be the recipient of so much love and wisdom from my big brothers and big sister and cousins and nieces and nephews and great niece and an extended family and friends, neighbors and community.

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Thank you to my brother, the late Michael Wexler. You danced on the balcony.

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Abstract

A transformational vision for education is emerging across the country from a deep place of shared imagining and shared experience. I joined Education Reimagined, a nonprofit dedicated to learner centered education, while historic change was taking place in the country that touched the lives of every citizen; through the profound disruption and isolation caused by COVID-19, the rising awareness and activism for the Black Lives Matter movement, and the crisis in governance exposed by the January 6 insurrection at the Capitol. This Capstone examines my work to find and bring together a diverse group of people and engage them in a process to invent multiple systems and templates to structure, support, and bring to life equitable, community-based, learner-centered ecosystems. Through this Capstone, I share my quest to find participants from the Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities for the working group. I investigate the nature of living systems and emergent systems change while making connections to some of the education movements in the past. I analyze my work using the National Equity Project Leading for Equity Framework (National Equity Project, 2020). Finally, I suggest three actions for the education sector: (a) invest in transformational change: gather people across sectors to imagine new possibilities for being in community inspired by living systems; (b) create strong networks to catalyze change: strengthen relationships, do the healing work together and reimagine and reclaim social community; and (c) clear the way: identify policy, structures, and systems that serve as a barrier to transformational social systems where every child is loved, honored, and free.

National Context for the Strategic Project

I joined the work of Education Reimagined just months after COVID-19 brought forth a threshold moment where "going back to normal" was not feasible. This was a time of heightened collective consciousness of inequities and a public conversation going on in the news, social media, and in the business world. There was a public questioning of what it means to be an American and a newly-found willingness to acknowledge implicit bias and racism. In the midst of great struggle and in the face of the unknown, this was a moment of great possibility for change in social systems. Or, as Amanda Gorman, the poet laureate shared so beautifully at the inauguration of President Biden and Vice President Harris:

> We did not feel prepared to be the heirs
>
> of such a terrifying hour
>
> but within it we found the power
>
> to author a new chapter (Gorman, 2021)

The closing of schools and the necessary move to online learning touched the lives of so many people across multiple sectors and brought a new awareness and appreciation for the ecosystem that makes up the lives of young children. Schools provide a certain structure to our lives. Once the buildings closed, we began to see the wider communities of support that exist for children and families and teachers, such as the after-school programs, social service agencies, and community facilities like recreation centers and libraries. A wide variety of responses emerged in this pivotal moment. Public and private

partnerships became more active, as people organized food, shelter, computer distributions and internet access for families. Families self organized pods and play dates, and shared childcare. In the education sector, there were calls for reforms — improvements to the existing structures and systems. The reforms called for a whole-child approach, using restorative justice, expanding access to resources and other efforts, which are connected to a long history of efforts that have come face to face with the racism in our culture and the oppressive infrastructure that supports its continuation. The pandemic revealed the disproportionate effects on Black and other minoritized children and their families, showing us once again that this system cannot take us where we want to go. What we need is transformation. Education Reimagined is calling for a radical reimagining of the system itself.

The Education Reimagined vision for equitable, community-based, learner-centered ecosystems (learner ecosystems) holds at its heart this central organizing idea: each learner is a unique, powerful, growing citizen of the community. The kind of system we need is one that can allow for the emergence and development of each child over time that leads to a thriving meaningful life filled with possibilities. The advances in brain science, complexity theory, and our growing capacity and awareness of human development and growth open up new possibilities for imagining education systems. We need a system that is designed to learn and change in order to respond to the unique needs and passions of the children and leverage what we know about how children learn and grow over time. Rather than design a system based on the assumption of

the "average" student, in this vision, every student has a unique profile. In his

book, *The End of Average*, Todd Rose, states: "The moment you need to make a

decision about any individual — the average is useless. Worse than useless, in

fact, because it creates the illusion of knowledge, when in fact the average

disguises what is most important about an individual" (Rose, 2015, p. 343). If we

break free of seeing the school building as the central hub, with structures for

stability that prove impervious to seeing children as individuals (such as as grade

levels and standardized testing), and instead we seek to create a responsive

living system anchored in the passions, interests, authenticity and self

determination of each child, suddenly we realize a deeper relationship with

families, communities, and the earth as essential to the education of children.

This Capstone examines my work at Education Reimagined in the

planning, strategizing and launch of a working group to explore the systems and

structures that would support the creation of equitable, community-based,

learner-centered ecosystems across the United States. This project is nestled in

a greater effort to galvanize a movement, leading to a transformational shift in

public education.

Origins of Education Reimagined and Work — Building the Field

Education Reimagined began in 2014 as an exploration — bringing

together a diverse group of 28 stakeholders holding many perspectives and

beliefs about public education. The group was made up of practitioners, students,

administrators, education funders and advocates. Over an 18-month period,

these stakeholders participated in a facilitated process intentionally designed so

participants could let go of the current constraints and "sides" of public education practices and theory. Instead, they worked together in the new paradigm to imagine a future unencumbered by the constraints of today. Together, they created a shared vision for education, based on seeing each child as unique, powerful, and creative — an agent of their own learning.

The five components of the Education Reimagined beacon come together (see Figure 1) and create a learner ecosystem with a fundamentally different approach to public education. Education Reimagined states, "These five elements are not meant to serve as a blueprint for a rigid model to be implemented everywhere. Instead, they serve as a "North Star" to guide innovation" (Education Reimagined, 2014, p. 7).

Figure 1: The Five Elements

Learner Agency

Socially Embedded

Personalized, Relevant, & Contextualized

Open-Walled

Competency-Based

Source: (Education Reimagined, 2014)

Each of these elements are described in depth in the Vision for Transformation (Appendix A).

I was drawn to the work of Education Reimagined and I am one of the original co-creators and signatories of the vision. I was 10 years into my work as

the executive director, designing and growing three K-12 schools and a foundation in Baltimore, called City Neighbors, when I first interacted with Education Reimagined. This was not a new experience, being engaged in an effort to imagine something new. When we started City Neighbors, we asked, "If you could have the best school you can imagine, what would it be?" and, "What would it take for every student to be known, loved and inspired?" The charter law in Maryland gave us the authority to ask that question and the guardrails for what we might create. We were there to disrupt the current system and yet, especially in Maryland, we were deeply embedded within that system. The district was the sole authorizer — we had to apply to them to receive and keep a charter. Our students and teachers were still subject to the same standardized tests and our teachers still had the same union contract. We imagined the best we could within the system we had and set up coalitions, alliances and networks to organize a community dedicated to innovation and public education. I spent much of my time as a leader pushing back against the system of public education in Baltimore. We hoped our work and collaborative stance would inspire other schools and directly influence the transformation of the Baltimore City School System. We were disrupters of the system, operating from a place of ownership — an independent, grassroots public school serving an intentionally-diverse population of children, with a stand for love, liberation, and community. I bring that same desire to transform the system to this work. That longing for impact and transformation of the current system and the tension of different operating systems embedded in different paradigms is the struggle for change and

revolution. Returning to Education Reimagined as a resident brought me face to face with that desire and the inherent tensions that come with it, once again.

In the first 6 years of its formation, Education Reimagined worked to expand the field of learner-centered education. They focused on building and sustaining communities of pioneers and used powerful convening and inquiry-based practices to engage in work dedicated to developing a lexicon of shared definitions, language, illuminating examples, and strong relationships of trust among participants — slowly building a strong connected network of learner-centered communities. Seven hundred people formed three communities of practice, including: a Learning Lab of practitioners; SparkHouse: a network of young learners; and, a Leaders Network, made up of national and regional actors in a network designed to accelerate the learner-centered movement. Education Reimagined continues to nurture these communities that hold the pieces of a puzzle for learner-centered education. They continue to illuminate the work of schools and practitioners that are building the evidence and experience for learner-centered practices. But now, in this threshold moment, a new pathway emerged.

Education Reimagined recognized this time of revealed challenges and social unrest as a call to action. They began to see (and believed others were also seeing) that rather than working to proliferate separate models, programs, or elements of the vision, instead, we could engage with others to create the possibility of systems-level change — holistic systems of equitable, community-based, learner-centered, ecosystems coming into being. In other

words, they decided to put their efforts into building the field of learner ecosystems. They decided to call together a unique mix of diverse learner-centered leaders who hold pieces of the puzzle of the learner ecosystem, all of whom are drawn to the idea that now is the time to significantly shift the direction of education and create transformational systems aligned with the belief that unless there is a fundamental shift in our thinking and our social systems we will not reach equitable outcomes for students.

Introduction to the Strategic Project and Capstone

My strategic project was nested in the overall initiative. The overall national initiative had three main parts: (a) promote a sustained, nationwide campaign to capture the imagination and will of education leaders and advocates across the United States to transform, rather than reform, education; (b) gather a leaders' network of diverse learner-centered leaders in a shared commitment to a transformed public education system that enables community-based, learner-centered ecosystems to equitably and powerfully serve every child and community; and, (c) gather participants, and design and launch working groups charged with inventing living templates that districts, communities and states could use as new jumping off platforms for structuring and supporting ecosystems. The latter was my strategic project.

The strategic project included three main components: (a) designing the concept and details of the working groups, including the roles needed, the learning arc, and outcomes; (b) identify participants for the working groups by conducting interviews in order to build a diverse team that would represent

multiple perspectives, expertises, and lived experiences, and include outreach to Black, Indigenous, people of color, and sectors beyond the field of education; and, (c) begin to identify the essential questions we need to ask in order to create transformational systems and structures that will lead to the outcomes we seek.

Review of Knowledge for Action (RKA)

The purpose of the working group is to bring together individuals and engage them in a process to invent templates that can be adapted by local communities and will help structure, support, and bring to life a new possible scenario for the future of education: equitable, community-based, learner-centered ecosystems. Learner-centered ecosystems operate in a fundamentally different way than the mechanistic systems we currently have in place, therefore, I investigate the nature of living systems and identify three mindshifts that lead to transformation. I briefly explore conditions of emergence that lead to systems level change. In this RKA, I touch upon how "emergent systems change" comes about, share quotes from interviewees, and explore some of the ancestry of the defining characteristics of the vision (learner centered, equitable, and community based) in order to recognize and honor some of the organizations and efforts that came before. Therefore, this RKA focuses primarily on:

1. The nature of living systems and three mind shifts;
2. Creating the conditions for emergence and how systems level change comes about; and

3. Making connections: finding shared principles and ancestry of the ecosystem vision of equity, community based, and learner centered.

The Nature of Living Systems and Three Mind Shifts

> Living systems are dynamic living webs of interdependent relationships—inherently whole, abundant, creative and self-organizing. Their organizing principles, creative processes and dynamic interdependence must guide our design of generative human systems, especially those that nurture the growing minds of our children.—*Stephanie Pace Marshall*

   If we want to imagine new systems, we need to not only recognize the limitations of our thinking, but also to find a way to think and talk and listen in new ways. The systems we have designed as humankind has evolved over time, aligning with our understanding of how the world works, or our "worldview." The challenge we face is that the way we talk about schools and systems and the language we use, is already holding certain assumptions about how things work. Assumptions about how we scale ideas, and how we measure growth and learning. The words that we use, like "school," hold meanings that come to mind and make it difficult to imagine new concepts.

   How do we break free of the constraints of our current paradigm? Stephanie Pace Marshall describes our need for new language: "The reason our society must create a new language for learning communities that transcends

school and classroom walls is that the dominance, attraction, and power of the current machine-based language of schooling is not capable of generating the organic patterns of the global learning community we now require" (Pace Marshall, p. 5, 1997). The organic patterns we seek can be found in understanding the language of living systems. In the following section, I describe three shifts in thinking using the nature of living systems, which allow us to expand our vocabulary and provide some guideposts to help us find our way forward.

Three Shifts in Thinking

Parts to Whole

Imagining our children being educated as part of a living system requires some fundamental shifts in our thinking. (180 Studios & Eckenhoff Saunders, 2020). First, we have to go from thinking in parts to thinking of the whole (Pace Marshall, 1997). Another way to say this, would be to go from mechanistic thinking to ecological thinking. In mechanistic, or linear thinking, we understand cause and effect and we organize our systems and behavior according to that understanding. For example, in linear thinking, when something works — we tend to do it again and again. The more the better. But what we are unable to realize in linear thinking, is the impact of those actions on the whole. Repeating a good thing, or simply continuing to increase the quantity of that good thing, can become unsustainable or even damaging if we are unable to consider the whole system. Living systems are nonlinear — they are made up of organized networks

"where individuals or species recognize their interdependence and organize in ways that support the diversity and viability of all" (Wheatley & Frieze, p. 2, 2006) In whole systems thinking, we can see and care for the parts, and we can see the whole as something more. The diversity of the parts can be seen and appreciated for what they contribute to the strength of the whole. The quality of the relationships between the parts becomes important and the dynamics of the whole can be recognized and seen in patterns over time (Wahl, 2016). When relationships and connections among the individual parts of a living system are dense and responsive to each other — then each of the parts are viewed as essential to the whole — and the whole system can accomplish results that no one part can accomplish alone. This mind shift-- being able to see the whole of a system--also gives us the capacity to consider complex problems from multiple perspectives and opens up possibilities for honoring insights from many vantage points and ways of knowing. This shift propels us to notice the emergent properties, the patterns over time, the dynamics, and the relationships needed to create the outcomes we are imagining for the whole living system. This shift in thinking, and the ones that follow, are aligned with the vision of seeing each child as a whole person and as a person who is growing and changing over time. Thus the living system is a structure that mirrors, or has symmetry, with each and every child.

Disconnected to Connected

The second major shift in our thinking is going from disconnected to connected, or objects to relationships (Capra, 2007). This requires a letting go of

boundaries we often hold in place that confine us as isolated, disconnected beings and instead opens us up to deeper cooperation and interactions that build relationships and community. In a living system, every part is touching another part and it is the interrelatedness of all of these parts, that make the whole. Our ability to see the patterns that take shape across dense networks has increased significantly with the complexity of science, helping us see not only the interrelated parts and their connections, but to stand back and see the emerging whole. This shift from disconnected to connected helps us recognize that every part of the ecosystem is interrelated and thus important. "Out of school time" as a phrase describing where and when learning takes place doesn't make sense when we realize that all learning that happens contributes to the whole child. Families and neighborhoods become part of the landscape and the map for this ecosystem, the context of each learner is of great relevance and offers a new approach to creating connections and relationships to support learning.

Fixed to Fluid

One more shift in mindset, is moving from a fixed mindset to embracing the fluid uncertainty of growth and change. "The term 'regenerative' describes processes that restore, renew or revitalize their own sources of energy and materials. 'Regenerative design' uses whole systems thinking to create resilient and equitable systems that integrate the needs of society with the integrity of nature" (Regenerative design, 2021). The emerging field of Regenerative Development (RD) brings together new understandings from complex adaptive systems, such as science, ecology, quantum physics, and psychology (Mang &

Reed, 2017). Regeneration is based on living systems and how the world really works, not how we want to make it work. Regenerative Ecosystems are systems and processes that restore themselves and have the capacity to recreate themselves. RD sees humans and nature as part of one autopoietic system (capable of regenerating itself) and sees the worldview of each participant as an essential component (Mang & Reed, 2017).

A regenerative or living system recognizes the *nature of things.* The system is sustained not by a protective set of values resistant to change, but instead, by values looking far afield, nurturing creativity, recognizing the flow and energy of each part being essential to the whole. Living systems, like humans, develop and evolve over time. The process of renewal and change and growth becomes one of the fundamental principles in a living system. This shift in valuing dynamics and nature leads us to seek out patterns rather than static data in order to view how things are forming and shaping over time. This has implications in how we view the assessment of teaching and learning and how we might consider shared accountability within an education ecosystem. For example, in schools in the Big Picture Learning network (BPL), small groups of high school students and an advisor stay together for four years and learn through real-world projects in a socially-embedded structure of advisory and internships. In a longitudinal study of students/alumni of schools in the BPL network, early findings included: 97% of BPL students were admitted into 2-year or 4-year colleges and 96% of BPL alumni reported they were in touch with their high school advisors ≥2 years after graduation. (Arnold & Mihut, 2020). The living

systems shift in thinking expands our definition of success to allow for recognizing and valuing different kinds of emergent patterns, which show the generative relationships that can endure over time, leading to stronger communities and wonderful results for children.

Creating the Conditions for Emergence and Systems Level Change

These fundamental shifts in thinking from a mechanistic top down model of the industrial age to a more complex, fluid, and inclusive model that values dynamics, relationships, and networks — leads to a new field of research that is discovering what we need to be aware of and what is possible when striving for social impact. Using nature as a guide for how change happens, is becoming increasingly common. Once we shift our thinking to regenerative systems designed for well being, then we have to rethink some of the assumptions we hold about how we organize learner ecosystems. For example, "going to scale" has new meaning. In the old industrial paradigm, we thought of increasing size — mass distribution. In a learner ecosystem, what we want to scale is the quality of the experiences for every child. In a recent report calling for regenerative change of our systems, the Aurora Institute states: "When we see scale as a condition of thriving, we begin to understand the process of getting to scale less as one of linear growth or replication, and more as one of creating the conditions in which thriving is possible. Getting to scale means creating the conditions in which a new educational system can thrive." (2020, p. 48)

How do we transform our social systems?   Emergence is the creation of something new from diverse parts that come together in the most elegantly

ordered way possible (Schmachtenberger, 2016). The Berkana Institute defines

emergence: "In nature, change never happens as a result of top-down,

pre-conceived strategic plans, or from the mandate of any single individual or

boss. Change begins as local actions spring up simultaneously in many different

areas. If these changes remain disconnected, nothing happens beyond each

locale. However, when they become connected, local actions can emerge as a

powerful system with influence…" (Wheatley, p.3, 2006). Wheatley and Frieze

posit that emergence doesn't happen for individuals in isolation, but rather, it

happens when individuals come together and a system that is needed emerges

from their shared thinking and work. The Berkana Institute identifies three stages

in the "Lifecycle of Emergence": (a) Networks: Discovering Shared Meaning and

Purpose, (b) Communities of Practice: Developing New Practices Together, and,

(c) Systems of Influence: New Practices Become the Norm. Reaching

transformative scale requires new strategies and the collaboration of many

organizations and leaders within and across sectors and building a recognized

field. The work includes building a shared lexicon of shared vocabulary and

meanings while supporting and illuminating the evidence of practice that

emerges. This is not about simply creating networks that can be mapped to

show the many connections between members, this idea of networks is more

concerned with the dynamics at play that make networks strong and generative

(Wheatley and Frieze 2015).

Another theory, Collective Impact, is a theory of social change that also

relies on emergence and continual learning by a network of organizations and

individuals working to achieve a shared and measurable result (Kania & Kramer, 2013). Collective Impact uses a targeted approach, identifying a measurable goal and building relationships around that shared view of reaching that goal. Similarly, the Strong Field Framework developed by the Bridgespan Group identifies components to assess the existence of and strength of a field of practice. These include: (a) shared standards of practice, (b) recognized knowledge base, (c) grassroots support and leadership, and, (d) funding and supporting policy (Bridgespan, 2009). Finally, transformational systems change requires a different kind of leadership, one which is driven more by inquiry than by decisiveness (Kania & Kramer, 2013). Thus the impact we seek is propelled by essential questions that help focus our efforts and define our deeply held beliefs.

Education Land Acknowledgement: Finding Shared Principles and Ancestry of the Ecosystem Vision of Equity, Community Based, and Learner Centered

The endeavor of K-12 public education is the largest socialistic structure in the United States, and therefore calls to us as a great means for attaining social equity and freedom. And, yet, in spite of many efforts and shared thinking, we are not achieving equitable results for children. What do we need to do; to be; to understand? Paulo Freire wrote in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, "Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people — they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress" (Freire, 1972). Freire helps us see the difference between systems that

are designed to control the people, versus systems that are designed to serve the people. Over time, many communities have struggled with this very thought as we do today. The learner ecosystem vision builds on the work and efforts of past and current generations of communities that have come together to create educational opportunities for their children, in order to make sure each child has the opportunity to know themselves, experience their own importance, and practice the difference they can make in the world. In this next section, I review social innovation and liberation efforts that I believe shows the interrelatedness of these past efforts and the current vision.

Citizenship and Liberation

The public school system is the primary vehicle for education in the United States and at its best, serves to raise children out of poverty, create cohorts of belonging, and for some, act as a springboard into the system of higher education. At the same time, public education has been used as a tool to strip children of their culture, to remove children from communities, and to teach compliance and respect for authoritarian models that center "whiteness." One essential question for the working group is, "How do we move forward and invent something fundamentally different and isn't designed to recreate these deep-rooted systemic inequities, when we ourselves are immersed in a culture that values whiteness?" We can begin by acknowledging and reclaiming the past, and learn from the cultural history and work of the pioneers, who led large-scale, politically-radical and grass-roots education movements. At the heart of these efforts is the vision for education, which liberates communities empowered to

care for their children. Tracey Cordero is from Pueblo de Cochiti and director of the Keres Children's Learning Center (KCLC) in New Mexico is an intergenerational, dual language, Montessori school that gives children access to learn in their heritage language of Keres. Tracey states, "Tribal education is sovereignty. It is our right to determine the education of our children" (T. Cordero, personal communication, March 18, 2021).

There are numerous efforts from the past (and the present) that acknowledge children as agents in their own lives and provide academic freedom with a focus on the ideals of liberation. For example, the progressive education movement founded by John Dewey at the turn of the 20th century, asserted that in order to have a strong democracy, our students needed to be in the practice of democratic participation (Dewey, 1938). Dewey's transformative ideas were founded on a different view of what education could be for children, families, and teachers. He proposed a then-radical philosophy of "child-centered education" and that school experiences should be based on the interests and passions of students. At the heart of the progressive philosophy is a deep respect for each child as a person of capabilities, and agency. When describing the main difference between the current industrial model (which he called the traditional scheme) and progressive education, Dewey said, "The traditional scheme is, in essence, one of imposition from above and from outside. It imposes adult standards, subject matter, and methods upon those who are only growing slowly toward maturity… Consequently they must be imposed." (1938, pp. 18–19).

Like Dewey, there are so many other leaders who believed that liberation, citizenship and public education were inextricably linked in our democracy. Many of these leaders used grassroots strategies to provide communal learning and build political power at the same time. African American educator and civil rights activist, Septima Clark, created opportunities called Citizenship Schools in the 1950s that registered thousands of voters and cultivated grassroots citizenship education (McFadden,1990). Other examples of the community lifting up the children and self liberation are the creation of the Freedom Schools, created during the 1964 Freedom Summer in Mississippi by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in order to give students academic skills, democratic citizenship skills, and to help register Black voters. Through teaching core subjects and skills, these schools were designed to teach and inspire students to view themselves as active political actors on their own behalf (as voters, elected officials, organizers, etc.). The schools included parents and grandparents and served over 3,000 students in over 40 schools. Classes were held in the community, in homes, churches, and beauty shops. Today, there are still Freedom Schools across the country, in Illinois, Missouri, Seattle, and some that are named after this effort, such as the Akwesasne Freedom School, located on a Mohawk Indian reservation, and the Paulo Freire Freedom School in Tucson, Arizona (CDF Freedom Schools, 2021). These schools emerged from a great need in the community and liberation was at the heart of their design.

These rivers of theory and action — progressive education, community empowerment, and liberation — all center around seeing each child as a whole

person with self-determined will, and with an essential role to play in the community and in humanity to share their gifts. Thought leaders like Ted Sizer, founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) in the 1960s, is remembered for his effort to bring a more humane and empowering sense of schooling into the public domain. From the CES website: "The governing practical metaphor of the school should be 'student-as-worker,' rather than the more familiar metaphor of 'teacher as deliverer of instructional services.' Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves" (Coalition of Essential Schools, 2021). Based at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, The National Equity Project was founded by the Bay Area Coalition of Essential Schools (BayCES) in October 1995. The National Equity Project (NEP), is a leadership and transformative systems change organization that's mission is: "to transform the experiences, outcomes, and life options for children and families who have been historically underserved by our institutions and systems" (National Equity Project, 2021). All of these efforts (and many more not captured here) attempted to deviate from what David Tyack and Larry Cuban called the "grammar of schooling" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) — or the standard model of teaching and learning, governance and assessment, along with authoritarian relationships, etc. — and were met with a significant amount of resistance to change and bureaucratic roadblocks. Currently, there are many networks and catalysts promoting liberatory education. For example, the Education for Liberation Network, brings together youth, teachers, families, and activists to study and understand how injustice is perpetuated and how to

organize to fight for transformational change. From their website: "EdLib is a national network founded and primarily facilitated by folks of color, that focuses on liberatory education by connecting a spectrum of members through the honest love and work of communities. We are an empowering and welcoming community that both inspires people and helps them learn and grow in ways that support a more just society" (Education for Liberation Network, 2021). Another example is the Abolitionist Teaching Network. According to their literature, "Abolitionist Teaching Network's mission is to develop and support those in the struggle for educational freedom utilizing the intellectual work and direct action of Abolitionists in many forms" (Abolitionist Teaching Network, 2021). I interviewed the founder of My Reflection Matters Village, a virtual community where "Parenting, education, and liberation intersect. This is a learning community created primarily for BIPOC families and radical educators seeking support in raising and educating free people, students decide on the types of virtual learning experiences, and projects they are interested in pursuing." (Morales-James, personal communication, March 12, 2021). Founder Chemay Morales-James writes, "Black and Brown kids are trusted as being capable, self-directed learners and taking on the role of facilitator or instructor when they have skills they want to share with others who share similar interests" (Liberated Learning, 2021). Currently there are innovative efforts that bridge so many of these ideas of mastery of real world learning and breaking down the walls between school and communities. Miguel Gonzalez is founder of Embark Education, a charter middle school embedded within two small businesses in North Denver; a coffee shop

and a bicycle shop. The curriculum is taught through integrated projects, where content and skills are not taught as isolated subjects. Real-world problems and work are the basis for the learning, and the boundaries between "school" and "business" and "community" give way to a new kind of relationship. Miguel put it this way: "We see our learners as whole humans, we strive to meet them where they are at. Supporting and understanding of who they are and where they are in the world. Equity is braided into that." (M. Gonzalez, personal communication, February 2, 2021)

The Wisdom of Community Based

By seeking to acknowledge the wisdom of communities as foundational to learning ecosystems, we have the chance to confront some of the barriers that persist over time. These barriers separate, rather than celebrate, unique children and cultures. In an ethnographic study exploring how children learn Indigenous heritage embedded in community, the author, Luis Urietta, found that understanding the heritage of Indigenous families and communities and seeking to understand the philosophical stance behind the way they organize learning and the processes they use, can expand opportunities for all children. "The challenge, however, is for educators and educational policy makers to take a personal and professional stance on pursuing transformative change" (2009, p. 332). Kara Bobroff founded the Native American Community Academy (NACA) in 2006, in New Mexico, and the NACA Inspired School Network (NISN), founded in 2014. She states, "The folks who carry language, history, and culture exist in communities. [They hold] knowledge around Indigenous ways of knowing what

the resources are in your home community. The systems we have are already founded on principles at odds with beloved community. The ecosystems are reflective of a deeper conversation that a community is holding. How are we going to live together? How do we want to be together? How do we serve and nurture our children?" (K. Bobroff, personal communication, January 27, 2021). The NISN is building a movement to establish schools committed to Indigenous communities and promoting Indigenous culture, identity, and community investment.

An example of the powerful connection between community, politics, and education, was the work of the Black Panthers, from 1969 through approximately 1975. Many children were coming to school hungry, and the Black Panthers' Free Breakfast for School Children program was designed to feed them (Blakemore, 2018).The Panthers organized with grocery stores to get donations and they consulted health experts to offer nutritious meals. Their work in this area is mostly unknown, and yet it contributed to the federal free breakfast and lunch programs in place today. In the United States, Latinos have faced racism in the form of schools not being responsive to or supportive of their home cultures, language and history. Latinos have faced barriers to jobs, membership, and policy designed to produce obstacles to their full participation in American life. Maria MacDonald writes, "Despite these obstacles, Latino communities have always demonstrated the capacity to act independently and to make their own choices in the struggle to gain access to quality schooling. Latino parents, students and communities have fought for education rights and schooling

opportunities through the creation of advocacy organizations, the establishment of independent private schools, by enrolling their children in Catholic schools and colleges, through litigation, walkouts, and by leveraging political and economic power for equitable or appropriate legislation" (María MacDonald, n.d.). Another example of leaders who have influenced our understanding of the relationship between education and civil rights is Bob Moses, and his Algebra Project (algegra.com) — which still runs today — using algebra as an organizing tool to unlock academic, social, and economic opportunities for students in cities across the United States. Acknowledgment of the history and presence of racism in this country is essential, if we are to create a system together that will not repeat inequities. Together, we can imagine a new story. The National Equity Project states, "It is possible to achieve more just, equitable, and liberating systems. The work of creating systems committed to principled action, collective wellbeing and thriving begins in our imaginations — and requires us to acknowledge and make meaning of the historical and ongoing impacts of racism and white supremacy. Not to assign blame, but to inform a new way forward" (National Equity Project, n.d.).

The above examples and acknowledgments are just touching upon the ancestry of the ideas and theories that are part of the shared history of education in America — the educational land on which we are standing. There are many more that I have not included, or have not discovered, from the past and the present. If we are to create a learner ecosystem that weaves together the belief in seeing each child at the center, holds the power of community, and is

intentionally striving for equity, then we will need to recognize these past efforts and what they reveal about the existing racist structures and the need to shift the way we are thinking, being, and acting, together.

Theory of Action

If :

I conduct learning and outreach interviews with a diverse group of individuals and seek out organizations beyond our known networks, while deeply listening and seeking to understand the diverse perspectives from leaders of color, and

I delve into my own story and bias and do equity-centered work of educating myself and actively seeking growth and understanding, and

I explore the nature of living systems and allow that to influence and inform the design (and essential questions) of the working groups,

I collaborate deeply with the design team and create a culture of exploration and co-creation,

Then:

I will assemble a unique group of flexible thinkers from across sectors, vantage points, lived experiences,

I will raise my critical consciousness and understanding of the persistent systems that have oppressed historically disadvantaged and dispossessed groups,

I will lead the team to design and structure the working group conducive to invention rather than reform — (letting go of the restraints and traditions of the current education system and instead wholly orienting around the learner in community at the center of a living systems design) —

Leading to the launch of the ecosystems working group and the creation of "living templates," which individuals and groups in communities across the country can adapt to local context, use to provoke conversations within their local communities, and more learners, families, and communities will have access to the creation of equitable, community-based, learner-centered ecosystems.

Description of Strategic Project

My strategic project was to launch the Ecosystems Working Group by bringing together individuals who hold a wide range of expertise, lived experiences, perspectives and understandings of learner-centered education — diverse across ideology, sector, race, age, geography, and vantage point — and engaging them in a process to articulate how the inner workings of ecosystems could be designed. The intent was to provide resources that communities can fit

to the unique needs and vision of their local context, families, and children.

This Capstone is about sharing the process and content of the work and the learning and growing along the way. In the following section, I describe the convening of the planning and design team and my work facilitating the outreach and interviews of possible participants. I discuss the planning and design challenges, the evolution of the working group structure, and share the learning from the extensive interviews, along with a brief discussion of the multiple representations of information we used to help us think together about creating a diverse team for the ecosystem working group.

Planning and Design Team

Each design team meeting began with a connection question related to the work, such as: "What is one major difference you see these systems templates and toolkits making in the world?" "What matters to you about that?" "When you imagine equitable, community-based, learner-centered ecosystems, which part or element is clearest to you?" These kinds of connection questions helped us to get to know each other better, and ground the work in a stronger vision for ecosystems and the possibilities the vision creates for children and families. Each time we met, we would read aloud the purpose, or the theory of action, or relevant section, to get centered in the work together. Through conversations, we named the project the Ecosystems Working Group. Together, the planning team clarified the purpose of the project. We considered the outreach to participants, the size of the group, the arc of learning, the roles, the

orientation, timeline, and deliverables. Please see Appendix B: Working Groups Model, for further details.

Structure of the Working Group

The design process led to a strong articulation and design of the working group. The structure would keep in mind what it was we were asking of participants especially during this time of upheaval and so we aimed for a design that would allow members to participate while holding other jobs, having families, and not being overly burdened by the work. In addition we staffed the working group with facilitators and design leads to help ease the burden. Our structure and design was aimed at creating a process that would lead to the work of transformation and invention rather than reform or iteration.

We decided on the creation of one big working group with three smaller break-out groups designed to go deeper into specific areas, or as we called them, "tiger teams." (A tiger team is a specialized, cross-functional team brought together to solve or investigate a specific problem or critical issue.[1]) The three tiger teams were designed to tackle what we saw as key supporting levers for thriving ecosystems: (a) assessing and credentialing learning; (b) governance, developing shared accountability and allocating resources; and, (c) recognizing, cultivating, and credentialing human capital.

Thus, each tiger team is made up of approximately 12 people and within the team, we created three distinct roles including: ***Design Lead/Harvester*** — this is the writer charged with synthesizing the group's input between meetings

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[1] Definition from the website 2/6/2021 https://www.lucidchart.com/blog/what-is-a-tiger-team

and bringing drafts back to the group and eventually the final deliverables and the person focused on the overall experience and engagement for the participants.This role is also focused on guiding the learning along the path toward invention, rather than reform or consensus and to assure we adhere to core vision and values (equity, learner centered, community based, ecosystems); and, *Facilitator* —- lead the meetings, set up conversations and guide the group through transition points in the agenda. This person is practiced in and able to facilitate an inclusive and collaborative process that leads to invention, and surface, identify and reckon with differences and tensions in perspectives. We believed this structure would support an experience of learning and collaboration among members. **Scribe:** This role is to capture the thinking of the group and document the conversations along the way.

The planning team thought about what value the working group might bring to the individual members who volunteer to do this work together. Our hope was to design the participation such that the learning and discovery within the working group could be beneficial to each individual's personal and professional life (beyond the working group) and thus would not be just a process of extracting ideas from them. We created a list of benefits for each participant:

- Build relationship with other leading thinkers committed to learner-centered transformation, and are coming from sectors and perspectives they may not otherwise work with, by engaging together in a thought-provoking work;

- Develop a capacity to invent standing in the future, informed but unencumbered by the tangled web of the current system and what has been;

- Deepen their understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and questions that will come with advancing an ecosystem agenda both locally and at a state and national level; and

- Contribute to the generation of system and policy options that can serve as new jumping off points for communities and states seeking to bring learner-centered ecosystems to life. (For the full list see Appendix B.)

We designed the working groups to launch with an orientation consisting of a series of Zoom calls held over a two-day period, in order for members to get grounded in the guiding principles and committed to the task of creating a new future for education. We allowed time to connect in small groups in order to build the kind of trusting relationships with one another that will allow for powerful collaboration, exploration of new ideas, and working through difficult conversations. Orientation would be a chance to do some ground-setting and identify the guiding principles underlying the design of equitable community-based, learner-centered ecosystems. In addition, we planned an orientation for the facilitators, design leads, and staff that would be working together to support the working group.

We developed a Theory of Impact (Appendix C) for the Ecosystems Working Group to share with members and help define the work together. We began with a series of four assertions:

1. Given a commitment to creating a near future in which every young person is seen as powerful, capable, and on a unique path toward discovering how their gifts and interests can contribute to the greater community and world; and

2. Given this future requires consistent and intentional centering of equity and human dignity in the design of the learner-centered systems we seek to catalyze; and

3. Given a belief that the current education system has not realized this commitment for all students and therefore, continuing to reform the current education system by itself will not produce the paradigm shift needed to make good on this promise; and

4. Given a new vision for the creation of thriving, dynamic and equitable, community-based, learner-centered ecosystems comprised of multiple entities (such as schools alongside community organizations, businesses, and whole-child wellness services) working together to provide learning opportunities and ensure student success.

We paid close attention to our stand for equity and used some shared language from the Education Reimagined Equity Statement. Based on feedback

from practitioners in the field and the Education Reimagined communities of practice we believe that many communities wanted to do something different, but had very little to draw from that provided different views of how systems might operate that were learner centered, equitable, and community based. We also wanted to explicitly state our belief that local communities would have to do the real work of co-creation in order to build unique ecosystems. From the Theory of Impact:

1. If we bring together a group of learner-centered individuals from across the country who identify with this vision and are diverse across race, age, socioeconomic status, geography and ideology, as well as lived experiences, expertise, perspectives, and understandings of what might be required to create and sustain equitable learner-centered ecosystems; and

2. If they collaborate together to envision equitable, learner-centered ecosystems in operation, letting go of the restraints of the current system and instead wholly orient around the future-state with the learner at the center of design; and

3. If they bring into view how such systems might operate by creating "living templates" that articulate possibilities for approaching design challenges such as assessing and credentialing learning; governance, developing shared accountability, and allocating resources; and recognizing,

cultivating, and credentialing human capital within equitable, learner-centered ecosystems; and

4. If they share these "living templates" both in iterative feedback loops with additional stakeholders and broadly through channels accessible to others across the country;

5. Then individuals and groups in communities across the country who are interested and/or already endeavoring to create learner-centered ecosystems will be fueled by the "living templates," which they can adapt to local context, use to provoke conversations within their local communities, inspire or recruit more allies, situate their work within the broader vision, and/or make strategic decisions about how to get from here to there; and

6. Then more learners, families, and communities will be nurtured by equitable, learner-centered ecosystems that value each learner and respond to their unique growth and development along their learning journeys.

Please see Appendix B: Workgroup Model for the plan and structures of the working groups, to support collaboration and the generation of ideas. This includes the phases, the learning arc, and the roles and responsibilities developed with the planning group.

The Interviews: Finding Participants

In the quest to find participants for the working group, I held interviews with more than 100 individuals during this time. In these conversations, I came to know educators, school leaders, students, parents, university professors, and thought leaders each with a unique perspective and vantage point. I spoke with people across the field from education startups, community organizers, authors, innovators, researchers, higher ed, technical support, state agencies, youth-led groups, parent-led groups, policy, assessment, school finance, governance, and accountability. I met people who were new on the scene and folks who were retired and shared their perspective of the long arc of change. These conversations had three purposes. The first was to find possible participants that were learner centered and equity focused as a minimum criteria for consideration; second, to ask for recommendations for more folks to talk to; and, finally, to help me learn and identify the essential thoughts and streams of knowledge held regarding the subjects of the working groups. In the end the interviews served to help me grow and learn in ways I hadn't imagined at the beginning of this journey. These interviews led to inviting a unique group of 33 people to join the working group. In this section I will share some of the process in choosing the people to invite by using multiple representations of data including the perspectives, technical expertise, vantage point, and demographics held by interviewees.

Conducting Interviews

Interviews consisted of 30–60 minute conversations that were introductory and involved me sharing the outline of the project and asking interviewees about their work, experience, and beliefs. I listened for the commitment to equity and putting learners at the center of the work. In addition, the interviews were designed to help me learn and listen for the thinking of leaders in the field. The following is a list of 10 questions that guided my conversations. Questions to use or keep in mind during the Interviews:

1. What do we need to know about the subject? What are the fundamental questions to be answered in this working group?

2. What is the constellation of ideas and the main conversations happening in this field (and who is having them)?

3. What are the commonly held myths we need to make sure get surfaced?

4. What are some of the leading edge thinking and assumptions that we need busted? (Like we can't go into this without the challenge of that assumption i.e., "assessment has to be comparative")

5. What are the assumptions for the critical background conversations that we need to consider?

6. Who is usually left out of this conversation? Why?

7. Who probably knows the most about this subject in terms of practical application?

8. Who are the people we need to talk to and then who are the people we want to enroll in being a part of this?

9. What would you think the composition of this working group needs to be?

10. Who are some of the people that either need to be outside experts that we are learning from as a group or any organization and/or initiatives that are already going on that we need to be aware of — with regards to reimagining any of these things?

Outreach

In order to conduct outreach to folks from a wide range of expertise, lived experiences, and perspectives, I created and sent out a survey asking for recommendations; searched the web for current efforts, articles, webinars and conferences; and then reached out to people through those channels.

First, we began with our known networks, which led to a larger share of recommendations of White colleagues and a concentration of people in the K-12 school and district vantage points. It took some time to reach out to new communities of people, and then, as I was conducting interviews I realized that the project itself was drawing some people toward it, and some people away. At the beginning, when describing the project and inviting reactions and interest to learn more, I centered more on clarifying the paradigm shift in seeing the learner as the central organizing hub rather than the school building. For some, the implications of that major shift on the existing system brought out concerns and questions emerged such as, "If we personalize for each unique student, who will

assure fairness?" and "If communities become the hub for learning, what happens for children in communities that are struggling for shelter and food?" These important concerns led me to realize that I was not being explicit enough about the commitment to equity, and thus it sounded as though the vision would not acknowledge what it would take to reshape an equitable future with intentional practices and structures.

I spoke with many people whose work as an individual or as a leader in an organization, held closely the perspectives of communities, schools, the district, state agencies, universities, national and international organizations. They held perspective and pieces of the puzzle for what a fully-functioning ecosystem would need and they had first hand experience with those policies and structures that serve as constraints. For example, one superintendent from Kentucky stated, "The biggest challenge is the perception of laws and rules that will not allow this kind of work. I'm thinking about truly learning anywhere, anytime and being able to credential that learning. We have to think bigger about what we are credentialing. Perceptions hold us back. We are so locked into seat time. We have a law in Kentucky that allows for proficiency-based credit. It's very vague, but I have found that we are scared of that. What if we do it wrong? We are locked into the ways we think about learning." (C. Coleman, personal communication, February 18, 2021). I also spoke with people in a wide developmental range of experiences. From current students participating in learner centered schools, to retired superintendents having spent a career working to make a difference in education. One retiree stated, "Trust the teachers

the same way you trust the kids. If it's not designed by teachers there will be some rough waters" (L. Schaeffer, personal communication, December, 16, 2020).

Criteria

I created several different ways to represent data of the interviewees. First, a simple running record of conversations to capture quotes and the biographical information on interviewees. I began to capture data from the calls in a spreadsheet with a master list, and then short lists of the first round of participants we would invite. This spreadsheet became a tool that allowed us to consider the potential candidates for a tiger team and make sure we understood the balance of technical expertise, vantage point, and demographics represented by the different mix of candidates we considered. The following tables are sorted by each tiger team topic and show the representation of those invited to the tiger teams by vantage point, technical expertise, and race. One of the questions we had to ask ourselves was how critical it might be to have somebody to speak to all of these different vantage points and lived experiences in the working group. We knew that for any vantage points or expertise not represented, we could introduce concepts with readings, or bring in external folks for conversations. Not all of the considerations for participants are represented in these tables. Notably special education, universal design for learning, and early childhood were all part of the thinking and considered criteria in this work. Many people held multiple roles and perspectives and we tried, as best we could, to capture those in the charts and graphs as the interviews progressed.

Assessing and Credentialing of Learning

We created data (Figure 3) based on a spreadsheet that captured information from the interviews including the vantage points, experience, and demographics of the participants invited to the Working Group. To begin to assemble the Assessing and Credentialing of Learning Tiger Team we began to identify the experience, understandings, and vantage points we hoped to bring to the table such as:

- Self-assessment

- Peer feedback

- Performance-based assessment

- Student exhibitions and defenses / Portrait of a Graduate portfolios

- Learner-driven (aka student-led) assessment

- Culturally relevant/responsive assessment

- Competency-based assessment and credentialing

- Credentialing of outside-of-school/ expanded learning opportunities

- Badges and micro-credentials

- Assessment of essential skills and dispositions / SEL

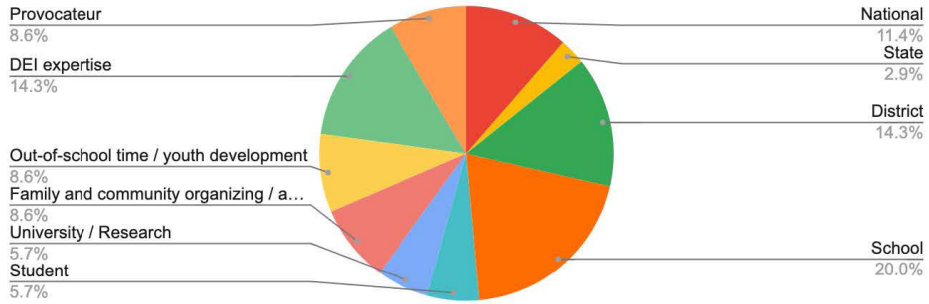- Digital backpack (perspective on privacy and data ownership)

We prioritized participants with experience in student-led assessment, including student-led exhibitions, portfolios, and learner-driven assessment. Figure 3 shows the group is weighted with people who have experience in
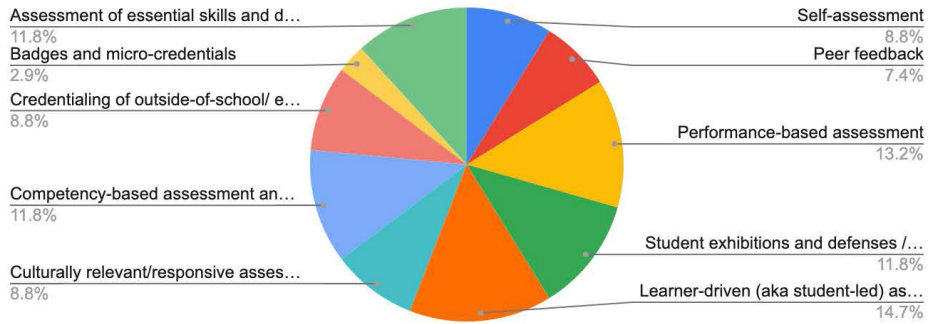
schools and districts (35.5%). Our short list included people with backgrounds such as a deeper learning coach, who works with schools to develop a broader set of assessments including on the ground or "street data"; two students from learner-centered schools, one of whom serves on the curriculum and assessment committee of her school; and the other student is from a teacher-designed school within a school that is open walled, with no grade levels, and an explicit shift in the power structure of the central relationship between children and adults. As one student stated, "I have an interesting relationship with math. I don't know a lot. I own my uneasiness with how we do math. I'm really interested in curricular design. I am on the curriculum committee and we have questions" (T. Alba, personal communication, February 1, 2021). Another participant is an entrepreneur, who started an after-school program designed for students to self assess and find their own "genius" and, as a final example, an associate professor from a Historically Black College and University studying, "non-dominant literacy strengths of K-12 learners from historically marginalized communities."

Figure 3: Assessment and Credentialing of Learning

Shortlist Representation by Vantage Point / Altitude - Assessment and Credentialing

- Provocateur 8.6%
- DEI expertise 14.3%
- Out-of-school time / youth development 8.6%
- Family and community organizing / a… 8.6%
- University / Research 5.7%
- Student 5.7%
- National 11.4%
- State 2.9%
- District 14.3%
- School 20.0%

Shortlist Representation by Technical Expertise - Assessment and Credentialing

- Assessment of essential skills and d… 11.8%
- Badges and micro-credentials 2.9%
- Credentialing of outside-of-school/ e… 8.8%
- Competency-based assessment an… 11.8%
- Culturally relevant/responsive asses… 8.8%
- Self-assessment 8.8%
- Peer feedback 7.4%
- Performance-based assessment 13.2%
- Student exhibitions and defenses /… 11.8%
- Learner-driven (aka student-led) as… 14.7%

Shortlist Representation by Race - Assessment and Credentialing

- White 36.4%
- Multi- Racial 9.1%
- Black 36.4%
- Native American 9.1%
- Hispanic/ Latinx 9.1%
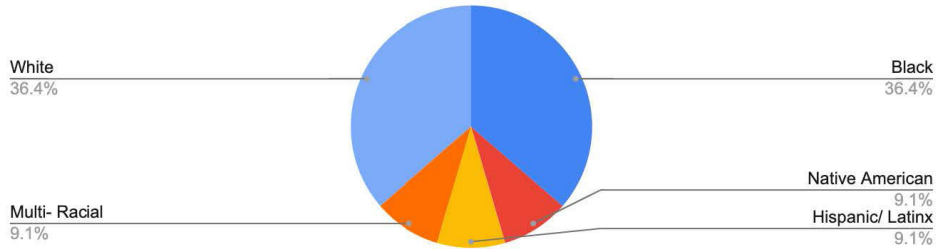
Recognizing, Cultivating, and Credentialing Human Capital

We identified the following experience and vantage points we felt were examples of individuals or organizations that hold pieces of the puzzle to learner ecosystems:

- Counseling and socio-emotional wellness

- Workplace and real-world learning

- Internships

- Human resources

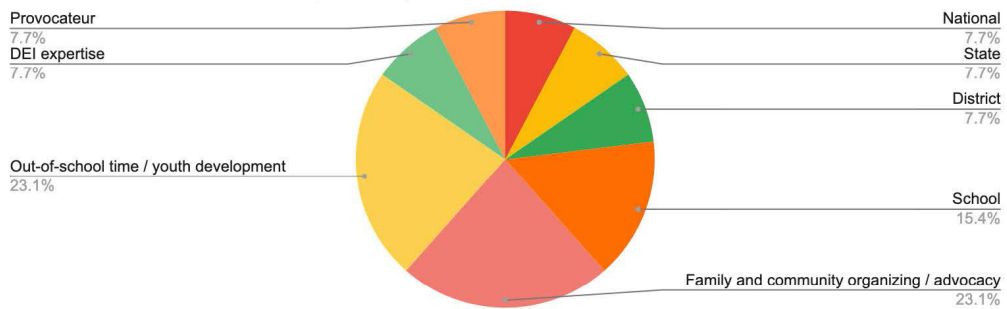- Educator preparation and development (higher ed, PD)

- Adult learning and development

- Weavers and People Connectors

- Dream catchers and pathway navigators

- Labor unions

We created Figure 4 based on a spreadsheet that captured information from the interviews including the vantage points, experience, and demographics of the participants invited to the Working Group. In Figure 4, the Human Capital Tiger Team has a strong representation of people from Out of School Time and Family and Community vantage points. These are the areas valued and essential to distinguishing ecosystems from the current system. Who are the people needed in a system designed to know each child? Who are the people we can recognize in the community, and what structures might we create to support mentorships, internships, and possible new roles? How do we credential people? What can we learn from Indigenous cultures that will engage elders and
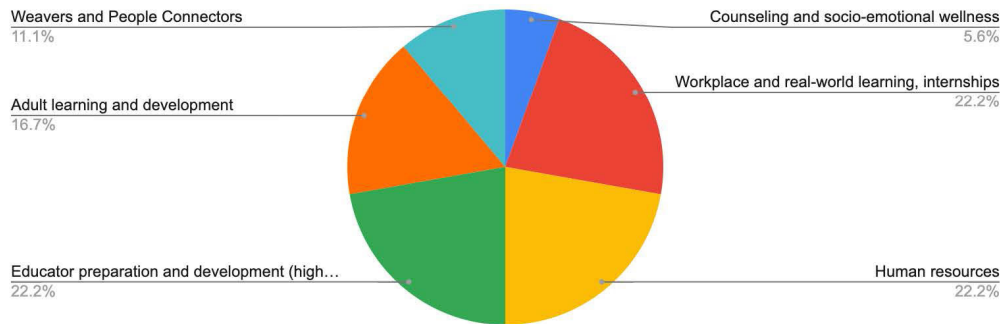
approach the community as a learning place? As one interviewee put it, "There are a lot of folks who carry language and culture and knowledge that exist in our communities." And, what new roles might we create to make sure this system is equitable and responsive to the needs of each child and the community?

Figure 4: Recognizing, Cultivating, and Credentialing Human Capital

Shortlist Representation by Vantage Point / Altitude - Human Capital

- Provocateur — 7.7%
- DEI expertise — 7.7%
- Out-of-school time / youth development — 23.1%
- National — 7.7%
- State — 7.7%
- District — 7.7%
- School — 15.4%
- Family and community organizing / advocacy — 23.1%

Shortlist Representation by Technical Expertise - Human Capital

- Weavers and People Connectors — 11.1%
- Adult learning and development — 16.7%
- Educator preparation and development (high… — 22.2%
- Counseling and socio-emotional wellness — 5.6%
- Workplace and real-world learning, internships — 22.2%
- Human resources — 22.2%

Shortlist Representation by Race - Human Capital

- White — 22.2%
- Hispanic/ Latinx — 11.1%
- Native American — 11.1%
- Black — 55.6%
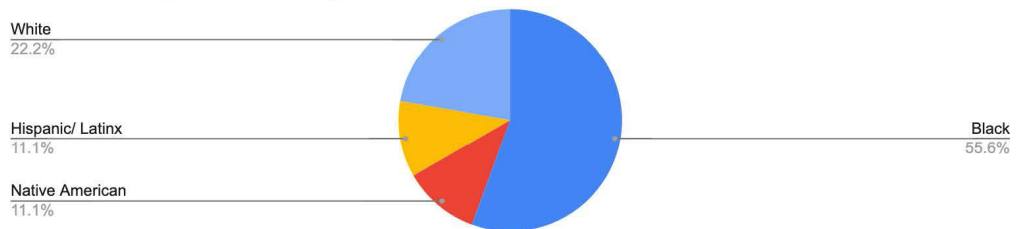
Governance, Developing Shared Accountability and Allocating

Resources

This tiger team is charged with thinking about new ways of

operationalizing governance, shared accountability, and allocating resources. We

identified the following experience and vantage points:

- Cross-sector governance or collaboration

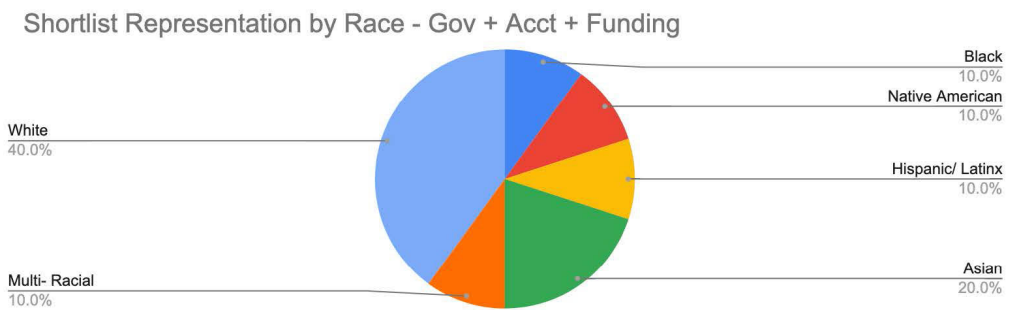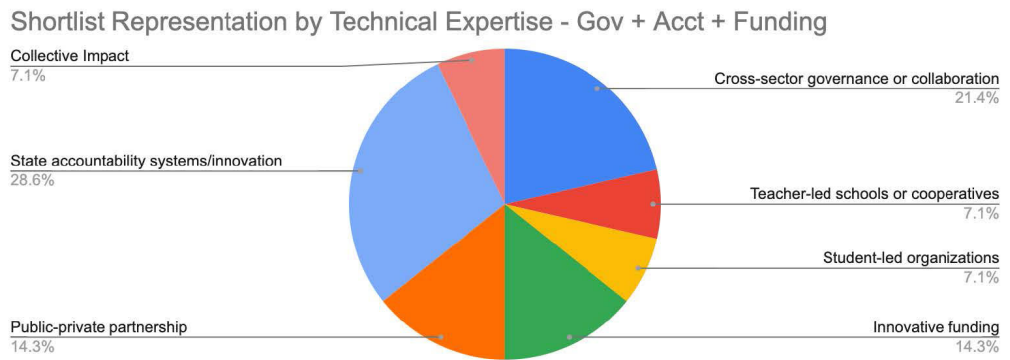- Teacher-led schools or cooperatives

- Student-led organizations

- Innovative funding

- Public-private partnership

- Philanthropy or venture capital

- State accountability systems/innovation

- Collective Impact

We created Figure 5 based on a spreadsheet that captured information

from the interviews, including the vantage points, experience, and demographics

of the participants invited to the Working Group. Leaders from the National

Teachers Association, partners in liberatory learning organizations, unschool

leaders, homeschool leaders, progressive schools, Native American Community

Association, state universities, alternative schools, and more. We made sure

there was at least one provocateur — someone who would push the thinking of

the group.

Figure 5: Governance, Shared Accountability, and Allocating Resources

Shortlist Representation by Vantage Point / Altitude - Gov + Acct + Funding

Provocateur 9.1%
DEI expertise 6.1%
Out-of-school time / youth development 9.1%
Family and community organizing / advocacy 15.2%
University / Research 6.1%
National 15.2%
State 15.2%
District 12.1%
School 12.1%

Shortlist Representation by Technical Expertise - Gov + Acct + Funding

Collective Impact 7.1%
State accountability systems/innovation 28.6%
Public-private partnership 14.3%
Cross-sector governance or collaboration 21.4%
Teacher-led schools or cooperatives 7.1%
Student-led organizations 7.1%
Innovative funding 14.3%

Shortlist Representation by Race - Gov + Acct + Funding

White 40.0%
Multi- Racial 10.0%
Black 10.0%
Native American 10.0%
Hispanic/ Latinx 10.0%
Asian 20.0%

Strategic Project Analysis

In this analysis, I will share the learning throughout the strategic project including: my early missteps while jumping into action; the evolution of the project and why it changed; and, finally, I use the National Equity Project's Leading for

Equity Framework (n.d.) to consider my growing understanding of the importance of acknowledging the past and explicitly talking about liberation.

Learning Along the Way

When I began working with Education Reimagined, I wanted to define my project quickly and jump into action. But this was a time of great change in the education sector. Education Reimagined was committed to finding their way by listening, engaging in conversations, and beginning to define their work going forward. At first I thought I could make an immediate impact by participating in all the work of the organization. When my supervisor asked me to set out a draft plan with goals for the project, I made an 18 month plan for the growth of the organization. I was surprised when I realized that was not what they expected me to do. We began to speak of a series of six symposiums. I went ahead and created a full launch agenda and lists of possible partners. But when I shared this early work, the team seemed confused. I realized I was jumping too far ahead. The team was still in the thinking stage. The team included my supervisor, the director of strategy, design lead, and program coordinator. In each meeting, we would consult the latest notes of our thinking and continue to evolve and refine the plan.

Coming from my former position as executive director of City Neighbors, I found the deliberate pace challenging. I was used to steering the ship. I often set teams into action and built momentum toward defined outcomes. Working in schools and with the district in Baltimore city, I learned to operate by taking prompt action and responding to the crisis of the moment. It was a bit of culture

shock for me to move to a national perspective with Education Reimagined and an environment that values research, prolonged discussion and preciseness of language. I often had the feeling that, just as I finally understood what my work was, it would all change the very next meeting. I shared this feeling with my supervisor. She posed a question that helped me think differently: "What would it be like to process this planning not as 'inaction'?" From that point on I realized that I was bringing tension to the work. I was able to let go and dive into the planning and thinking. This led to a much more thoughtful and carefully planned project in the end.

One thing I would do differently is to get engaged in other work that was happening in the organization. I was unsure, at times, of my role, and when I did join in other efforts, I felt out of place. Working remote during residency contributed to this feeling of not connecting with other members of the team. It would take a much greater level of ongoing communication and daily meetings for me to have found my place in participating in more of the other work that was happening in the organization when I first joined. Eventually the working group idea for my strategic project coalesced. I became engrossed in participating in interviews and planning meetings, and fell into sync with the pace and tone of the organization.

The reason for this rocky start is also connected to the context of my residency. Education Reimagined, was in the midst of change (along with the rest of the nation) and responding to the shifting context of public education. Across the country people were experiencing three main shifts in education. The

first shift came with the move to online, which caused the districts to develop much more personalized relationships between families and schools, as teachers saw children in their homes and worked to meet the needs of each individual. Districts worked to make sure students had access to the internet and online learning and many districts became advocates for families finding resources, food, and supplies that were needed. The second shift came as people realized that the community was acting as the hub and resource for play, learning, food and child care, with the willing partners in the community such as businesses, local government, libraries, rec centers, park districts, and more. The walls that separate the school and community came down during this time and many families found new ways of using the outdoors for learning. Organizations in the community that provide for children after school or out of school became essential players in serving the needs of families once they switched to remote learning. In addition, because many of these providers were often already using learner-centered approaches, building on the interests of students and using the community as a place of learning, they were positioned to help families during a time of crisis. A new appreciation for out-of-school time partners and the relationships they hold with families emerged thus making the learner ecosystem even more visible. I interviewed Josh Schachter, the founder of an organization called Community Share, an online platform designed to create an online human library that matches students and educators with partners in the community in order to create "real world learning experiences and to give children access to mentors, project collaborators, guest speakers, content-area advisors, student

competition judges, field trip hosts, and more" (Community Share 2021). Josh described his work as a way to "build up the ecotones in a system, the place where two different kinds of communities meet and integrate and interact — the connective tissue between communities. This is "democratizing education." (J. Schecter, personal communication, February 17, 2021).

New forms of governance emerged, as families came together to form pods and other ways of grouping children. At the same time, districts began to experiment with new ways of taking attendance (rather than "seat time") and for credentialing learning outside of the school building. With the position of residency in a national organization, I had the opportunity to expand my vantage point. I spoke with many people who were doing their best to innovate within the system and some who were disruptors, designed to push for systems change in policy and practice. Some were in action working to suggest changes at this point in time. For example, I spoke with a superintendent preparing to present to the State Board of Education, to ask for the changes he believed necessary for the system to move from the old system to the new expanded concept. He explained, "We defined attendance pre-covid as seat time as the primary means of defining attendance. During covid all of that changed and we learned that students can 'attend' school online or in pods in the community. Now we are requesting to use student work products to determine attendance rather than physically reporting to the school site the same way Independent study allows work product to determine attendance." *(Anonymous, personal communication, March 9, 2021).* I heard evidence of those working to embrace the new way of

thinking about schools — and I interviewed superintendents who acknowledged they felt so overwhelmed and busy supporting children and families in this time of great need, that they didn't have the space to reflect on the changes they were experiencing. These shifts in public awareness led to a shift in the strategy employed by Education Reimagined. For the past six years, their work was building the field and thinking of schools and programs as the unit of change. Now, in light of the pandemic and the shared experiences of the public, they could think of whole systems change. That was the realization they were in the midst of when I joined in the work.

Looking through the lens of equity

Education Reimagined is operating from a new paradigm, one that is standing in the future where we see the world in new ways (in this case, with learner agency at the center). Bringing up the past, or focusing on solving the problems we hold right now, can situate the work back in the mechanistic industrial age vision of schooling. And, yet, here, in America, without the explicit and transparent stand for disrupting our own patterns of implicit bias, privilege, and racism and then working to do that same work in our organizations, and in the education field — we will not be able to transform our systems and society to reach equitable outcomes for all children. As I began creating this strategic project, I had the opportunity to explore the ways that equity and the vision intersect. Over this past year, Education Reimagined created an equity statement, they explored equity through the creation of a declaration, and they expanded their shared vocabulary, by reading critical race theory and applying

the lessons learned to their work. In addition, they continued to expand representation from the BIPOC community to their governing and advisory boards and staff.

I chose to use the National Equity Project Multidisciplinary Approach: Equity, Complexity, and Design framework (Figure 2) to navigate and analyze my strategic project, because it provides a multidisciplinary frame of equity, complexity, and design which are all present in the work of planning, outreach and designing the working groups.

Figure 2: Leading for Equity Framework
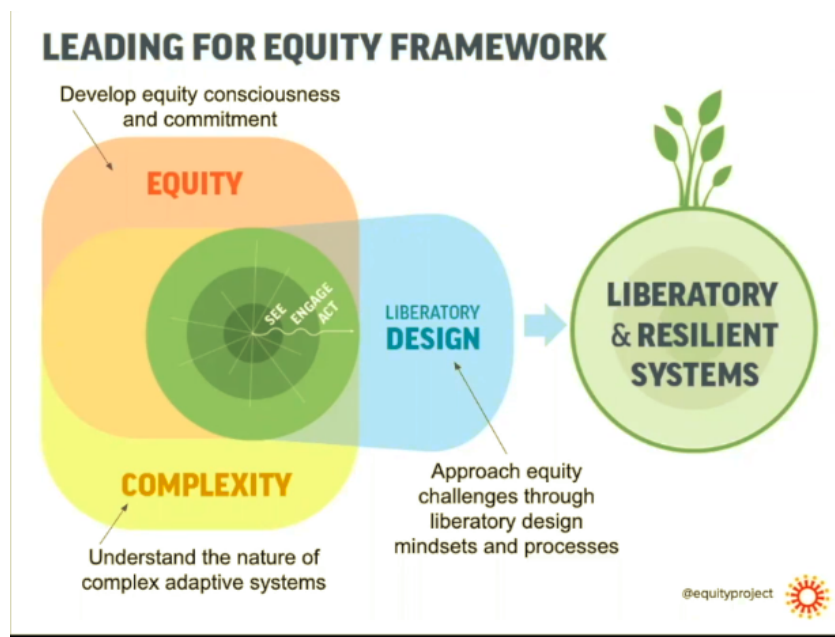
Source: (National Equity Project®, 2020)

The framework asks us to look closely at our Leadership Stance and suggests that equity leadership moves from the "inside-out," rather than the more traditional version of top down leadership. Then it situates us with that lens in the

middle of three disciplines: *equity* — developing equity consciousness;

Complexity — understanding the nature of complex systems; and, *design* —

approaching equity challenges through the mindset of user-centered design

(Leading for Equity Framework, 2020). These practices and perspectives and

actions are a way of operating and thinking that will lead to what they call:

Liberatory & Resilient Systems — a goal of developing certain system conditions

that increase its capacity to bring about equitable outcomes and experiences for

students (Leading for Equity Framework, 2020). This exploration impacted my

own growth and understanding as I strove to develop the working group design,

seek out participants, and develop the process.

Equity - developing equity consciousness

As I spoke with people, I identified two major concerns in response to the

learner ecosystem vision and the working group. The first was a concern for what

this vision would do to the current system in place serving over 50 million

children right now. I spoke with those deeply engaged in reform efforts aimed at

making powerful moves to make the current system operate better leading to

better results for children. This began to feel like a great divide and I wanted to

create a bridge. Did this new vision condemn the old system? Does a new tree

condemn the elders? We talked about parallel systems, but I felt we needed

another way to think and communicate about this change and transformation if

we truly want to be inclusive of diverse perspectives and lived experiences in the

working group. As a leader in the charter school movement in Baltimore, I had

experienced being at great odds with the current system while wanting so much

to be a part of it all. I sought out a way to think about the current system and I found Bill Sharpe's Three Horizons tool that creates a way to envision the future, looking at three horizons (Sharpe, 2020). The first is the horizon that is taking care of business right now and keeping the structures we have going. A self sustaining system that says, the future will look very close to what we have right now as long as we continue to maintain the status quo. The second horizon is the disruptive horizon of entrepreneurs always trying new ideas to see what might lead to the future we want. The third horizon has set its sights on a desired future and stands with confidence for nothing less creating a possible pathway to follow as more and more people begin to see it too and the evidence grows. The Three Horizons theory says that every system eventually becomes a first horizon system sustaining itself. We always need a third horizon to shoot for. But I still felt as though I was holding a judgement on the current system and not sure I agreed that a transformational system that knows how to learn and is highly responsive to the growing changing children and adults within it would need the same kind of concerted effort for transformation we are witnessing in education right now.

The second concern was for the altitude of the work. The vision is for communities of families and educators to come together and create with their community a unique vision for education based on their region, mapping the assets, expanding the neworks, creating a system that fundamentally operates by knowing each child through systems of advisories, home bases, and other structures that both allow for maximum differentiation, and quality socialization in order to thrive. So, how could a national working group create anything of use?

The ecosystem vision is a process of becoming more and more connected. This is not a system that can be mandated from above, and that is a sign of its diversity — or in living systems terminology, a kind of biodiversity that is a sign of resilience. We clarified in our design meetings that the working group is creating jumping off places for communities to adapt. Resources to be shared widely to add to the public knowledge for how ecosystems could work. That way communities that are interested in this idea do not have to start from scratch. These would offer possible pathways, concepts, and scenarios. The Organization for Economic Cooperative Development (OECD) recently published four scenarios for the future of education, to help people begin to think strategically about the choices we might make that would lead us to one future or another. They point out the need for developing processes for future thinking and write, "What does it mean to be future-fit in such a challenging context? Attempting to predict or forecast the future is of limited benefit in a world of high uncertainty. What is highly valuable, however, is to identify a number of different plausible future scenarios, explore what impacts they could have and identify potential implications for policies." (OECD, 2020) We added language to explicitly acknowledge that the ultimate work would belong to those communities who decide to take up the work. From the Working Group invitation we created:

> "The invention of the systems, policies, and structures that can support these ecosystems of learning will require a new conversation among committed individuals both inside and outside of the "education system" as it is currently defined. And, while the

important work of envisioning and building new ecosystems must occur locally, Education Reimagined believes that by hosting such a conversation at a national level we can generate important learning, insight, and pathways for how such systems might operate—making visible ideas, options, trade offs, and templates that can inform broader policy change and that local actors can adapt to their own context." (Please see Appendix F for the Invitation to the Ecosystems Working Group.)

The Evolution Of The Project

Part of the learning and effort during the planning phase was realizing when we were stuck ourselves and constrained by the natural inclination to react to what is happening in the current system and try to solve for existing problems. For example, in the beginning, we devised six separate working groups (assessment, accountability, credentialing learning, human resources, funding, governance). As we continued to meet and think through the work, we realized that holding six separate working groups was more of a reactive stance to the design of the bureaucratic model of public school systems, rather than leaning into the systems we might imagine within a different paradigm where the system is living, and every student is seen as unique. The design team moved from the original idea of six separate working groups to one large working group with three tiger teams. The tiger teams would take on:

1. Assessing and credentialing of learning

2. Governance, develop shared accountability and allocating resources

3. Recognizing, cultivating, and credentialing human capital

Grouping these tiger teams in this way helps us to do that. For example, separating assessment from accountability allows us to connect assessment with learning and accountability to governance. Whereas in the current system, they now are linked and that link between accountability and assessment has led to the continual narrowing of learning and opportunities for children.

Participants of the Working Groups

I decided I would need to do some intentional outreach to people of color if we were to expand the community and build partnerships and gain wisdom from other perspectives and experiences. Education Reimagined staff were participating in a leadership program at this time, and one of the members, Shajan Abusalih, who serves as a Program Manager with Education Reimagined and has partnered with the team to advance their work on equity, diversity, and inclusion, reached out to me with a message and request to connect: "I am focusing on making sure that BIPOC, underserved and marginalized communities feel valued and a place of belonging within learner centered education and the transformation of education." (S. Abusalih, personal communication, November 11, 2020). That began a joyful partnership in thinking through this project and having a close partner to view the work specifically through an equity lens. We asked questions about whether equity centered and social justice advocates viewed this work and project as aligned with their values. We discussed wanting to create a bridge for those who might find the vision hard

to reach at first. We scanned the online gatherings, conferences, webinars, etc. with black leaders and social impact leaders, and together we identified those that may be aligned with our work and we reached out to those leaders in the field, and together held interviews to gain insights and invite conversations and participation in the work.

The idea that equity leadership moves from the inside out helped me realize the importance of my continued growth of understanding how my own bias can blind me to the experiences of others. Throughout the interviews, I had the opportunity to listen closely to the experiences and perspectives of people of different races, vantage points and positional authority. Working closely with my colleague Shajan, we discussed the possibilities for outreach and the possible barriers that might be in our way for attracting and building relationships with Black leaders in the field. How do we do a better job in attracting Black leadership? What was holding people back from joining? In my next interview with a Black woman, I shared these questions that I was holding about outreach and asked if she was willing to offer some feedback on the conversation we were in and she agreed. After talking about the vision and describing the working groups, I asked, "Does this sound invitational to you? As a Black woman, what is your reaction? What is missing? What don't I see, but is clear to you?" She paused for a moment and then replied, "From my perspective, I don't hear any acknowledgement of what the Black community has contributed and continues to contribute to the field. The vision is right on. It reminds me of the Freedom Schools, and the Black cultural value of community and shared responsibility for

children. What about the Black Panthers community work? How about the liberation schools we see today?" (A. Mumby, personal communication, February 8, 2021). This conversation led me to learn more about the educational ancestry acknowledgement that is needed to honor and connect with the communities of Black, Indigenous, and people of color. Her feedback influenced the framing of the work and led to deeper conversations and more willing participants. This type of learning — on the job through experimentation — and, with the help and partnership of Shajan holding together the idea of a bridge we were trying to create, is an example of what the Equity Framework calls moving from the inside out and holding complexity.

In the next section I review the composition of the working group and share multiple spreadsheets, visual representations, that led us to the short list of candidates to invite into the work.

Design - approaching equity challenges through the mindset of user-centered design

The framework suggests employing user centered design to create conditions that will generate liberatory possibilities. In the design of the working group, we created space for the tiger teams to engage communities in the prototypes, and through feedback loops go through an iterative process and get input from communities at the grassroots level who are interested in this work. In addition, throughout the design, and the invitation we added language such as, "Our intent is to provide resources that communities can fit to the unique needs

and vision of the local context and community." to clarify our desire not to create a solution, but to create helpful resources that could spark the conversations and action needed by communities, schools, and districts to create education ecosystems. The impact of this work is present in this excerpt from the Working Group Theory of Action:

If they share these "living templates," both in iterative feedback loops with additional stakeholders and broadly through channels accessible to others across the country;

Then individuals and groups in communities across the country who are interested and/or already endeavoring to create learner-centered ecosystems will be fueled by the "living templates," which they can adapt to local context, use to provoke conversations within their local communities, inspire or recruit more allies, situate their work within the broader vision, and/or make strategic decisions about how to get from here to there;

Then more learners, families, and communities will be nurtured by equitable, learner-centered ecosystems that value each learner and respond to their unique growth and development along their learning journeys.

There is deep knowledge in the people and organizations that in the past we called "out of school time" or "after school time" providers. For years, they have focused on whole child practices and social and emotional learning, they have relationships with families and often mixed-age groupings. They hold so many pieces of this puzzle that is coming together so clearly now. Building on the ideas of organizations that have emerged so clearly this past year, we can work

with teachers and begin to look forward and create new roles, such as pathway navigators, weavers, surveyors, and more. The ecosystems working group is a model that any community could employ to bring together people who want to work and imagine an equitable, community based, learner centered, ecosystem where every child is honored, loved, and free.

Implications for Self

Reflecting on the efforts of this past year, I recognize major implications that I will take into my career and my life.

Leading the design and creation of the working groups posed challenges for me, in an attempt to expand my critical consciousness of my own bias. Bringing together a diverse group of people from different vantage points, expertise, lived experiences, and race, I found it startling to discover that my invitation to join the working group was not well received by some of the people I'd thought would be inspired by this project, people whose work was anchored in a stand for liberation. I asked for feedback. I listened to what they were experiencing. This was one of the moments when my thinking and listening expanded, and I gained greater understanding. At last, I understood the importance of acknowledging that this vision is informed by the wisdom from communities, past and present. Communities of folks who joined together to take education into their own hands and raise their children to know themselves, their history, and their rights to participate as full citizens in the world.

I have found myself drawn again to Kegan's (1994) theory of adult growth over time and the five stages of development and increasing complexity, which

he describes as the "evolution of consciousness, the personal unfolding of ways of organizing experience that are not simply replaced as we grow, but subsumed into more complex systems of mind" (Kegan, 1994, p. 9). My experience of awakening, and then reawakening to my own implicit bias is an evolution of my consciousness that continues to grow and change.

This revelation changed the way I talked about the work, and it impacted the design of the project. Listening led me to investigate and research the educational land acknowledgement, and incorporate the explicit recognition of the work that came before. At this point, it was tremendously useful to find the National Equity Project's Leading for Equity Framework, as it provided a way for me to think about the past and current efforts while envisioning the future in a way that didn't minimize the importance or the value of the work of past communities. The framework helped me to see how to hold complexity, and create complex solutions to meet complex problems.

Over time, my definition and experience of leadership continues to change and grow. I am wondering about the deeper change required of individuals — of myself — within the system, to live out this kind of open architecture of living systems when closed systems and closed architecture is how the system has always functioned? When challenged to redefine leadership for myself, some of my own immunity to change came roaring up. In the creation of new systems, how do we move forward in a way that doesn't spark the immune system of the system itself? The tension I feel and have felt throughout my career, between wanting to be engaged with the current education system, and also wanting that

system to learn and change, defines my career. I started City Neighbors out of a great love for public education, and, in part, because I wanted to remain in the system, but have the freedom to create a school that would model a different kind of schooling. We immersed ourselves in the community, creating alliances and coalitions across sectors and with a focus on advocating for equitable education funding, beautiful buildings, parent involvement and student voice. Coming to Education Reimagined during this pivotal moment, and having just spent two years as a student in a doctoral program dedicated to adult development, systems thinking, and leadership focused on equity and justice — felt like I had an opportunity to get back to the work I loved, but from a different jumping off place. That feeling both served to limit my thinking in some ways, and in other ways, help me gain clarity on my passion for the transformation of public education. If we don't want to repeat the racist infrastructures and mindsets we are immersed in, then we have to design systems that are biased toward thriving for every child. I've learned it will take trust to look through the lens at our leadership, at how we design, and how we embrace complexity. I've learned we must make the changes within if we hope to build the capacity to design the outer systems we seek. Now I find myself at the crossroads, with a desire to co-create systems that acknowledge the wisdom of the past, embrace the present, and look to the future — setting a course for imagining and creating equitable, community based, learner centered ecosystems.

Implications for Site

In this section I make three recommendations for Education Reimagined: (a) maintain clarity of the vision; (b) expand the team; and (c) make the stand for equity and liberation more explicit.

Education Reimagined is a catalyst organization helping to bring the sparks of ideas together. The working group will create resources that will create living templates for systems and structures of governance, funding, assessment, human capital, and more, but we need a strong and clear vision of where we are headed, so that communities can determine a scenario to advance. There are so many possibilities for what public education might become in the future and each have deep implications for equity, for the strength of our communities and ultimately for our Democracy. In a report by the OECD on the Future of Schooling, they suggest four scenarios for the future of education. First, that schooling gets extended using the technological advances, but the general system remains intact. Second, the traditional system breaks down and education becomes outsourced and learning happens anywhere anytime, again with technology as the driver. Third, learning becomes personalized and schools serve as learning hubs, providing local and global resources to local organized groups of families, with experimentation and innovation becoming the standard and the open walled advantage continues as a practice further connecting schools to their communities. The fourth scenario they call the "learn as you go" scenario. In this one, "Education takes place everywhere, anytime. Distinctions between formal and informal learning are no longer valid as society turns itself

entirely to the owner of the machine. Governance is global in this last scenario (OECD, 2020). The learner ecosystem vision is about self determination and right now, we have to determine what future we want to create. Districts and communities will need to practice this kind of futures focused thinking too, and the analogy of living systems provides a strong guide for the work.

Moving forward, the resources and living templates generated by the working group can be shared widely. When communities adapt them, it will create an opportunity for Education Reimagined to create a new position for an ecosystems steward and coordinator. Focused on providing direct support to districts that took up this work, he or she would facilitatie communities of practice across districts, in order to build capacity and strengthen networks. This recommendation aligns with the emergent network strategy, and each pioneering district or community would get the benefit of shared wisdom, resources, and support from being in a cohort model. Education Reimagined can also track the progress and build the evidence in the field, while also aligning network partners, so that communities and districts that are exploring these ideas are illuminated and highlighted for investors and technical assistance partners.

Finally, this year, the organization published its Commitment for Equity and Social Justice which states:

> We stand for learner-centered education because it offers the possibility of true liberation and equity in education. At its core, learner-centered education honors and values the humanity and dignity of each child — seeing them as unique, curious, wondrous,

and capable. It enables each young person to discover and bring forth their unique talents and passions in ways that contribute to their community and society. And, it empowers every educator, family, and community to make the difference they are committed to making for young people. (Education Reimagined: Equity and Inclusion Statement, March 2021)

I suggest that the organization maintain their clear and stated position of seeing each child as powerful, capable, and unique and then lead unapologetically with these bold words and stand for "true liberation and equity in education." Continue to create partnerships with organizations that stand clearly for equity, liberation, and the rights of children.

Implications for Sector

In order to design education that holds the learner at the center and sees the whole child growing and learning and changing over time, we need to create systems that are operating differently than the systems we have now. Having gone through this process, used the frameworks, talked with over 100 people, worked with the team at Education Reimagined, I now believe that we'll get further in this work if we prioritize our work as follows:

1. Invest in transformational change
2. Create strong networks to catalyze change
3. Clear the way

These three recommendations can have tremendous implications for the sector.

First, the sector has an opportunity to invest in transformational change: encourage communities to imagine new possibilities inspired by living systems.

This is both a bottom up and bottom down and sideways connecting theory of change for social innovation. The sector has to shift mindsets and actions from parts to whole, disconnected to connected, and fixed to fluid. We already have great momentum. The shared experience of this past year and COVID-19 led the public to question the foundational assumptions held about schools and learning. We already see new possibilities that can lead us to more inequities or to a transformational systems change. We see evidence in the self-organized (and sometimes district organized) pods; credentialing learning that happens outside of school; hybrid learning models; and the growing awareness and acknowledgment of the value in deepening the relationships and collaboration with the local community. The challenge we face is that we have to envision what we really want in order to make it come true over time. That is why I am suggesting a strategy that begins with organizing this work around essential questions. (Please see Appendix E). If we could have the best learner ecosystem we can imagine, here, in our community, what would it be? We need to align our efforts and learning with a living systems approach so we can tell when we are on the path that will get us where we want to go or when we are off that path. The communities that join together to answer these questions will need support, capacity building, technical assistance, and time to grow and find their own solutions. In a living system that is driven by transformation and with a bias toward well being we have to think of scaling as an emergent process rather

than a top down or hierarchical process. Philanthropy, investors, and education

funding can be aimed toward creating the conditions for these community efforts

and the experimentation that will naturally follow. They can do this by offering

grants to build evidence in the field of dynamic learner ecosystems.The evidence

of a living system is its ability to regenerate--or you might say--the ability to learn.

If we are creating a learner ecosystem, then the most valuable evidence and

data we could gather will be hearing the voices of students participating in the

co-creation of their own unique pathways with the highest level of joy, self

determination, and meaningful community participation in a fluid responsive

system that is biased toward always learning and growing.

Second, the sector has an opportunity to create strong networks to

catalyze change: strengthen relationships, do the healing work together:

reimagine and reclaim social community. Move from disconnected to greater

connection.

This work requires a deep understanding of people and place and stories

and ancestry. The living systems approach is not just about reimagining — it is

about reclaiming the uniqueness of each person, the uniqueness of each

community and place (Mang & Reed 2017). We can increase the connections

between people and organization in order to find the solutions we seek. Thus, we

will need frameworks like the NEP Leading for Equity Framework to help us do

this healing and learning in public. The Framework asks us to "Approach equity

challenges through the mindset of user-centered design, which shifts traditional

power dynamics related to decision-making and brings forth deeper innovation

and agency amidst institutionalized norms and structures." To me this means we can create a new narrative and a new story for our children, and for public education. It means we can build our capacity to develop our equity consciousness and shared standards of justice continually, to hold complexity, and envision solutions using different leadership skills. We have much to learn from each other in these public compassionate conversations we must have to make this change visible.

Clear the way: identify policy, structures, and systems that serve as a barrier to transformational social systems, where every child is loved, honored, and free: Move from fixed to fluid.

Work with advocates and focus on policy to clear the way so that the people who are closest to the life of children can lead us on the pathway to transformational school systems. Illuminate the many examples of pioneers who believe that we can change and grow our systems and develop new policies that support the essential dynamics of a living system.

Conclusion

Working with Education Reimagined this past year, was an opportunity to be immersed in work with a field catalyst organization during a time of great awakenings and shared experiences in our country. We reached out to gather people to learn from the traditions of the Indigenous Nations, the Black Liberation Movement, parent-driven organizations, homeschools, unschools, progressive schools and more. I have learned that we must approach this work with great humility asking questions rather than knowing. Otherwise, we will be holding on

to a white centered image of education that might exclude the wisdom of our diverse communities and cultures, Not knowing the answers, but finding the questions together gives us the chance of creating something new and amazing together.

We cannot imagine new systems if we are stuck in the mechanistic paradigm of averages, parts, objects, and fixed mindsets. We can only transform our systems by fundamentally shifting the way we think and view the system itself. When we see the deep relationships and interconnectedness of every person, we can begin to see the patterns of the whole system. That view allows us to think differently about the underlying systems that we need such as learning and assessment; governance, shared accountability, and funding; and recognizing, cultivating, and credentialing human capital.

The process of interviewing so many people during this time of the pandemic made me present to the great loving spirit that exists in our communities. I encountered so many people all wanting to do good work. I see now we only need to hold together. We only need to seek the answers to our questions and encourage each other to be bold and curious. From parts to whole, the pieces of the puzzle are coming together in a system of networks and dense relationships that is increasingly complex. We have the tools and resources, the level of communication and shared public knowledge to individualize learning for every person. We face the challenge of deciding, together, not only how we respond to the needs of each child, but how we learn to operate as a collective to address the complex problems we face. Together we

can find out what it would take to create systems that are aligned with our

deepest desire to grow our children to live happy, meaningful lives, and to live

together in a more connected and loving way.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Five Elements Of The Education Reimagined Vision
From: A Regenerative Vision For Education In The United States

These five elements are not meant to serve as a blueprint for a rigid model to be

implemented everywhere. Instead, they serve as a "North Star" to guide

innovation. They do not create a single roadmap that can be followed the same

way in every learning community. Realizing new designs will be an iterative

process; much experimentation will be necessary to discover ways that these five

elements can work together and reinforce one another to create excellent

learning experiences for all children, regardless of their circumstances.

Learning that is characterized by LEARNER AGENCY recognizes learners as active participants in their own learning and engages them in the design of their experiences and the realization of their learning outcomes in ways appropriate for their developmental level. As such, learners have choice and voice in their educational experiences as they progress through competencies. Harnessing their own intrinsic motivation to learn, each learner strives to ultimately take full ownership of their own learning.

COMPETENCY-BASED learning is an alternative to age- or grade-based learning. In competency-based learning, each learner works toward competency and strives for mastery in defined domains of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Learners' trajectories toward mastery are guided and managed, rather than placing the emphasis on their achievement of specific benchmarks in a fixed amount of time. Competency-based learning recognizes that all learners are unique and that different learners progress at different paces. It allows the system structure to support variation of learning speeds in accordance with each learner's specific challenges and needs. Assessments, both formative and summative, are utilized on a continuous basis to inform the learning and instructional strategy for each learner. Additional resources are provided to learners who need help to accelerate the pace of competency development.

PERSONALIZED, RELEVANT, AND CONTEXTUALIZED learning is an approach that
uses such factors as the learner's own passions, strengths, needs, family, culture, and community as fuel for the development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Learning experiences are leveraged to bridge gaps and meet learning challenges; designed to expand interests, opportunities, and perspectives; and responsive to learners' passions. At the same time, they are

rooted in real-world contexts and empower the learner to demonstrate his or her learning in a variety of authentic ways and settings. Personalized, relevant, and contextualized learning also acknowledges that different learners face different challenges to learning, whether in health, safety, economic situation, emotional wellbeing, social interactions, or competency development. Those challenges are both identified and addressed so that the learner is adequately supported, thus ensuring that his or her current life situation does not constrain the breadth or depth of learning. Learning that is characterized by LEARNER AGENCY recognizes learners as active participants in their own learning and engages them in the design of their experiences and the realization of their learning outcomes in ways appropriate for their developmental level. As such, learners have choice and voice in their educational experiences as they progress through competencies. Harnessing his or her own intrinsic motivation to learn, each learner strives to ultimately take full ownership of his or her own learning.

SOCIALLY EMBEDDED learning is rooted in meaningful relationships with family, peers, qualified adults, and community members and is grounded in community and social interaction. It values face-to-face contact, as well as opportunities to connect virtually, and recognizes the significance of establishing continuity in children's lives through the development of stable relationships. Independent exploration and practice; collaborative group work; structured, intentional instruction; and structured and cooperative play, among other experiences, are integrated to develop learners' competencies. Both peers and adults are recognized as integral partners in learning, and learners are encouraged to interact with those developing at different competency rates, from different backgrounds, and with different interests. Furthermore, socially embedded learning catalyzes and structures partnerships with families, community-based employers, civic organizations, and other entities that can foster learning.

OPEN-WALLED learning acknowledges that learning happens at many times and in many places and intentionally leverages its expansive nature in the learner's development of competencies. It creates and takes full advantage of opportunities in a variety of communities, settings, times, and formats. All learning experiences, whether highly structured or exploratory and experiential, are valued, encouraged, and integrated into the learner's journey. These experiences may be in-person, virtual, or blended. Play, recreation, technology-enabled experiences, community-based work, and service opportunities, for instance, are all recognized as legitimate vehicles for learning. While opening learning to a myriad of settings, open-walled learning also provides learners with a physical space in which to socialize, collaborate, and learn with peers and adults. Where a particular community possesses relatively few educational resources, they are supplemented to provide learners with authentic, rich, and diverse learning opportunities.

Appendix B: Working Groups Model

Working Groups Purpose
The purpose of the working groups is to bring together individuals who hold a wide range of expertise, lived experiences, perspectives and understandings of learner centered education—diverse across race, age, socio-economic status, ideology, geography, and vantage point – and engage them in a process to invent templates that help structure, support, and bring to life equitable, community based, learner-centered ecosystems and make the realization of that vision available and actionable in communities and states across the country.

By joining, participants will:
- Meet and/or become more deeply related to other leading thinkers in this field by engaging together in a thought provoking work
- Invent standing in the future, unencumbered by the constraints of today
- Leave more informed about the challenges, opportunities, and questions that will come with advancing an ecosystem agenda for the country
- Create living templates that support thriving ecosystems that will be widely shared and adapted to unique contexts across the country

Arc of Learning for the Working Groups
Begin as a whole group that will meet periodically in order to connect, orient, and build a shared understanding of the work to be done. Launch smaller groups ("Tiger Teams") out of the whole group to invent and explore a subset of topics and develop templates for structuring and supporting equitable learner-centered community based ecosystems. Engage additional "concentric rings" of stakeholders to provide critical feedback that will guide iteration along the way.

Phase One: Connecting, Orientation, and Launch
- Whole-Group Conversation #1   Getting Oriented - Connecting and Ground-Setting: What are the guiding principles underlying our design of equitable community-based, learner-centered ecosystems?
    - What do we mean by learner-centered at scale inside a community?
    - What do we mean by ecosystem?
    - What do we mean by equity?
    - What do we mean by ecosystem as an adaptive, living system (vs. a mechanical one)?
    - Ecosystem must be unique to the context in which it is situated and thus, iteration through feedback loops with diverse stakeholders important to the creation and functioning of learner-centered ecosystems
    - Why are we talking about invention - and why does that matter? (briefly ground conversation in Wheatley Two Loops Theory?)
    - What work are we taking on? (Giving the chance to decide)

- Whole-Group Conversation #2   Getting Organized
  How do we structure and support equitable learner-centered community based ecosystems? We begin to explore design challenges beginning with the learner at the center and moving outwards from there.
    - Review the Outcomes Document
    - Once we are centered in the vision and the outcomes we can begin to develop the ideas for a system that supports and invigorates ecosystems. This meeting is a kick off for the groups ("Tiger Teams") that will go deeper into the different systems:
      - **assessing and credentialing learning**
      - **governance, developing shared accountability, and allocating resources**
      - **recognizing, cultivating, and credentialing human capital**

  Potential activities:

  - Define essential questions for each topic grounded in the context of equitable learner-centered ecosystems;
  - Identify ways and examples the current system has NOT satisfied each essential questions - points of departure
  - Collaboratively construct "less like… more like…" indicators, specific to each topic area, to guide the committee work moving forward
  - Gain clarity around what kind(s) of deliverables the committees are working toward – including what artifacts the committees will collect along the way toward the embodiment of an ecosystem that will be assembled into a narrative of learning that can be shared more broadly.

Each committee will produce the input necessary to create templates of a system design, including these possible following components:

  - The case for transformation
  - Options for schematics or models of the system components in a fully thriving ecosystem
  - Key factors for success and key trade-offs in different scenarios
  - Circumstances that will require variation (e.g. rural, high-density poverty)
  - High-level guidance for implementation strategies that intentionally challenge existing power dynamics and decision-making hierarchies
  - Something we can't know right now (leaving room for the unknown)

Tools
- A readiness assessment for communities or states

- Examples of parts-of-solutions that already exist

Phase Two: Creation and Iteration

- <u>Committee meetings</u> (cadence and schedule TBD)
    - Goal of work during this phase is to wrestle through essential questions and begin producing draft templates (however rough) that can be shared in next whole-group meeting
    - Committees identify stakeholder groups (and specific people) that need to be involved in one or more feedback rounds; may also begin outreach for feedback
- <u>Whole-group Conversation #3</u> Getting It Together / Optimized / Operational
  (possibly also including additional feedback-givers) to collectively review and refine committee work and artifacts, with particular attention to:
    - Adherence to vision of equitable, learner-centered ecosystems
    - Alignment or discrepancies between the templates of different committees (with the goal of resolving them during this Phase Two period)
    - Clarity and accessibility of the templates and the building narrative of how we got where we are – i.e. this has to make sense to potential end-users
- "Test" and refine committee templates based on input from diverse stakeholders - focusing in particular on
    - How do the vision/templates resonate with the core values and deepest needs/concerns of these groups/folks?
    - What landmines or unintended consequences should we be mindful of in this new system?
- Socialize templates with Vanguard along the way

Phase Three: Finalizing, Outreach, and Planning for Dissemination

- Design leads write and produce products for final review
- <u>Whole-group meeting #4</u> to review final products and reflect on the process and where to go from here
- Design dissemination strategy
- Production by Education Reimagined of final deliverables
- Deliverables shared broadly by participants and networks

Tiger Teams: A tiger team is a specialized, cross-functional team brought together to solve or investigate a specific problem or critical issue.

Composition: Each Tiger Team will be made up approximately 9 people (boxes on a zoom screen). Within the team, three distinct roles will be played by up to three people (potentially one person could hold more than one role), including:

- Harvester
  - synthesize the group's input between meetings and share back to the group
  - draft final deliverables
  - open minded and with experience and knowledge of the Tiger Team topic
- Design Lead on Overall Engagement
  - lead the design of the Tiger Team engagement
  - guide the learning along the path toward invention
  - assure we adhere toward core vision and values (equity, learner centered, community based, ecosystems)
  - Identify and dig into the set of conversations that need to be had to delve into the system at hand
  - open minded and with experience and knowledge of the Tiger Team topic
  - bring in and be informed by pieces of the future (exemplars and models) that already exist
  - when appropriate share drafts and get relevant feedback and input from external stakeholders (both representative of the communities these systems need to serve AND of the policy actors involved in creating the space for such system invention)
- Facilitator
  - lead the meetings
  - set up conversations and guide the group through transition points in the agenda
  - practiced in and able to facilitate an inclusive and collaborative process that leads to invention
  - surface, identify and reckon with differences and tensions in perspectives
- Tiger Team Member
  - Meet and/or become more deeply related to other leading thinkers in this field by engaging together in a thought provoking work
  - Invent standing in the future, unencumbered by the constraints of today
  - Leave more informed about the challenges, opportunities, and questions that will come with advancing an ecosystem agenda for the country
  - Create living templates that support thriving ecosystems that will be widely shared and adapted to unique contexts across the country
- Education Reimagined Staff
  - administrative tasks such as scheduling the Tiger Team meetings
  - create and share external agendas
  - support further outreach to external stakeholders

In between Tiger Team meetings the folks in these roles would be collaborating together in order to:

- debrief where the team is at and what further conversations need to be delved into
- collaboratively shape the next Tiger Team engagement including bringing in other perspectives, readings, videos, experiences, etc..

Appendix C: Working Groups Theory of Impact and Perspectives

Theory of Impact

Given a commitment to creating a near future in which every young person is seen as powerful, capable, and on a unique path toward discovering how their gifts and interests can contribute to the greater community and world; and

Given this future requires consistent and intentional centering of equity and human dignity in the design of the learner-centered systems we seek to catalyze; and

Given a belief that the current education system has not realized this commitment for all students and therefore continuing to reform the current education system by itself will not produce the paradigm shift needed to make good on this promise; and

Given a new vision for the creation of thriving, dynamic, and equitable, community based, learner-centered ecosystems comprised of multiple entities (such as schools alongside community organizations, businesses, and whole-child wellness services) working together to provide learning opportunities and ensure student success;

If we bring together a group of learner-centered individuals from across the country who identify with this vision and are diverse across race, age, socioeconomic status, geography, ideology as well as lived experiences, expertise, perspectives, and understandings of what might be required to create and sustain equitable learner-centered ecosystems; and

If they collaborate together to envision equitable, learner-centered ecosystems in operation, letting go of the restraints of the current system and instead wholly orient around the future-state with the learner at the center of design; and

If they bring into view how such systems might operate by creating "living templates" that articulate possibilities for approaching design challenges such as assessing and credentialing learning; governance, developing shared accountability, and allocating resources; and recognizing, cultivating, and credentialing human capital within equitable, learner-centered ecosystems; and

If they share these "living templates" both in iterative feedback loops with additional stakeholders and broadly through channels accessible to others across the country;

Then individuals and groups in communities across the country who are interested and/or already endeavoring to create learner-centered ecosystems will be fueled by the "living templates," which they can adapt to local context, use

to provoke conversations within their local communities, inspire or recruit more allies, situate their work within the broader vision, and/or make strategic decisions about how to get from here to there; and

Then more learners, families, and communities will be nurtured by equitable, learner-centered ecosystems that value each learner and respond to their unique growth and development along their learning journeys.

Appendix D: Working Groups Outreach and Driving Questions

The conversations will help you answer these questions about each working group subject area:

1. What do we need to know about the subject? What are the fundamental questions to be answered in this working group?

2. What is each working group developing a system for? To do what?

3. What is the constellation of ideas and the main conversations happening in this field (and who is having them)?

4. What are the commonly held myths we need to make sure get surfaced?

5. What are some of the leading edge thinking and assumptions that we need busted? (Like we can't go into this without the challenge of that assumption i.e. "assessment has to be comparative")

6. Begin to see the assumptions that have to be busted through that might still be in the background for people if they're not placed clearly on the table.

7. How do we give people confidence that learning is happening equitably across an ecosystem?

8. What are the assumptions for the critical background conversations that we need to consider?

9. What are some of the major aligned things happening that we either need to know about or we might consider pulling people from?

10. Who is usually left out of this conversation? Why?

11. Who probably knows the most about this subject in terms of practical application?

12. Who are the 10 most influential ones and can we identify them at least to know that they're not what we're doing, or if they are that we're finding somebody to talk to to and at least be a liaison to what's happening there.

13. Who are the people we need to talk to and then who are the people we want to enroll in being a part of this?

14. What would you think the composition of this working group needs to be?

15. Who are some of the people that either need to be outside experts that we are learning from as a group or any organization and/or initiatives that

are already going on that we need to be aware of - with regards to reimagining any of these things?

Appendix E: Draft Essential Questions of the Working Groups

Education Reimagined Working Groups: Essential Questions - DRAFT

The purpose of this document is to brainstorm the "essential questions" that each Working Group would set out to address. Defining "essential questions" will help each group focus on its topic while also recognizing when their inquiry begins to merge into another group's inquiry - thus signaling a ripe opportunity for cross-group conversation.

Shared Questions:

- What are the design principles for living systems? (parts - whole, fixed - fluid, disconnected - connected, emergent)

- How do we move forward and invent something fundamentally different and isn't designed to recreate these deep-rooted systemic inequities, when we ourselves are immersed in a culture that values whiteness?

- How do we ensure the system we create is always decolonizing and decentering whiteness so that we are truly creating a loving and just society?

Assessment Tiger Team Questions

- What are the design principles for this to work? (e.g. learners have to be allowed to demonstrate your proficiency in a competency in many ways)

Learner Perspective:

- How will we know whether and when a learner has achieved a learning goal?

- How are learning goals set? By whom?

- How will we communicate whether and when a learner has achieved a learning goal?

- Is there going to be a diploma or certificate at the "end of" a child's educational journey?

- How will we ensure that each learner achieves their expected learning outcomes?

Ecosystem Perspective:

- Who needs to know what about this, and why?

- How will we ensure that each learning program is of high quality and consistently supports learners in achieving their expected learning outcomes?

- How will we ensure that the ecosystem as a whole is achieving its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion goals?

Education Workforce Preparedness and Composition

- Who are the "right" individuals to support learners in achieving their learning goals?

- How will we ensure that these individuals are present, thriving, and equitably distributed throughout the ecosystem?

- Who are the people in that child's life that makes sure that that pathway they're following is navigated in a way that leads to their healthy human development and wellbeing?

- How do we ensure transparency and access so that there are equitable outcomes?

- What kind of system could we create so that every learner belongs and is known for who they are as an individual and the impact they have in the community?

- What experiences would develop a deep personal knowledge and understanding of participation in democracy?

- How do we ensure the system we create is always decolonizing and decentering whiteness so that we are truly creating a loving and just society?

Funding

- How will we allocate resources to ensure that each learner achieves their learning goals?

- How will we create maximum autonomy and self determination with funds, and assure equitable outcomes and sound educational and financial practices?

- What would the evidence look like that the funding model was successful? Working back from the experience of the learner and their family.

Governance

- How will we define roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority throughout the ecosystem to ensure that collaborative goals are defined and met?

- What governance model and practices can we consider that will by design create a shared ownership of power, and a self organizing model of distributed leadership?

- The principle of emergence has implications for governance. Emergence requires a different kind of leadership that is driven more by inquiry then by decisiveness. What can we create in our systems and structures that acknowledge and embrace this ideal?

Appendix F: Invitation to the Ecosystems Working Group

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education and exposed its legacy structures and systems as inflexible, inadequate, and inequitable. With schools no longer able to operate as usual, families and communities have stepped in to facilitate learning and care for learners in ways that were not imagined in the original blueprints of our education systems. Moreover, in the wake of COVID-19 and our country's greater social justice awakening, there is greater demand than ever to dismantle the inequitable and racist systems of today and invent new, learner-centered systems and structures. These systems can, by design, embrace new views of what success is, what great learning looks like, and the conditions necessary to enable vibrant, meaningful learning for diverse learners, particularly youth of color and other marginalized youth.

In this moment, we, as a nation, are presented with the real opportunity to advance demonstrations of community-based, learner-centered ecosystems that can embody the full learner-centered vision for education like never before.

MEETING THIS OPPORTUNITY: A VISION OF ECOSYSTEMS OF LEARNING

The possibility before us is a future in which education is no longer an isolated institution that judges and promotes young people based on comparisons to averages. Rather, the education system becomes the backbone to dynamic, interconnected ecosystems of learning where the community and world are the playground for learning; equity, human dignity, and freedom are fostered; and young people—no matter who they are or where they are from—are supported to thrive and contribute in a complex, fast-changing, and interconnected world.

In this emergent vision, young people and their families are supported to navigate a vibrant world of learning experiences, make sense of them, and see gaps and next steps—all in service of developing young people as lifelong learners with the skills and ways of being to provide for themselves and their families and to thrive in life.

This vision builds on the incredible work that learner-centered practitioners, youth development leaders, and communities have been advancing for decades and their learnings of what it takes to serve children and young people diverse across every dimension. It is strongly informed by the wisdom from communities, past and present, who have joined together to raise their children as people who see and know themselves and are committed to making a difference in the world. And, it is founded on the notion that these ecosystems must be living systems themselves that are, as Stephanie Pace Marshall articulates, "dynamic living webs of interdependent relationships—inherently

whole, abundant, creative and self-organizing." Only in this way can they see every child as unique and full of unbounded potential; and support them to narrate their own story of growth and connection to each other, their community, and the world beyond.

The invention of the systems, policies, and structures that can support these ecosystems of learning will require a new conversation among committed individuals both inside and outside of the "education system" as it is currently defined. And, while the important work of envisioning and building new ecosystems must occur locally, Education Reimagined believes that by hosting such a conversation at a national level we can generate important learning, insight, and pathways for how such systems might operate—making visible ideas, options, trade offs, and templates that can inform broader policy change and that local actors can adapt to their own context.

Thus, Education Reimagined is launching an Ecosystems Working Group of individuals who hold a wide range of expertise, lived experiences, perspectives and understandings of learner-centered education—diverse across ideology, sector, race, age, geography, and vantage point—and engaging them in a process to articulate how the inner workings of ecosystems could be designed. Our intent is to provide resources that communities can fit to the unique needs and vision of their local context, families, and children.

THE ECOSYSTEMS WORKING GROUP DESIGN & TIMELINE
The Ecosystems Working Group will be made up of 30 - 36 carefully selected learner-centered experts, systems thinkers, practitioners, and young people—diverse in sector, ideology, expertise, race, age and geography. This will be a group aligned behind a learner-centered vision for equitable community-based ecosystems; ready to contribute from a place of invention, not iteration; and unwaveringly committed to the creation of equitable systems and policy options that prioritize, honor, and support the youth and communities they are serving.

This Working Group will launch on May 11-12, 2021 with a required Orientation Conversation, Tuesday, May 11, 1:00 - 4:00 EST and Wednesday, May 12, 12:00 - 3:00 EST. The purpose of this Orientation Conversation will be to provide all of the Ecosystem Working Group members with the foundation they will need to successfully work together to invent options, pathways, and onramps that can help make equitable, community-based, learner-centered ecosystems actionable in communities and states across the country. It will be pivotal in having this group launch with alignment, trust, and in relationship with each other to ensure the success of the work. (If you are unavailable for these dates but still interested in participating, please let us know immediately to see if we can arrange an alternative.)

And, while the larger Working Group will stay connected, we will then be breaking it into three smaller Tiger Teams of 10-12 individuals who will spend more time delving into three specific areas of focus:

assessing and credentialing learning;

governance, developing shared accountability, and allocating resources; and

recognizing, cultivating, and credentialing human capital.

These Tiger Teams will meet at a cadence that works for them, roughly 3-4 hours of meeting time and 2-3 of preparation for meetings per month over the course of the process. While this is our best estimate at the moment, we imagine some months will be heavier or lighter than others, depending on the particular team's needs, availability, and conversations. These Tiger Teams will be organized and facilitated by Education Reimagined staff and consultants and will be informing and contributing to the generation of a final product template / toolkit focused on their specific focus area. Through their conversations, they will be exploring essential questions relevant to their topic area, generating possible policy and system options, and surfacing the differences between and the tensions within these options. These conversations will be intentionally designed to enable participants to engage not just as professionals representing organizations but also as individuals with unique perspectives and lived experiences that are valued in the creation of new systems.

Along the way, the whole Working Group will meet at designated intervals to connect, reorient, and contribute to each others' thinking. Likewise, to ensure the conversations do not become siloed, there will be ways to engage, learn from, and get feedback from additional perspectives and expertise to create a feedback loop that strengthens the final products.

Throughout the process, Education Reimagined will be seeking ways to elevate the Working Group and Tiger Teams' ideas, learnings, insights, and questions to a broader audience, such that the learning journey of these groups can inform the field just as much as the produced templates and toolkits can.

WHY PARTICIPATE?

Communities across the country are already pushing against the boundaries and limitations of the education system. They are breaking down the silos between "formal" and "informal" learning; seeing new possibilities for how, when, and with whom young people can be learning; and recentering the importance of belonging and connectedness. Yet, the resilience of the legacy education system is incredibly strong and without a guiding vision of what else could be and/or onramps and pathways to pursue, the work of fundamentally transforming how learning is organized, supported, and credentialed is incredibly daunting and challenging.

These toolkits and templates have the potential to make a meaningful difference in communities' abilities to step fully into the possibility of bringing to life a thriving ecosystem of learning that values the particular community's context and honors who children are, how they learn, and who they want to become. Having system and policy options to consider and adapt from, inspired communities can step forward boldly, rather than being stymied by the weight of inventing everything from scratch.

As such, this is an opportunity to engage in ground-breaking, rewarding work that has the potential to have an impact that is far greater than the sum of its parts and to shape and impact how we each think, operate, and go about our work. It is a chance for each participant to:

Build relationship with other leading thinkers committed to learner-centered transformation, and are coming from sectors and perspectives they may not otherwise work with, by engaging together in a thought-provoking work;

Develop a capacity to invent standing in the future, informed but unencumbered by the tangled web of the current system and what has been;

Deepen their understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and questions that will come with advancing an ecosystem agenda both locally and at a state and national level; and

Contribute to the generation of system and policy options that can serve as new jumping off points for communities and states seeking to bring learner-centered ecosystems to life.