

A world map is centered on the page, rendered in a dark blue and gold color scheme. The map is overlaid with a complex network of glowing yellow and orange lines and dots, representing global connectivity or data flow. The background is a dark, starry space.

Atlas of Change *in* Education

MAPPING CHANGE IN EDUCATION WORLDWIDE



FOR CHANGE
IN EDUCATION



Note from the Editor

The first edition of *24h for Change in Education* took place in October 2022, at a time when we felt a badly needed call to action was required. As schools returned to a semblance of normalcy after the pandemic, many found themselves naturally drifting back to their old ways. The leitmotif was *back to the future*—not the past.

Three years later, the urgency remains undiminished. This time, the catalyst that should have resulted in the long-overdue transformation of educational systems worldwide is the unforeseen advent of artificial intelligence, a technology that has already disrupted nearly everything in the world... except education in schools.

Formidably recalcitrant even when confronted with life-altering events such as the pandemic and the rapid development and generalization of AI, pedagogy remains largely impervious to these seismic changes. Schools, by and large, continue to rely on their traditional recipes for success, preparing students for a world that no longer exists.

In what seems to be an uncanny trend in K–12 education, the dominant narrative is one of negativity: doomsday scenarios for a post-AI humanity, bans on cell phones and access to social networks, concerns about plagiarism and academic integrity, and a long litany that perpetuates an unflattering image of education in the public imagination.

There is, however, another level of reality—one that rarely transcends the environments in which it unfolds. Across the world, in all kinds of contexts, there are innumerable schools that defy overwhelming odds and societal expectations to make change happen now. They demonstrate that a new model of education is possible, that learning can indeed be joyful, and that educators and students need not relinquish either their identities or their right to wellbeing in pursuit of quality education.

24h for Change in Education created a space for those changemakers who are revolutionizing learning today: a worldwide tour of living expressions of educational change. On November 20, 2025, starting in New Zealand and always at 10 a.m. local time, we spanned the globe all the way to Hawaii in the United States, streaming live testimonials that showcased how schools and educators worldwide are transforming education.

This ***Atlas of Change in Education*** seeks to capture those voices through a journey that maps change across the globe—both as a tribute to pioneering educators and schools, and as a practical resource. It aims to serve not only as a source of

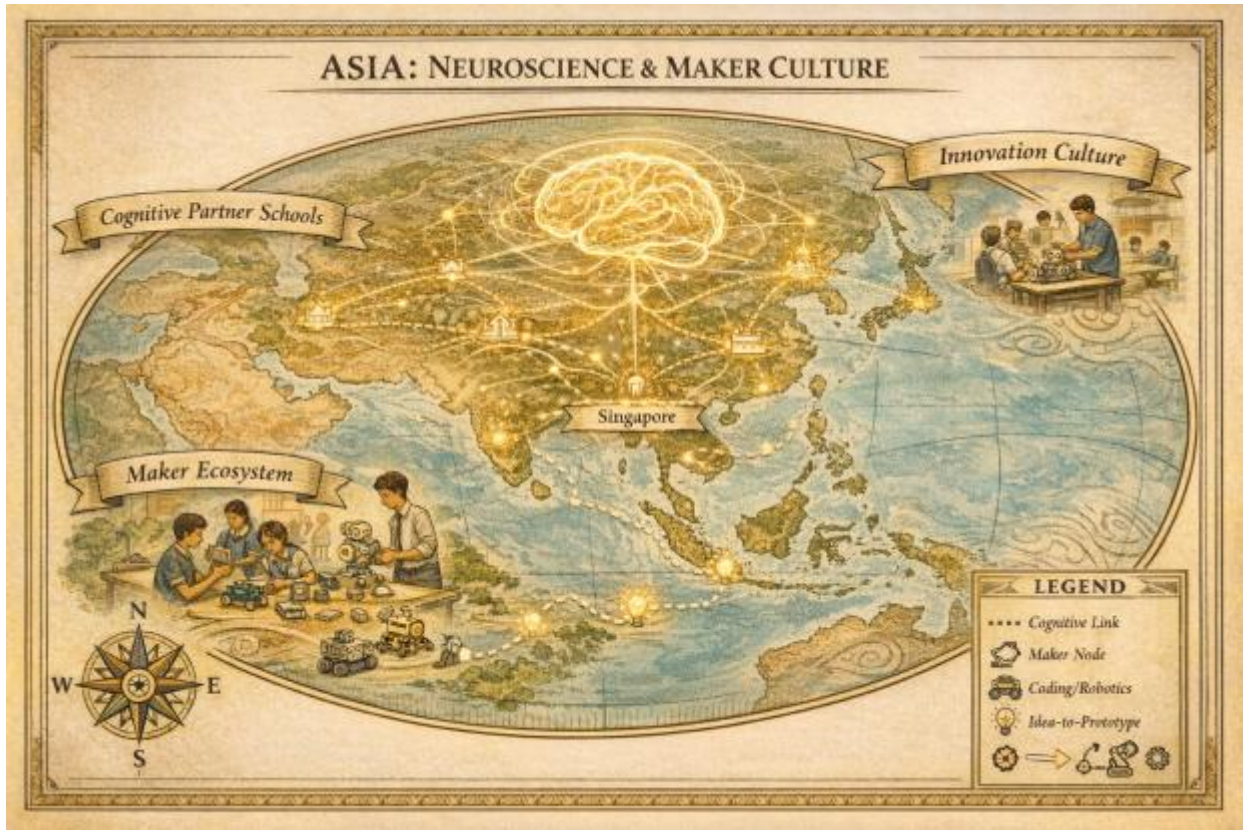
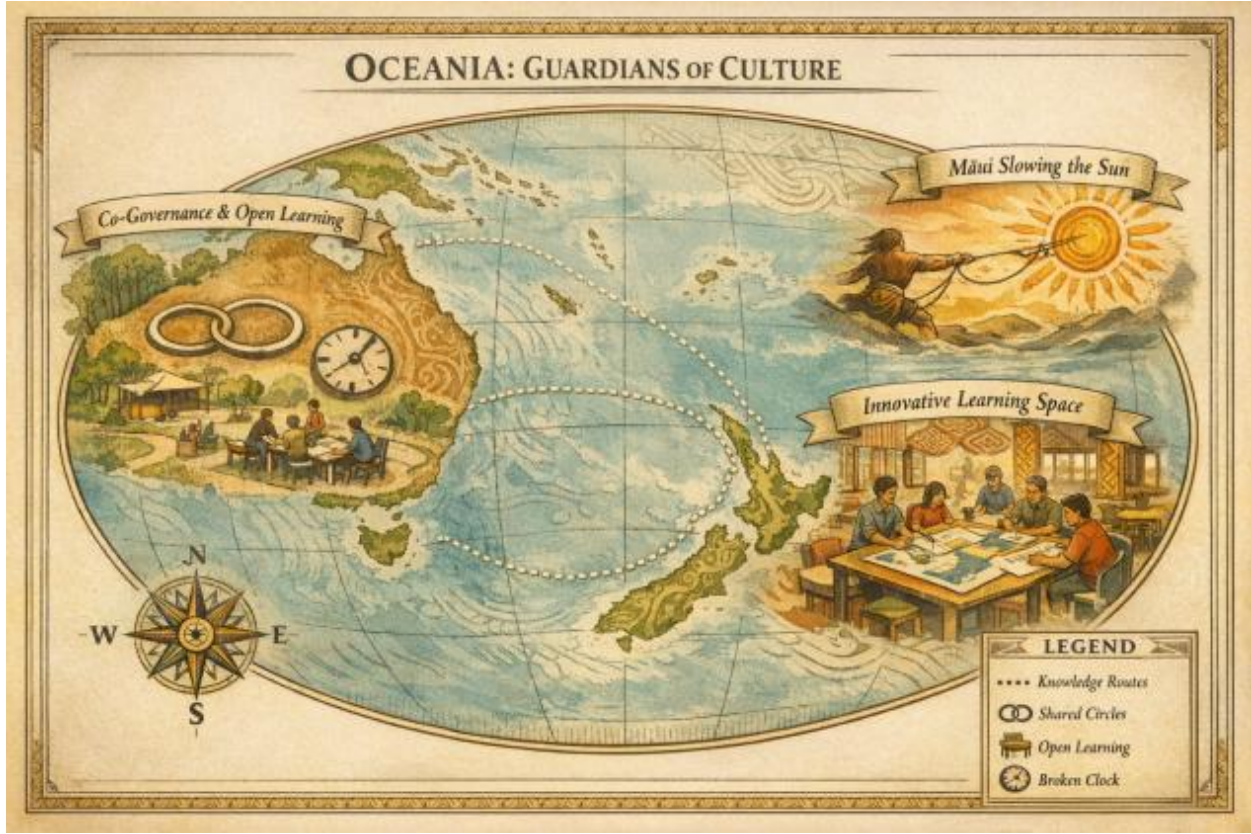


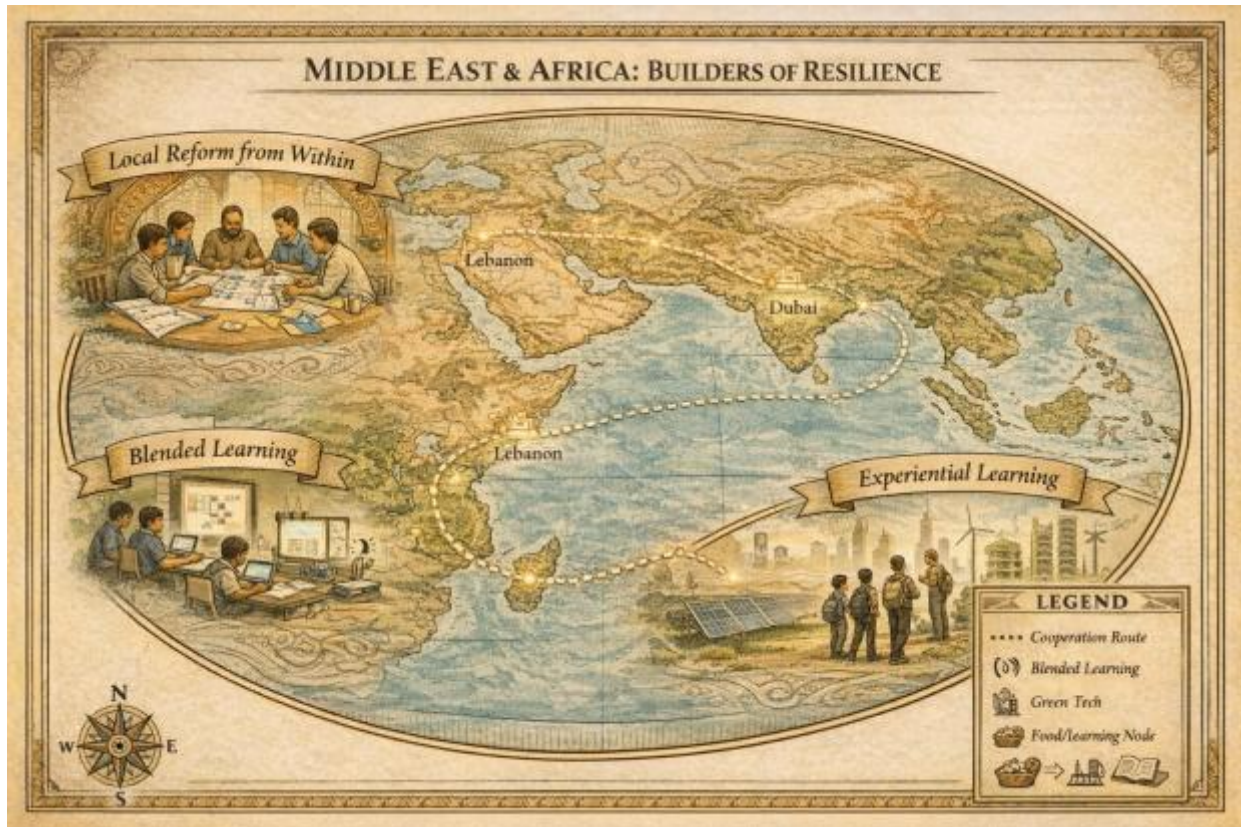
inspiration, but also as a curated repository of projects and ideas for those willing to innovate within their own contexts.

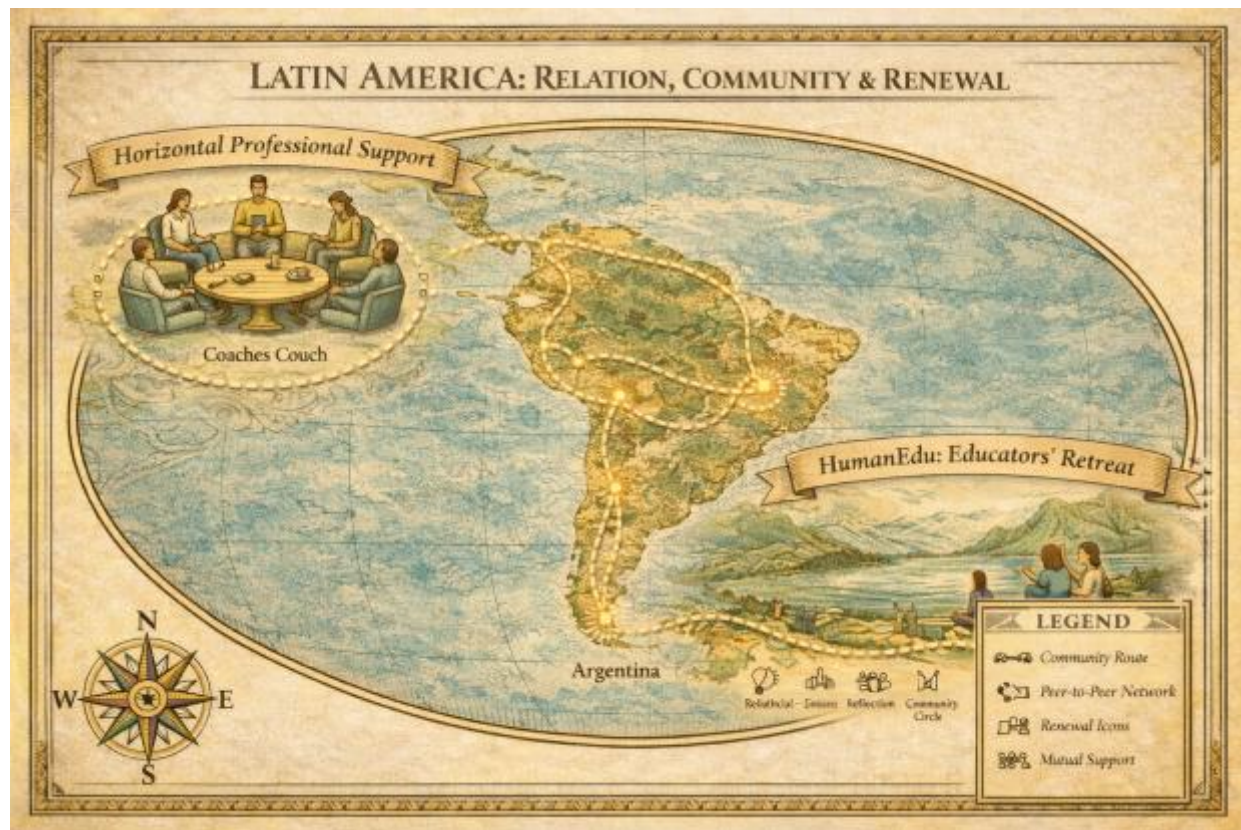
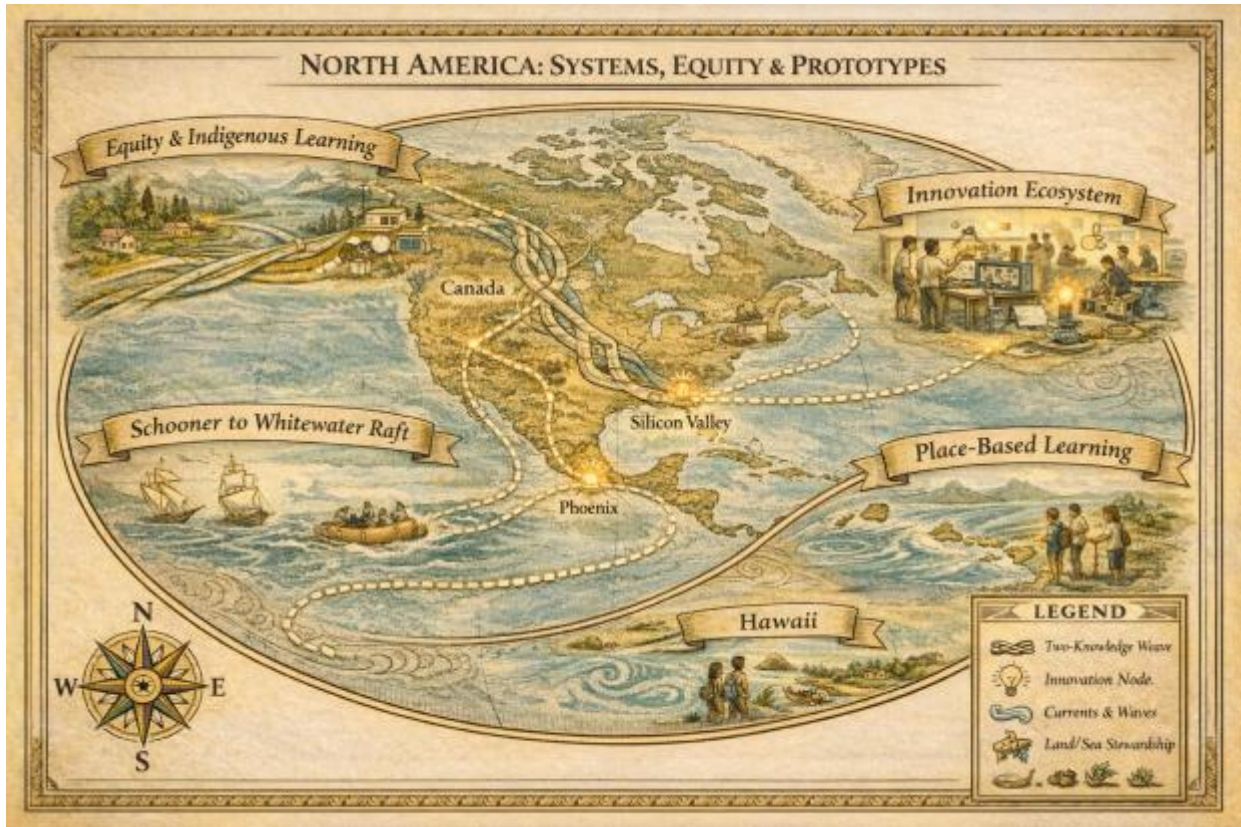
Our special thanks go to all the educators and students who contributed to this event. It is our hope that these pages reflect their efforts not only to transform education, but also to offer renewed hope for a better future.

Let the journey begin.

GABRIEL RSHAI









Contents

Chapter 1 – True North	14
1. The Myth of Maui: Slowing the Sun.....	14
2. The New Map: From Schooners to Rafts	15
3. The Crisis of Relevance	17
4. The False Dichotomies (Traps to Avoid)	18
Head vs. Heart	18
Smart vs. Brilliant	20
5. The Pivot: Look to the “Real” Educators.....	20
Chapter 2 – The Cartographers & The Methodology	24
1. The Methodology: A 24-Hour Relay Race	24
2. The Cartographers: Who Is Leading the Way?	26
3. The Global Connector: OECD Schools+	29
4. Defining the Mission: The Organizer.....	31
5. The Organizational Shift: The Ecosystem Collective	31
6. Conclusion: The Living Map.....	32
Chapter 3 – Continental Drifts	34
1. The Leadership Crisis: From Surviving to Thriving (Ireland)	34
2. The Digital Divide: A Dream Deferred (Eswatini / Africa)	36
3. The Evidence Trap: Whose Data Matters? (Australia).....	39
4. Systemic Barriers: Responsive Leadership (Canada).....	40
5. Conclusion: Navigating the Fault Lines.....	42
Chapter 4 – Erosion and Growth	45
1. Stopping the Erosion: The Burden on Leaders.....	45
2. Wellbeing as Culture, Not Curriculum (The Cure)	47
The Language of Care (Dublin)	48
The Cognitive Approach to Discipline (Queensland)	49
3. Indigenous Wisdom: The Deep Roots.....	50
Finding the Gift (Hawaii)	50
The Steersman (Queensland)	51
Earth as the Teacher (Canada)	52
4. Conclusion: Nurturing the Soil.....	53
Chapter 5 – Student Agency	56
1. The Paradigm Shift: From Passengers to Pilots.....	56



2. The Makers: Engineering and Innovation.....	57
India: Engineering for Social Good.....	57
3. The Communicators: Finding a Voice and Purpose	60
4. The Experiential Learners: A Rigorous Reality	61
5. Conclusion: From Consumers to Creators	64
Chapter 6 – Leadership Landmarks.....	66
1. The Inner Transformation of the Leader.....	66
2. The Organizational Architect: Building Trust	68
“Brushfires to Bonfires” (Canada)	69
3. Empowering the Marginalized Leader	71
The WILL Network (Ireland)	72
The “Steersman” Model (Queensland)	73
4. Alignment of Purpose: What the World Demands.....	73
The Human Element (E3).....	74
The Alignment Principle (Uruguay)	75
5. Conclusion: The New Definition of Power	76
Chapter 7 – Islands of Innovation.....	79
1. Reimagining the Structure of School	79
Decompressing Time (New Zealand).....	79
The Business of Learning (USA).....	81
2. Radical Models: Breaking the Mold.....	82
The Jailhouse School (Australia)	82
The Industry School (Australia).....	82
3. The Inquiry Engine: Curiosity as Curriculum.....	83
4. Early Foundations: Agency from the Start.....	85
5. Conclusion: Islands in the Stream	86
Chapter 8 – Bridging the Gap	88
1. Brain-Based Learning: The Science of Adaptation	88
2. AI as a Tool for Humanity	90
3. Art & Tech: The Hybrid Canvas	93
4. The Human Advantage: What Machines Can’t Do	94
5. Conclusion: The Centaur Teacher	97
Chapter 9 – Plotting the Course.....	99
1. The Strategic Framework: Moving from Maintenance to Vision	99



2. The Mandate: Redefining Success with Community.....	101
3. The Toolkit: Navigational Instruments for Monday Morning	103
For Flexibility: “30 Credits My Way” (Canada)	103
For Equity: The Cultural Resilience Survey (USA)	104
For Digital Ethics: The Manifesto for Responsible Tech (Spain)	105
For Professional Growth: The Coaches Couch Blueprint (Mexico)	106
4. The Solutionary Mindset.....	107
The Unfinished Map	110
1. The Return to the Sun	110
2. The Universal Truths	111
3. The Call to Action	112



PROLOGUE

Before We Draw the Map

There's a moment that comes before any journey—before the suitcase, before the booking confirmation, before the brave speech you give yourself in the mirror—when you simply admit the truth:

I don't know exactly where we're going anymore.

Education has been living inside that moment for a long time.

Not because educators lack vision. Not because schools lack effort. But because the world we built schooling for is not the world our young people are walking into. The weather has changed. The river has shifted. The sky moves at a different speed.

And still—every morning—doors open, bells ring, lessons begin. As if routine alone could guarantee relevance.

If you've ever stood in a corridor after the last bell, watching students drift toward buses and carparks, you may have felt it too: a quiet question hovering in the air like dust in late sunlight.

Are we preparing them for *their* world...
or training them to survive *ours*?

That question is not an accusation. It's a compass.

The Feeling Beneath the Data

We can name the pressures in clean, report-ready language.

Rapid technological change.

Mental health concerns.

Climate instability.

Economic uncertainty.

Polarisation and distrust.

But those phrases—while true—often land like headlines. They skim across the surface.

What we hear in schools, when people speak without scripts, is something more intimate.



A teacher says, "I'm not sure I'm making the difference I thought I would."
A student says, "I'm doing everything I'm told, but I don't feel like myself."
A parent says, "I just want them to be okay—really okay."
A leader says, "We're moving constantly, and I'm not sure we're moving *forward*."

The gap between what matters and what is measured is not an academic problem.
It's an existential one.

Why an Atlas?

This book is not a blueprint.

A blueprint assumes the terrain is stable. It assumes the builder is in control. It assumes the future is a structure you can predict if you simply follow the steps in the right order.

But we are not building a fixed object.

We are guiding living, breathing human beings through a world that will not hold still.

That requires a different kind of text.

In the pre-internet world, an atlas did more than tell you where to go. It let you *travel* before you travelled. You could open it on a kitchen table and cross oceans with your finger. You could see mountain ranges you'd never climbed, cities you'd never walked, coastlines you'd never touched—and somehow your imagination already knew them. An atlas expanded the world while you were still at home.

That's what we need now.

Not a single route. Not a universal prescription. But something that helps us see beyond the familiar—so we can choose our direction with more courage and clarity.

An atlas offers landmarks. Warnings. Possibilities. It doesn't shame you for taking a different path. It simply says: *Others have been here. Here's what they noticed.*

And then it asks the harder thing:

What is your true north?

The Stories That Wouldn't Let Us Go

This atlas was born in conversation—across time zones, cultures, and contexts. We listened to educators, researchers, school leaders, students, and community builders who are not waiting for permission to reimagine learning.



Again and again, we noticed a pattern:

The most alive educational spaces were not necessarily the most resourced. They were the most *oriented*.

They had clarity about why they existed.

They built learning around contribution, not compliance.

They held students as whole humans—mind and heart—without lowering expectations.

In those places, you could feel it immediately.

Not perfection. Not ease.

But *meaning*.

The Temptation of Easy Answers

In times of disruption, we reach for certainty the way a drowning person reaches for anything that floats.

A new framework.

A new program.

A new device.

A new slogan.

Sometimes those things help. Often, they don't—because complexity doesn't yield to quick fixes.

The real work lives in tensions we must learn to hold:

Rigour **and** wellbeing.

Structure **and** freedom.

Tradition **and** transformation.

Evidence **and** imagination.

This atlas is an attempt to resist narrowing. Not by denying the tensions—but by mapping the places where people are learning to live inside them with courage and craft.

Before We Begin

There is a line that runs beneath every page:

We do not need more schooling.

We need more *learning*.



Learning that restores agency.
Learning that builds belonging.
Learning that invites contribution.

This is not a romantic dream. It's an urgent practicality. Because young people can feel when we are preparing them for an exam instead of equipping them for life.

So we start with a simple act of honesty:

We are in new terrain.

That doesn't mean we are lost. It means we need better bearings.

If you are holding this atlas, it is likely because you are already a kind of cartographer—whether you have that title or not. You sense the gap between what is and what could be, and you haven't made peace with the gap.

Good.

That restlessness is not a flaw.

It is the beginning of direction.

Turn the page when you're ready.

We'll start drawing.

Chapter 1 – True North

Defining Direction in a Disrupted World

1. The Myth of Maui: Slowing the Sun

In Aotearoa New Zealand, there is a story that has been told for generations.

The sun, the story goes, used to race across the sky so quickly that people barely had time to fish, grow food, or live their lives. Maui, the trickster hero, gathered his brothers, wove mighty ropes, and set a trap. At dawn they snared the sun, held it fast, and refused to let go until it agreed to slow its frantic pace. Only then could people truly inhabit their days.

This legend was shared with us by educators from Albany Senior High School in New Zealand, not as a quaint piece of folklore, but as a mirror. In their telling, you can almost hear the echo: **What would it mean to “slow the sun” in education?**

For most of the industrial age, schools have run on someone else’s clock. Bells slice the day into rigid segments. Curriculum documents race ahead whether students are ready or not. The timetable is treated as sacred

infrastructure rather than a design choice. We have built systems that move so quickly, and so uniformly, that there is little space to “harvest” deep learning, reflection, or meaning.

When we listen to students and teachers around the world, a pattern emerges:

Lessons are packed, but understanding is thin.

Calendars are full, but purpose is vague.

Everyone is busy, yet too few people feel they are doing work that matters.

Seen through Maui’s story, our task becomes clearer. We do not need to make the sun brighter. We do not need to invent a new sky. We need to **slow things down enough** for human beings to thrive.

Slowing the sun in education might look like:

- Stretching learning into 100-minute blocks where students can think, create, and iterate rather than simply comply.



- 100-MINUTE LEARNING BLOCKS
- SLOWING JUDGMENT
- SLOWING REFORM CHURN

- READ THE WATER IN REAL TIME
- RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP
- ADAPTIVE PLANNING

- Slowing the rush to judgment so a student’s gifts can surface beyond their latest test score.
- Slowing the churn of reform long enough to listen carefully to community, culture, and country before the next initiative is launched.

The Maui myth is not about passivity; it is about agency. The sun did not volunteer to slow down. People decided to act. In the same way, time in schools will not magically reorganize itself around deeper learning. Someone has to take the ropes, call a few colleagues together, and say:

“We can’t keep going at this speed. Let’s hold the sun for a moment and decide what it should illuminate.”

This book begins with that act of courage.

2. The New Map: From Schooners to Rafts

During our global conversations, Dr. Connie Kamm, speaking from Phoenix, offered a simple image that keeps returning:

We were trained to captain schooners, but we are actually on a whitewater raft.

The schooner is a beautiful thing: sturdy hull, tall masts, clear lines of authority, and predetermined routes. If the weather holds and the charts are accurate, you know

roughly where you'll be and when. Success, in that world, is about **planning, discipline, and staying the course.**

For generations, education has imagined itself as a schooner. The curriculum is the route. The timetable is the ship's clock. The exams are the lighthouse you steer toward. We promote leaders who can "hold steady" and "stay on message" in the face of storms.

But the world our young people are entering is less like a calm sea and more like a turbulent river. Technology, climate disruption, political instability, and social change have turned the water white and fast. By the time a committee finishes writing a policy, reality has already taken another bend.

On a whitewater raft, everything changes:

- You don't follow a fixed route; you **read the water in real time.**
- Authority is still present, but the guide's job is to keep the team responsive, not to cling to a pre-written plan.
- Stability comes not from rigid structures, but from **agility, trust, and shared awareness.**

Andre Mamprin, speaking from Canada, pushes this idea further. He reminds us that education, despite being a massive, multi-billion dollar sector, is arguably **the least disrupted human enterprise.** For decades, nearly every other industry has



THE SCHOONER: INDUSTRIAL SCHOOLING



THE CERTIFICATION TRAP: ARTIFICIAL SCARCITY



THE WHITewater RAFT: DISRUPTED WORLD



THE CRISIS OF RELEVANCE: FAILING SCHOOL, THRIVING LIFE



been reshaped by digital transformation, automation, and new forms of value creation. Schools, by contrast, have largely preserved their industrial DNA.

This creates a dangerous gap between school and reality:

- The workplace expects collaboration, adaptability, and self-direction; school still rewards compliance and correct answers.
- The world outside is networked and fluid; inside, learning is often siloed and linear.
- Young people live in a constant flow of information; we still treat knowledge as if it were scarce and locked in textbooks.
- We are captains of schooners drifting into rapids.

The point is not to romanticize chaos. Whitewater guides do not surrender to the river; they study it obsessively. They learn where the hidden rocks are, where the current pulls hardest, how to use the force of the water rather than fight it. They prepare meticulously—and then they let go of the illusion of control.

This book is about that pivot: from commanding a ship on a known route to guiding a raft through unknown waters, with and for our students.

3. The Crisis of Relevance

Everywhere we go, we hear the same question, sometimes murmured, sometimes shouted:

“Why am I learning this?”

Shei Ascencio, who works across Mexico and Canada, tells stories of students who can see the cost of their schooling more clearly than the purpose. They know what they are giving up in time, identity, and possibility. They see the gap between the problems they care about—mental health, climate, inequality—and the worksheets in front of them.

In one of our conversations, Shei described a student looking at a complex exam and simply asking:

“Will any of this help me be a better human or contribute to my community?”

The question hung in the air longer than the answer.

Peter Hutton, from Australia, names another layer: the **certification trap**. Education systems have constructed a kind of artificial scarcity around university entrance, jobs, and opportunity. We funnel young people through narrow academic pathways and attach life-defining consequences to small differences in grades.

“We’ve turned access into a bottleneck,” Peter argues. “The game is not about learning; it’s about



gaming a system designed to keep opportunity scarce.”

The tragedy is that **schooling** and **learning** have quietly drifted apart. A student can win at school—collecting high grades, awards, and university places—without ever developing the curiosity, courage, or creativity that deep learning requires. Another can lose at school and yet be rich in insight, resilience, and practical wisdom.

Susannah Johnson, from Hawaii, gave us a story that makes this crisis painfully human. She spoke of a student who, by every school metric, was “failing.” His grades were low. His test scores were poor. In the data dashboards that many schools now worship, he showed up as a problem.

Yet outside of school, he was something else entirely. He was an expert spearfisher, responsible for putting food on his family’s table. He knew the tides, the reef, the behavior of fish, the patterns of weather. He could read an ecosystem in ways that would make a marine biologist pause.

One day, when asked how he felt about school, he replied:

“I’m just not good at anything.”

The system had taught a provider, a knowledge holder, and a community asset to see himself as worthless—because his brilliance did not show up on the school’s radar.

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This is the crisis of relevance at its core:

We are asking young people to trade their time and identity for credentials that may or may not serve them.

We are ignoring or erasing forms of knowledge that do not fit our narrow academic categories.

We are measuring success in ways that leave too many students convinced they are “good at nothing.”

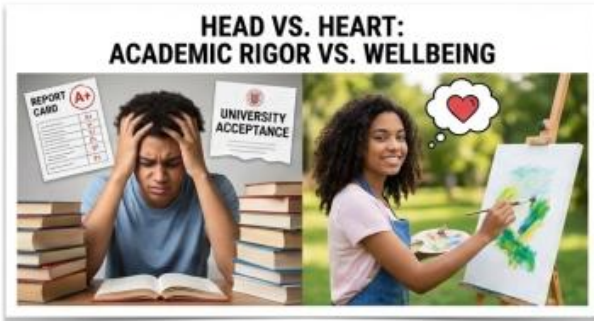
Before we redesign curricula or invest in new technology, we must first confront this: if students do not see the purpose of what we offer, and if the world does not meaningfully recognize the value of what they learn, **no amount of innovation will save us.**

4. The False Dichotomies (Traps to Avoid)

When a field is under pressure, it often retreats into either/or thinking. Education is no exception. Around the world, we see the same unhelpful binaries playing out.

Head vs. Heart

Chris Bezsylko, founding Head of Imagination Lab School in Palo Alto, California, United States, describes a conversation he hears again and again. Parents tell him, in almost the same breath:



“I just want my child to be happy,” and

“I want them to get straight As and into a top university.”

They speak as if these were two different children, or two incompatible futures. When schools accept this divide, we design for one at the expense of the other: high-pressure academic environments that sacrifice wellbeing, or relaxed, “happy” spaces that underprepare students for challenge and rigor.

The truth, of course, is that **deep learning requires both**: intellectual stretch and emotional safety; demanding work and a sense of belonging; standards that are high and support that is human.

Traditional vs. Progressive

Paula Rodríguez, representing the OECD, invites us to stop arguing under these labels and look instead for the **“DNA of high-quality teaching.”** In our conversations about the Schools+ initiative, she describes classrooms around the world that defy the stereotypes:

- “Traditional-looking” classrooms where a skilled teacher uses direct instruction with extraordinary clarity and responsiveness.
- “Progressive-looking” spaces with flexible furniture and group work that, underneath the aesthetics, lack cognitive challenge.

The label tells us almost nothing. What matters is what students are actually asked to think about, do, and reflect on.



When systems frame the debate as “traditional vs progressive,” schools waste energy on surface-level features—what the classroom looks like, what the tasks are called—instead of the deeper questions of **equity, cognition, and relationship**.

Smart vs. Brilliant

In San Francisco, Dr. Juan Carlos Arauz offered a reframing that stays with you long after the call ends. He distinguishes between “**smart**” and “**brilliant**.”

“Smart,” he suggests, is how institutions measure us: grades, test scores, credentials, and the ability to perform within a particular system.

“Brilliant” is something else. It is the innate, lived potential that emerges when a person is seen, supported, and invited to contribute. He speaks of brilliance as **defined by proximity**—by whether a young person is surrounded by people who recognize and nurture their gifts.

If we are not careful, schools become machines that sort for “smart” while systematically ignoring “brilliant.” We reward those who decode the system’s expectations and quietly marginalize forms of genius that do not come packaged in the usual way.

These dichotomies—head vs heart, traditional vs progressive, smart vs brilliant—are traps. They force us into defensive positions and shallow

debates. The work ahead demands something more difficult and more hopeful: **both/and thinking**.

We need schools that are:

- Emotionally safe **and** academically demanding.
- Rooted in proven practices **and** open to new forms of learning.

Able to recognize institutional measures of success **and** fiercely committed to uncovering each student’s unique brilliance.

5. The Pivot: Look to the “Real” Educators

If top-down reform was going to save us, it would have worked by now.

Over the last decades, schools have endured wave after wave of initiatives: new standards, new accountability systems, new technologies, new frameworks. Each arrives with glossy documents and ambitious slogans. Each promises transformation. Many leave behind little more than fatigue and a thicker policy binder.

The most hopeful stories we heard during our global event did not come from mandates; they came from **people**.

Ainsley Rose, speaking from Canada, describes change not as a grand program, but as a series of **brushfires**. In his telling, innovation



often begins with two or three educators in a hallway noticing a pattern, naming a problem, and trying something different in their own classrooms. The fire spreads not because someone wrote it into a strategic plan, but because colleagues see the light in their students' eyes and want the same for their own.

"You don't start with a bonfire," Ainsley suggests. "You start with a spark, and you protect it from the wind long enough for others to gather around."

Angela Falkenberg, from Australia, adds another crucial dimension: **practice-based evidence**. While research and theory matter, she reminds us that classrooms are complex, living ecosystems. Teachers develop a form of expertise that rarely shows up in formal studies: the ability to feel when a group is stuck, to improvise an explanation in the language of a particular community, to adjust on the fly while maintaining high expectations.

Too often, systems treat this wisdom as anecdotal or inferior to "evidence-based" strategies lifted from distant contexts. Angela argues for a more honest and respectful cycle: practitioners experimenting and observing; researchers helping to make sense of patterns; policy supporting what is already working at the ground level.

Around the world, we see "real" educators refusing to wait for permission to do this work. They are forming **tribes**.

In Mexico, communities like *The Coaches Couch* are creating informal spaces for educators to coach, support, and challenge one another outside of bureaucratic structures.

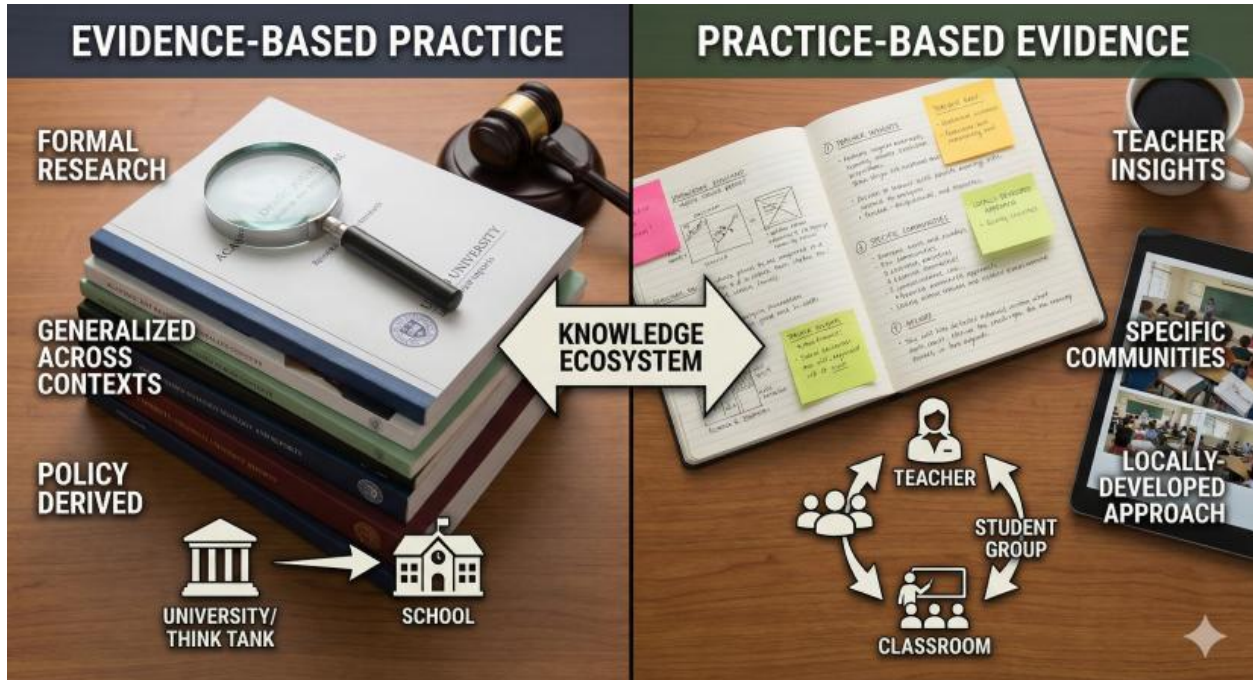
In the San Francisco Bay Area, groups like the *Ecosystem Collective* bring together teachers, leaders, entrepreneurs, and students to prototype new forms of learning that cross institutional boundaries.

These tribes are not polished. Their meetings are rarely streamed or celebrated. But this is where much of the **real cartography of change** is happening—messy, relational, and grounded in daily practice.

If you are holding this book, chances are you are already part of such a tribe, or longing for one. The pivot we are calling for is simple, but profound:

From waiting for the system to transform itself

To recognizing that **the system is we**—the conversations we host, the choices we make, the risks we take together.



6. The Call to Cartography

Why call this book an **Atlas**?

Because we are not offering a master plan, a single route, or a prescription. We are gathering maps: partial, evolving, and deeply local. A New Zealand legend about Maui. A Phoenix-based metaphor about rafts and schooners. A Hawaiian boy who thinks he’s “good at nothing” while feeding his family from the sea. A Canadian principal watching brushfires turn into bonfires. An OECD researcher tracing the DNA of excellent teaching in wildly different contexts.

Each story is a contour line. Each practice is a landmark. Each person is a compass bearing.

An atlas does not tell you where you must go. It shows you where others have been and what they found there, so you can make informed, courageous decisions about your own journey.

In the chapters that follow, we will:

- Map emerging **principles** that seem to hold across contexts.
- Highlight **practices** that schools are already using to slow the sun, read the river, and restore relevance.
- Name the **tensions and trade-offs** honestly, so we are not seduced by easy answers.



But the map is not the territory. The real work will happen in your staff rooms, classrooms, hallways, board meetings, living rooms, and community spaces. Our hope is that this atlas gives you enough shared language and evidence to say, with others:

“This is the direction of our true north. We may not know every rapid ahead, but we know what we stand for.”

There is a proverb often attributed to Māori wisdom:

Turn and face the sun, and the shadows will fall behind you.

In a world saturated with shadows—fear, fatigue, cynicism—our task as educators is not to deny the darkness, but to deliberately orient ourselves toward the light: toward what helps young people thrive, connect, and contribute.

Maui did not slow the sun alone. He gathered his brothers, wove the ropes, and acted together. In the same way, none of us will redefine education in isolation. We will do it as a global constellation of educators, students, families, and communities, each holding a piece of the rope.

This is your invitation to cartography.

Turn and face the sun. Let’s start drawing.

Chapter 2 – The Cartographers & The Methodology

How we mapped the change

Chapter 2 – The Cartographers & The Methodology

How We Mapped the Change

1. The Methodology: A 24-Hour Relay Race

The Atlas began, quite literally, as a race against the sun.

The premise was disarmingly simple: hold a continuous, 24-hour live stream that followed daylight around the globe. Instead of a conference in a single hotel ballroom, we would build a moving, digital campfire—one that never went out, only shifted time zones.

We started where the day starts.

At sunrise in Aotearoa New Zealand, the first segment went live. Educators from Albany Senior High and the FutureMakers network welcomed us into their world: indigenous narratives, student-led learning, and a school culture that sees learners as citizens, not recipients. As they spoke,

the chat filled with greetings from people who were still on yesterday—Argentina, Ireland, Canada—peeking into tomorrow's light.

Then, on the hour, the relay began.

- New Zealand passed the baton to Australia.
- Australia to Singapore.
- Singapore to India.
- India across the Middle East and Africa.
- Europe into the Americas.
- The Americas finally gliding into sunset in Hawaii, where the last rays of November 20 closed the circle.

Every 60 minutes, the host shifted, the accents changed, and a new corner of the world took the stage.



But the through-line remained constant: **What does real change in education look like where you are, right now?**

This was not just a clever format. It was a deliberate methodology.

Breaking Isolation

Innovative educators often feel like islands—small pockets of light in systems that reward standardization. By following the sun, region by region, we began to see something different: not islands, but an **archipelago**.

A rural school in Eswatini. A robotics lab in Delhi. A principal in the Irish midlands. A community school in Hawaii. None of them alone, all of them part of a larger chain. The 24-hour format made that visible in real time. When one island finished sharing, another one lit up on the screen.

Equity of Voice

Traditional conferences almost always reproduce hierarchy: keynote speakers at the center, everyone else squeezed into panels or breakouts. We chose a different rule:

Every region gets exactly one hour. No one gets more.

A rural cluster of schools in Eswatini had the same stage and time as a tech hub in Silicon Valley. A grassroots project in Lebanon had the same spotlight as a prestigious international school in Dubai. There were no “headline acts” and “supporting acts.” The practitioner **was** the keynote.



In that sense, the format was as much a statement of values as it was a schedule.

Distillation Under Pressure

When you tell a group, “You have a day,” they will fill the day. When you tell them, “You have 60 minutes to represent your region’s best ideas to the world,” something different happens.

People start asking sharper questions:

- “If we could only share three practices, which ones have truly changed learners’ lives?”
- “What story captures the essence of our journey?”
- “What can others actually adopt or adapt tomorrow?”

The time constraint became a gift. It forced clarity, focus, and honesty. No one had room for jargon or long histories. Each hour became a distilled snapshot of lived change, captured at a precise moment in time.

This chapter is about the people who ran that relay—the cartographers who, hour by hour, began sketching a global map of educational transformation.

2. The Cartographers: Who Is Leading the Way?

We call them **cartographers** because that is what they were doing—charting the edges of what school can be, often in places where the old maps simply say, “Here be dragons.”

They came from every region, every system, and every level of the educational ecosystem. What unites them is not a shared methodology or ideology, but a shared commitment to **draw new lines** where the old ones no longer serve. To make sense of their diversity, we group them here not as a ranking, but as a constellation.

The Pacific Rim – Guardians of Culture

New Zealand: Philly & Albany Senior High

From the very first segment, Philippa Wintle and the team at Albany Senior High grounded us in indigenous wisdom and student agency. They showed us a school built on trust: students designing their own interdisciplinary projects, teachers working in open-plan learning commons, and Māori narratives woven into the daily



life of the school. Their message was clear: you cannot design the future of education if you erase the first peoples' ways of knowing.

Australia: Nathaniel Edwards & Peter Hutton

Nathaniel Edwards invited us into a conversation about indigenous leadership in Australia—what it means to move beyond token inclusion and into genuine co-governance of learning communities. Meanwhile, Peter Hutton shared radical school models that rewrite the rules entirely: schools without traditional year levels, timetables, or exam-driven identities. Together, they reminded us that the Pacific Rim is not just geographically on the edge—it is also on the edge of what's possible.

The Asian Tigers – Engineers of the Future

Singapore: Prof. Er Meng Hwa

From Singapore, Professor Er Meng Hwa bridged neuroscience, AI, and schooling. He explored what it might mean to design learning with a deeper understanding of how the brain learns—and how AI can serve as a cognitive partner rather than a replacement for teachers. In a system often lauded for its results, he opened space for a new question: how do we use our success as a launchpad for humane experimentation, not an excuse to freeze in place?

India: Salwan Education Trust

The Salwan Education Trust in India brought forward images of students designing robots, coding solutions, and tackling real-world problems with a maker's mindset. Their work goes far beyond "STEM labs"; it is about building a culture where innovation is expected from students, not just from adults. In a country with staggering scale and complexity, Salwan offered a glimpse of how pockets of excellence can become prototypes for systemic change.

The Middle East & Africa – Builders of Resilience

Lebanon: TAMAM Project

From Lebanon, the TAMAM project, under the leadership of Dr. Rima Karami Akkary and the Project Steering Team, shared the story of a homegrown Arab reform movement, one that does not simply import Western models, but designs change from within the cultural, linguistic, and political realities of the region. It presents a **school-university partnership** based at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. TAMAM foregrounds job-embedded professional learning, collective leadership, and iterative inquiry as mechanisms for leading locally grounded school improvement initiatives and **cultivating self-renewing schools**.



Eswatini: Welcome Mlanga

Welcome Mlanga took us to Eswatini, where bridging the digital divide is not an abstract slogan but a daily challenge. He described schools where connectivity is fragile, devices are scarce, and yet educators are crafting blended learning experiences using whatever tools they have. His message was both humbling and energizing: if innovation is possible here, it is possible anywhere.

Dubai: American School of Dubai

From Dubai, the American School of Dubai showcased experiential learning that honors both global citizenship and local context. Students engage in real-world projects, outdoor challenges, and community partnerships in a city that feels like a future lab. Their segment asked a subtle but important question: can privilege be leveraged not to insulate students from reality, but to equip them to change it?

Europe – Re-imagining Tradition

Ireland: IPPN

Representatives from the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) spoke about **sustainable leadership**—how to support school leaders who have weathered pandemics, policy shifts, and societal change without burning out. Their stories from rural and urban Ireland alike reminded us that leadership is not only about vision,

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but about building structures of care, collegiality, and professional trust.

UK: Queen Ethelburga's

From the UK, Queen Ethelburga's shared an approach to schooling where holistic health is not an add-on but a central pillar. They spoke of wellbeing, mental health, and physical activity as core components of academic excellence, not as competing priorities. In a system often caricatured as exam-obsessed, they offered another narrative.

Spain: Brains International School

Brains International School in Madrid showed us how students are not only consuming technology, but **creating** with it: developing apps, designing solutions, and using digital tools to address real community issues. Their students spoke of creativity, agency, and responsibility in a way that made it impossible to see them as passive receivers of curriculum.

The Americas – The Frontier

Canada: Ontario Principals' Council

From Canada, the Ontario Principals' Council brought forward a rich conversation about equity and Indigenous learning. School leaders described efforts to indigenize curricula, confront systemic bias, and ensure that reconciliation is not a line in a policy document but a lived practice.



United States: Silicon Valley, Phoenix, Hawaii

In the United States, we heard multiple, contrasting but complementary voices:

- **Silicon Valley (Jorge Zavala)** emphasized entrepreneurial ecosystems, incubators, and the messy space where education meets startup culture.
- **Phoenix (Dr. Connie Kamm)** returned us to the image of the schooner and the whitewater raft—reminding systems that agility and responsiveness are no longer optional.
- **Hawaii (Susannah Johnson)** grounded everything in place-based learning, culture, and the ocean. Her stories about students learning from the land and sea, while grappling with identity and relevance, made clear that “innovation” without roots risks becoming hollow.

Latin America: Mexico & Argentina

From Latin America, the voices were raw, warm, and deeply relational:

- In **Mexico**, communities like *The Coaches Couch* showed what horizontal professional support looks like: no hierarchy of experts, just a tribe of peers coaching, problem-solving, and dreaming together.
- In **Argentina**, initiatives like *HumanEdu* brought educators into immersive retreats, re-centering them as humans before they step back into their roles as teachers and leaders. The work there insists that transformation is not only technical, but profoundly emotional and communal.

Together, these cartographers did not agree on everything. They did not use the same language, tools, or frameworks. But they shared something more important: a refusal to accept that “this is just how school is” and a willingness to draw alternative routes.

3. The Global Connector: OECD Schools+

As the regional teams spoke, another voice acted as a kind of global **grammar** for the conversation: the OECD Schools+ project, represented by Paula Rodríguez.



Where local practitioners brought rich, situated stories, Schools+ brought a wide-angle lens—a taxonomy developed from observing more than 150 schools across 40 countries. It did not exist to override local narratives, but to **connect** them. Paula helped us do three crucial things.

Move Beyond “Traditional vs Progressive”

Instead of asking whether a school was “traditional” or “progressive,” Schools+ asked:

- What kinds of tasks are students actually doing?
- How often are they engaging in deep cognitive work?
- What is the quality of feedback and interaction?

This shift showed that classroom resources and new technologies, by themselves, do not lead to educational improvement; it is also the pedagogical practices of teachers that make the difference.

Name the DNA of High-Quality Teaching

From its vast dataset, Schools+ distilled key features—patterns of practice that consistently appeared in high-performing, equitable schools across contexts. Things like:

- Clear learning intentions paired with rich, open-ended tasks.
- High expectations coupled with strong relational trust.
- Frequent opportunities for students to explain, argue, and create—not just recall.



We could see those same patterns at work. Their practices were not outliers or curiosities; they were expressions of a global, evidence-informed DNA.

Provide Legitimacy Without Flattening Diversity

For many practitioners, the greatest risk of sharing their work publicly is being dismissed as “niche,” “context-specific,” or “nice but not scalable.” The presence of Schools+ sent a different message:

“What you are doing is not only powerful for your students; it aligns with what we know, globally, about what works.”

That validation matters. It gives educators language to talk to policymakers, boards, and parents. It turns isolated experiments into part of a global evidence base, without forcing everyone into a single mold.

In a sense, OECD Schools+ functioned as a **legend** on the edge of the Atlas—a key that helps readers interpret the map without dictating where they must go.

4. Defining the Mission: The Organizer

All of this needed a connective tissue: someone to convene, host, and hold the 24-hour experiment together. That role was played by **The Learnerspace**.

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Acting as the digital campfire, The Learnerspace:

- Designed the relay format and coordinated the handoffs across time zones.
- Hosted the live stream, stitching together local segments into a coherent global narrative.
- Framed the guiding question again and again: *How do we build schools that are fit for the future—and worthy of our children?*

The mission behind it was simple and ambitious:

“We are the world; we are the future.”

Not in a sentimental sense, but in a literal one. The future is being built, right now, in classrooms and communities from Auckland to Accra to Austin. The 24-hour stream was one way of making that visible—a reminder that innovation in education is not the property of any one country or organization.

The Learnerspace did not claim to own the ideas shared. Its role was to make them easier to see, easier to connect, and harder to ignore.

5. The Organizational Shift: The Ecosystem Collective

As the day unfolded, another pattern surfaced—not about pedagogy, but



about **how we organize ourselves** as adults.

Too often, schools, nonprofits, and educational innovators operate in a **scarcity mindset**. Funding is limited, attention is limited, time is limited—so we compete.

- We guard our models instead of sharing them.
- We chase the same grants.
- We build parallel projects in the same communities, rarely aligned.

Dr. Juan Carlos Arauz, from E3 in the Bay Area, offered a different vision: the **Ecosystem Collective**.

Rather than seeing organizations as competitors in a market, he invited us to imagine them as members of a shared ecosystem. In that ecosystem:

- Value flows not only through money, but through **trust, knowledge, and reciprocal support**.
- Collaboration is not a PR word, but a daily practice: sharing staff time, resources, tools, and relationships.
- Projects are co-designed to fill gaps and leverage strengths, not to mark territory.

He spoke of a **gift economy** among changemakers—an economy where people offer what they are good at

and ask for what they need, trusting that the system will remember and respond.

We saw versions of this already alive:

- In Mexico, *The Coaches Couch* operates as a horizontal network: educators coaching one another, sharing failures and breakthroughs without needing to brand every insight.
- Across the 24-hour stream, organizations opened their playbooks generously, inviting others to copy, remix, and improve their work.

The implication is uncomfortable but necessary:

We cannot credibly teach students about collaboration, empathy, and collective problem-solving if we, the adults, continue to operate in silos, driven primarily by competition and scarcity.

The Ecosystem Collective is both a concept and a challenge. It asks us to redesign not just classrooms, but the **adult systems** around them.

6. Conclusion: The Living Map

The 24-hour relay was, in one sense, a finite event—24 segments, 24 hours, and then it was over. People went



back to their schools, their meetings, their daily urgencies.

But the conversations did not disappear. They left traces: stories, images, practices, phrases that stuck. This book is the artifact of that day. It is our attempt to preserve the energy, clarity, and honesty that surfaced when the world's educators briefly agreed to face the same sun together.

Think of the chapters that follow as a **living map** created from that relay:

- Each chapter distills patterns we saw repeated across regions.
- Each example comes from real people in real places, not from theory alone.
- Each idea is offered as a coordinate, not as a command.

And like any map, it is incomplete.

New schools will emerge. Old schools will reinvent themselves. Policies will shift, technologies will surprise us, and crises will force us to adapt. The Atlas cannot—and should not—try to fix the landscape.

Instead, it offers you this invitation:

- **Locate yourself.** Where are you on this map? What resonates, what challenges, what feels missing?
- **Add your coordinates.** The next time you and a colleague pilot a new practice, solve a problem with students, or shift a school culture, consider it another line on the map.
- **Share your cartography.** Whether through local networks, platforms, or quiet conversations, your work becomes more powerful when others can see it.

The relay race may be over, but the mapping has only just begun.

In the chapters ahead, we will move from methodology to themes—from how we gathered the stories to what they revealed about assessment, wellbeing, AI, leadership, and more. As you read, remember: this Atlas is not something to admire from a distance. It is something to walk into, annotate, and eventually leave marked with your own paths.

The sun is already rising somewhere. The next cartographer is about to take the baton.

Chapter 3 – Continental Drifts

Policy & Systemic Tensions

1. The Leadership Crisis: From Surviving to Thriving (Ireland)

If you want to understand the fault lines in a system, talk to the people who stand right on top of them.

In Ireland, that is the primary school principal. For over two decades, the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) has been listening to those leaders—surveying them, walking alongside them, and documenting what it actually feels like to hold a school together day after day.

The picture that emerged was as consistent as it was troubling: principals spending more and more time on everything except the core work of learning.

- Procurement and tendering processes.
- Building maintenance and health-and-safety audits.

- Compliance with an ever-growing list of regulations.
- Administrative firefighting that never quite ends.

Many Irish principals described themselves less as “leaders of learning” and more as **administrators of systems**—tasked with keeping an increasingly complex machine from breaking down. The human cost was predictable: exhaustion, burnout, and a draining sense that the very people meant to inspire transformation were struggling just to survive the week.

For years, it felt like a local problem. A quirk of the Irish system. Something “we just have to put up with.”

Then came the tipping point.

Paraic Clerkin, CEO of IPPN, told us about the moment he read the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report and realized: *It's not just us.*

For the first time, a global body named and validated what Irish

principals had been saying for years—that school leaders around the world are drowning in administration at the expense of instructional leadership. The report described principals who spend their days on logistics instead of learning, compliance instead of coaching, paperwork instead of people.

For Paraic and his colleagues, this was a **game changer**:

- It turned private frustration into public evidence.
- It reframed the issue from personal resilience (“You just need better time management”) to structural design (“We have engineered leadership roles that are unsustainable”).
- It gave Irish leaders language to speak not only to their own government, but into a global conversation.

The consequences of this leadership crisis are not abstract. When principals spend their energy managing buildings and budgets, the things that matter most suffer:

- Fewer classroom observations and coaching conversations.
- Less time to build shared vision with staff.

- Limited capacity to lead real change in teaching and learning.

In other words, **student outcomes** are quietly shaped by meeting agendas and admin loads.

For years, the best many systems hoped for was “sustainable leadership”—a situation where principals could at least do the job without collapsing. Ireland’s own leadership frameworks reflected that aspiration: keep people in the role long enough, with enough support, that they don’t burn out.

Those days are over.

The emerging shift, captured in IPPN’s more recent thinking, is from sustainability to **flourishing**. The question is no longer, “How do we keep leaders from breaking?” but:

“How do we design roles, supports, and systems so that leaders can *thrive*—intellectually, emotionally, and professionally?”

That shift sounds simple. It is not. It requires:

- Reassigning or centralizing portions of administrative workload.
- Clarifying what *must* be done by a principal and what can be done by others.

- Reimagining leadership preparation to prioritize instructional leadership, culture-building, and relational intelligence.

Ireland’s story is not only Irish. It is a mirror held up to systems everywhere that ask leaders to deliver transformation while burying them under tasks that keep the existing machinery intact.

2. The Digital Divide: A Dream Deferred (Eswatini / Africa)

The conversations about AI in education can sometimes feel like they come from another planet: discussions about personalized algorithms, learning analytics, and virtual tutors that are always on, always responsive.

Then the camera switched to Eswatini.

Welcome Mlanga, President of the Eswatini Principals Association, did not bring slides of sleek devices or dashboards. He brought a reality check.

In many rural villages, he explained, **AI is still a dream**—not because people lack imagination, but because the basic infrastructure is missing.

- Some schools are accessible only by rough roads, or in the rainy season, not at all.
- Electricity can be irregular or absent.



- Connectivity, when it exists, is fragile and expensive.
- Devices are scarce, shared, or outdated.

And yet, the story is not simply one of absence.

Welcome described a paradox that is becoming common across Sub-Saharan Africa: **students are often ahead of schools**. Through mobile phones—sometimes shared within a family, sometimes in community spaces—young people are accessing videos, tutorials, and social platforms that connect them to a wider world of information. They may watch coding videos on a cracked screen while sitting in a home with no running water.

Meanwhile, their schools, bound by budgets and policies, struggle to provide even basic digital resources.

This is the digital divide in its current form: not only between nations, but **between students and the institutions meant to serve them**.



Against this backdrop, a massive pedagogical shift is underway across much of the continent: the move from **Objectives-Based Education (OBE)** to **Competency-Based Education (CBE)**.

Under Objectives-Based Education, success was often defined through narrow academic targets aligned to high-stakes exams. The system was brutally efficient at one thing: sorting.

- Those who met the objectives progressed.
- Those who did not were effectively rejected—sometimes as many as 70–80% of students left school without credentials that opened doors.

For millions of young people, this meant graduating into a kind of institutional silence: no qualification, no viable vocational path, no safety net. In many countries, this contributed directly to a chronic youth unemployment crisis.

Competency-Based Education is, in part, a response to that failure.

Instead of asking, “What objectives did you meet on a written test?” CBE asks:

- “What can you *actually* do?”
- “What skills and dispositions have you developed?”
- “How well can you apply your learning in real contexts?”

The focus shifts from exam performance to **vocational viability**: equipping young people with skills that can translate into livelihoods, entrepreneurship, or community leadership—even in contexts where formal jobs are scarce.

In Eswatini and beyond, this shift is not just pedagogical; it is existential. When a system that used to reject the

majority begins to reorient around competencies, it is, in effect, rewriting its social contract with young people.

But the transition is not easy:

- Teachers educated and trained under OBE must relearn how to plan, teach, and assess.
- Infrastructure gaps mean that many of the glossy global models of CBE (with rich digital portfolios and high-tech simulations) are not immediately applicable.
- Policy documents can change much faster than classroom practice.

Welcome’s message, however, was not one of despair. It was sober hope.

Yes, AI remains, for now, a distant horizon in many African contexts. But the more fundamental shift—from rejecting students to designing for their **future employability and dignity**—is already in motion. Any global conversation about AI and the future of learning that ignores this reality is, at best, incomplete.

3. The Evidence Trap: Whose Data Matters? (Australia)

If Ireland’s story revealed a crisis of leadership, and Eswatini’s a crisis of infrastructure and opportunity, Australia brought us face to face with a crisis of **knowledge**: who gets to say what “works” in education?

Angela Falkenberg, speaking from her role with Australian principals, named a tension that many educators feel but rarely articulate publicly: the gap between **policy mandates** and **classroom reality**.

On paper, most reforms come wrapped in the language of “evidence-based practice.” Governments and systems point to academic research, meta-analyses, and expert panels. Policies are rolled out with references to effect sizes and randomized controlled trials.

There is nothing wrong with research. The problem arises when evidence is treated as a one-way street—from academia down into schools—without serious regard for what practitioners are already observing, testing, and refining in their own contexts.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Angela distinguishes between:

- **Evidence-Based Practice:**
Policies and strategies derived

primarily from formal research, often generalized across contexts. These come with a seal of approval from universities or think tanks and can be useful starting points.

- **Practice-Based Evidence:**
Insights emerging from what teachers and leaders actually see working (or not) with specific children in specific communities. This is the knowledge you gain by noticing that a strategy technically aligned with the literature fails with a particular group of students, while a different, locally-developed approach unlocks their engagement and learning.

The danger, she argues, is when systems elevate the former and silently devalue the latter—treating researchers as the “real experts” and practitioners as implementers whose job is to comply, not to contribute.

Dr. Chris Duncan, representing Australian school leaders, sharpened the critique with a concrete example: the enthusiastic embrace of **Cognitive Load Theory** (CLT) as a policy touchstone.

CLT, in its basic form, reminds us that learners have limited working memory, and that instructional design should avoid overloading it. Sensible enough. But, Chris suggests, the way it



is sometimes translated into policy feels worryingly mechanistic:

The brain is treated like a computer processing information, and teaching is reduced to optimizing information transfer.

Lost in this translation is a simple, deeply human reality:

First we feel, then we learn.

Students do not arrive in classrooms as disembodied processors. They come as whole human beings—with emotions, histories, identities, and relationships that profoundly shape their capacity to pay attention, take risks, and persevere.

A lesson that is perfectly tuned to minimize cognitive load may still fail if:

- The student feels unsafe or unseen.
- The cultural references erase their identity.
- Their prior experiences with failure have convinced them that trying is dangerous.

This is not an argument against CLT or against research. It is an argument against **weaponizing** research in ways that flatten the complexity of classrooms and silence practitioners.

Angela and Chris point toward a different model:

- Researchers and policymakers listen carefully to what teachers are noticing and trying.
- Teachers use research not as a script, but as a conversation partner—testing and adapting ideas in context.
- Systems treat practice-based evidence as a valid and necessary part of the knowledge ecosystem.

In that model, the “evidence” that drives policy is richer, more humble, and more human.

4. Systemic Barriers: Responsive Leadership (Canada)

From Canada, the conversation turned to another kind of fault line: the one that runs through **race, identity, and access**.

The Ontario Principals Council (OPC) has been working on what they call **Responsive Relationship-Centered Leadership**—an approach that begins with a blunt recognition: the system is not neutral. It contains structures that consistently disadvantage Black and Indigenous students and communities.

“Inclusion,” in this frame, is not enough. Inviting students into a space that was not designed for them, and then offering support to help them cope, leaves the underlying architecture untouched.

Responsive leadership, as OPC describes it, asks different questions:

- Where, in our policies, procedures, and everyday practices, do barriers show up?
- Who is being asked to adapt, and who is assumed to “belong” by default?
- How are decisions about curriculum, discipline, and opportunity shaped by unspoken norms and biases?

A powerful case study came from the Peel District School Board, through the work of leaders like **Steve Keenleyside** and **Raquel Walker**.

They described the creation of a **Center for Black Excellence**, not as a segregated program, but as a hub for reimagining how Black students encounter opportunity in and beyond school. A key partnership emerged with community organizations





such as *Swirl*, which opened doors into professional networks often closed to young people from marginalized communities.

The shift was stark:

- Instead of “charity” projects where students are recipients of help, Black students were invited into **high-level, work-integrated learning**.
- In one example, students worked on real marketing campaigns for major brands like WWE or Cricket Wireless—solving authentic problems, pitching ideas, and seeing their work taken seriously.
- Mentorship was not abstract; it came from professionals who looked like them, had navigated similar obstacles, and were willing to open their networks.

Equity, in this model, is not primarily about remedial support or add-on services. It is about **access**—to relationships, opportunities, and experiences that change a young person’s sense of what is possible.

Responsive Relationship-Centered Leadership means that principals and system leaders:

- Spend time listening deeply to students and families whose voices have been sidelined.

- Audit their own structures with honesty, asking who is being held at the margins.
- Use their positional power to remove barriers, not simply to manage them.

Canada’s contribution to the Atlas reminds us that systemic change is not only about new pedagogies or assessments. It is about confronting the historical and present-day realities of racism and colonialism, and designing schools that do more than “include”—schools that **redistribute power and possibility**.

5. Conclusion: Navigating the Fault Lines

These stories—from Ireland, Eswatini, Australia, and Canada—are not isolated anecdotes. They are signs of **continental drifts** within education systems: slow, powerful movements that create tension, friction, and sometimes earthquakes.

- In **Ireland**, the fault line runs through the principal’s office, where the weight of administrative bureaucracy threatens to crush the role of leader as learner, coach, and visionary.
- In **Eswatini** and across Africa, it runs through the gap between global tech narratives and local

realities, and through the seismic shift from rejecting most students to designing for their competence and employability.

- In **Australia**, it runs through the contested terrain of “evidence”: how we decide whose knowledge shapes policy and whether we honor the emotional and relational dimensions of learning.
- In **Canada**, it runs through structures of race, history, and belonging, and through the courageous attempts to redesign schools so that Black and Indigenous students don’t just survive them, but harness them.

The friction between:

- **The system as it is**—bureaucratic, unequal, rigid, often optimized for stability rather than humanity, and
- **The system as it needs to be**—human-centric, equitable, responsive, and adaptive

is where much of the real work of educational leadership now happens.

Leaders find themselves standing with one foot on each tectonic plate:

- One foot in compliance, policy, and inherited structures.

- One foot in emerging practices, community demands, and the moral urgency of change.

No wonder so many feel, as Irish principals put it, “drowning.” No wonder African educators talk about dreaming beyond their infrastructure. No wonder Australian leaders wrestle with research that can either liberate or constrain. No wonder Canadian teams speak of both hope and pain in the same breath.

These tensions have a human cost.

They show up in the bodies and minds of leaders working late into the night. In the quiet resignation of teachers trying to protect their students from the system’s rough edges.

In the anxiety of students who sense that the adults around them are stretched thin and pulled in conflicting directions.

And yet, within these same fault lines, we also see possibility:

- Systems naming and addressing role overload.
- Curricula shifting from exclusion to competence and dignity.
- Knowledge-building that respects both research and lived practice.
- Leadership that tackles structural racism rather than decorating around it.



In the next chapter, we turn from policy and structure to the **human fallout** of these drifts—and to the ways schools are intentionally cultivating wellbeing, culture, and belonging as central, not peripheral, to their mission.

If Chapter 3 has mapped the stress points in the system, Chapter 4 will explore how, amid those pressures, educators are working to ensure that the people inside the system—students, teachers, leaders, and families—do not simply endure, but have a genuine chance to heal, grow, and flourish.

PART II: MAPPING THE TERRAIN (CURRENT REALITIES)

Chapter 4 – Erosion and Growth

Wellbeing & Culture

1. Stopping the Erosion: The Burden on Leaders

In Chapter 3, we saw the outlines of a leadership crisis: principals pulled between the desire to mentor and the demand to administer, between the work they feel called to do and the work the system insists they must do.

Nowhere is that tension more visible than in the figure of the **teaching principal**.

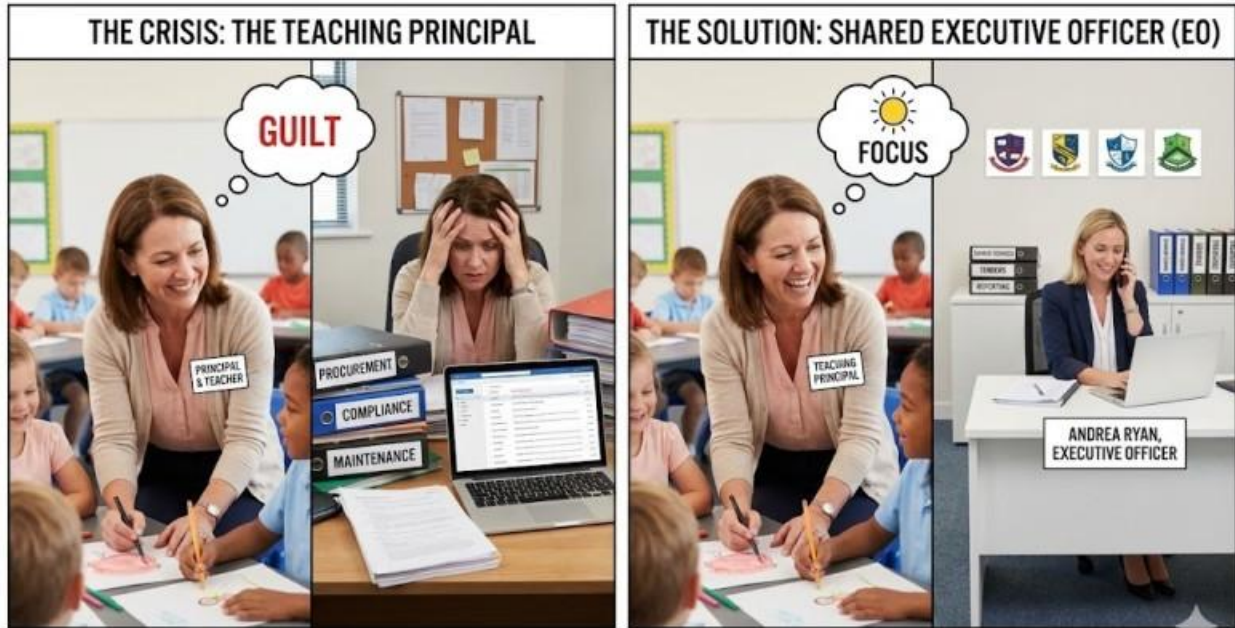
In Ireland, more than half of primary school leaders — about 55% — teach a full class *and* carry the full weight of school leadership. They start the day calming an anxious child, shift into literacy instruction, and then, during their “break,” try to deal with a leaking roof, a procurement tender, and an urgent email about a compliance audit.

Finnbar Hurley, working with the Centre for School Leadership, calls attention to the emotional residue of this reality: a persistent, corrosive **guilt associated with unfinished tasks**.

- If they prioritize their students, the paperwork piles up.
- If they prioritize the paperwork, they feel they are abandoning the children in front of them.

There is no version of the day where they finish everything, so the job becomes a kind of slow erosion: of energy, of focus, of joy.

Traditionally, our response to this has been to offer leaders more *coping strategies*: time-management workshops, resilience training, inspirational talks on “self-care.” These have their place, but they leave the basic architecture of the role untouched. They polish the cliff while the sea keeps hammering at its base.



CLUSTERING SCHOOLS TO REMOVE NON-EDUCATIONAL TASKS

The Irish **Small Schools Project** takes a different approach. Instead of asking principals to be tougher cliffs, it changes the shape of the coastline.

Finnbar and colleagues began with a simple question: *What if we could remove a whole category of work from teaching principals altogether?* Not by ignoring it, but by giving it to someone whose job is precisely that.

The model they piloted clustered **four rural schools** together and used pooled resources to employ one shared **Executive Officer (EO)**.

Into that role stepped Andrea Ryan.

Andrea's job was not to coach teachers, run assemblies, or write pedagogical plans. Her role was to handle the **non-educational tasks** that had quietly swollen to dominate principals' days:

- Procurement, tenders, and vendor management.
- Compliance paperwork and reporting.
- Building maintenance logistics and contracts.
- The stream of operational emails that used to ping principals at all hours.

When Andrea took over this realm of work, something remarkable happened: the **guilt** that had become a constant background noise began to recede. Teaching principals reported a sudden lightness in their days: not because the work of

WELLBEING AS CURRICULUM (THE POSTER)



WELLBEING AS CULTURE (THE OPERATING SYSTEM)



leadership had become easier in every respect, but because the impossible equation had shifted.

They could:

- Plan a lesson without worrying about the next invoice.
- Visit a classroom without the nagging voice reminding them of an unfinished audit.
- Spend time with a struggling teacher or student and know that someone else was stewarding the paperwork.

In short, they could begin to act again as **leaders of learning**, not just **administrators of systems**.

This is more than a wellbeing initiative; it is **structural care**. The Small Schools Project did not ask leaders to meditate their way out of

overload. It rewired the job so that overload was no longer baked in.

Stopping erosion, in this case, meant shifting the rocks themselves, not just asking the shoreline to be more mindful.

2. Wellbeing as Culture, Not Curriculum (The Cure)

Over the past decade, “wellbeing” has blossomed into a curriculum area. Schools have added lessons on mindfulness, resilience, emotional literacy. Posters go up. Programs are purchased. Assemblies are held.

And yet, in many places, the daily experience of students and staff has not significantly changed. Anxiety remains high. Relationships are strained. The gap between what we

teach about wellbeing and how we *live* together at school can be painfully wide.

The schools in this chapter point us toward a different approach:
wellbeing not as a subject, but as an operating system.

The Language of Care (Dublin)

At Mary Mother of Hope Senior National School in Dublin, principal **Ana Fitzpatrick** and her staff asked a practical question:

“If we are serious about compassion, what does it actually *look like* in the hallway, in the classroom, in the small moments of the day?”

They realized that many children who needed connection or help had no safe, simple way to ask for it without drawing attention to themselves. Traditional systems — putting your hand up, asking to leave class, crying or acting out — often carried social cost.

So they built a quiet, almost invisible **language of care.**

One example is the **“Hot Chocolate” system.** A child who needs a discreet chat with a trusted adult can signal it non-verbally — perhaps by placing a particular object on their desk or using a simple code. The message is: *“I need a moment with you.”*

Later that day, that adult might invite them for “hot chocolate time” — not as a reward or interrogation, but as a small ritual of presence. The drink itself is symbolic; the real nourishment is the conversation and the feeling of being noticed.

Another tool is the **thumbs up / thumbs down** signal. At different points in the day, a teacher might quietly check in, and students can, without speaking, show:

- 👍 - “I’m OK enough to learn.”
- 🙋 - “I’m not OK; I might need support.”

No disruption. No public disclosure. Just a fast, shared code that allows adults to track the emotional weather in the room and respond before storms break.

Underneath these practices is a clear goal: to help children learn **self-compassion** — to know, deep down, that they are *“minded”*, cared for, and encouraged to become their **own best friend** rather than their harshest critic.

Wellbeing here is not a weekly lesson; it is a daily choreography of signals, routines, and choices that say:

“You matter. We are paying attention. You don’t have to shout to be seen.”

The Cognitive Approach to Discipline (Queensland)

On the other side of the world, at Parklands Christian College in Queensland, **Gary Cully** and his team were wrestling with another piece of the culture puzzle: discipline.

Like many schools, they had experienced the cycle:

- Student misbehaves.
- Adult reacts emotionally (frustration, anger).
- Punishment is applied.
- Little changes.

So they implemented the **Responsible Thinking Process (RTP)**, reframing discipline not as an emotional showdown but as a **cognitive, restorative process**.

At the heart of RTP is the **Responsible Thinking Classroom (RTC)** — a calm space staffed not by security officers or disciplinarians, but by **social workers** trained to hold difficult conversations.

When a student's behavior disrupts learning, the goal is not to humiliate or control them, but to create a structured pause. In that pause, a guided dialogue takes place, centered around simple, powerful questions:

- "What are you doing?"
- "What should you be doing?"
- "What will you do next time?"

These questions are not tricks. They are an invitation for the student to:

- Recognize their own agency.
- Name the gap between current behavior and agreed expectations.
- Commit to a different choice.

Meanwhile, the process helps staff to **"space that emotive reaction"** — to step back from their own rising frustration and meet the child with clarity rather than reactivity.

The shift is profound:

- From punishment to **problem-solving**.



- From “You made me angry” to “Let’s figure out what happened and what you will do now.”
- From discipline as control to discipline as **learning**.

Combined with relational support, this cognitive approach transforms discipline from a source of fear into a structured opportunity to grow — for students and adults alike.

In both Dublin and Queensland, wellbeing is not a bolt-on unit. It is woven into how people **signal distress**, **respond to conflict**, and **speak to each other**. The cure for erosion here is cultural, not cosmetic.

3. Indigenous Wisdom: The Deep Roots

If wellbeing is the living plant, **indigenous wisdom** is the root system we too often ignore.

The deepest insights into human potential, belonging, and balance do not come from the latest self-help book or app. They rise from ancestral, place-based knowledge — ways of understanding life that have been tested over centuries in relationship with land, water, and community.

The cartographers in this Atlas repeatedly pointed us back to those roots.

Finding the Gift (Hawaii)

In Hawaii, educator **Susannah Johnson** told us the story of **Auntie Pua Burgess**, a respected elder and community leader, and a student who believed he was “good at nothing.”

On paper, the system agreed. His grades were low. His attendance was spotty. In the academic economy of the school, his “value” was negligible.

But Auntie Pua knew his life outside of that economy.

He was a skilled **spearfisher**, rising before dawn to read the tides, the currents, and the behavior of fish. He knew the reef intimately — where to move, when to wait, how to listen to the ocean. He regularly brought home food that literally kept his family fed.

In the logic of the land and the community, he was not “nothing.” He was a **provider**, a knowledge keeper, a vital thread in the web of survival.

The problem was not that he lacked a gift. The problem was that school had **no way to see it**.

Auntie Pua’s lesson to the educators was simple and devastating:

“Your job is not to grade the test. Your job is to *find the gift*.”

That sentence reframes everything. It shifts the teacher’s role from judge to discoverer, from ranking ability to **revealing contribution**.

In a wellbeing conversation, this matters profoundly. You cannot tell a child to “love themselves” while daily reinforcing a narrative that they are failing at the only things that count. To nurture mental health, you must locate and honor the ways they already bring value — even, and especially, when those ways sit outside the traditional academic frame.

The Steersman (Queensland)

Back in Queensland, **Nathaniel Edwards** at Radiant Life College shared the **Gundoi Program**, rooted in local indigenous perspectives.

The program takes its name from the **cassowary** — a powerful, ground-dwelling bird that plays a crucial ecological role in the rainforest. Cassowaries swallow large seeds whole and carry them long distances before depositing them, helping to





regenerate and diversify the forest. They are, in a literal sense, **replenishers of the land.**

In Gundoi, students are invited to see themselves in that metaphor:

- *You* are the ones who carry seeds of knowledge, culture, and care.
- *You* replenish your community by the way you live, work, and relate.

The program's practices match the metaphor. Through the **Junior Rangers** initiative, students:

- Learn **on country** — in both saltwater and freshwater environments.
- Work alongside elders and local knowledge holders.
- Take responsibility for stewardship tasks: monitoring ecosystems, caring for specific sites, learning protocols for being on the land.

They are not “taken on a trip”; they are **positioned as steersmen** — the ones who help guide the bus, not just ride in the back. Education becomes inseparable from ecology and responsibility.

The wellbeing that emerges here is not simply individual; it is **relational and ecological**. A young person's

sense of self-worth is tied to their role as a carer of place and people.

Earth as the Teacher (Canada)

In Canada, **Don White** and **Bya-de-bin Peltier** from the Durham District School Board described the **Akinomaagaye** program.

At its heart lies a radical premise:

“All knowledge exists within creation.”

If that is true, then the primary teacher is not a person, but the **earth itself**. Classrooms are not the default; they are one possible setting among many, and often not the most important.

In Akinomaagaye, students and educators move beyond the idea of a “field trip” as a break from learning. Instead, land-based experiences **are** the curriculum:

- Time on the land is structured and sacred, not an afterthought.
- Elders and knowledge keepers guide the learning, ensuring that Indigenous Ways of Knowing are centered, not tacked on.
- Western scientific perspectives are invited into a **“Two-Eyed Seeing”** approach: one eye rooted in Indigenous knowledge, the other in

Western frameworks, both held together to gain depth and clarity.

The result is a pedagogy where:

- Identity, spirituality, and learning are intertwined.
- Students experience themselves as part of a living system, not as isolated performers.
- The earth is not a background, but a **co-teacher** and source of wisdom.

For many students — Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike — this is profoundly healing. It reconnects them with a sense of belonging that is deeper than any individual achievement. It reminds them that they are, first and foremost, **part of creation**, not merely subjects in a system.

4. Conclusion: Nurturing the Soil

Leadership overload in Ireland. The digital divide in Eswatini. Evidence wars in Australia. Structural racism in Canada. These are the erosive forces we explored in Chapter 3 — the tectonic pressures that grind away at the human core of schooling.

The stories in this chapter are not grand policy fixes. They are **local acts of care**:

- A shared Executive Officer in rural Ireland who takes admin off principals' shoulders so they can breathe and lead.
- A hot chocolate ritual and a thumbs-up/thumbs-down signal in a Dublin classroom that quietly tell children, "You are minded."
- A Responsible Thinking Classroom in Queensland where discipline becomes dialogue, not punishment.
- An auntie in Hawaii who insists on finding the boy's gift in the reef, not in the report card.
- A Gundoi cassowary metaphor that turns students into stewards.
- An Akinomaagaye circle on the land where the earth is the teacher and Two-Eyed Seeing becomes a way of walking through the world.

None of these will appear in global rankings. You cannot easily benchmark a child's sense of being minded, or a principal's relief when guilt lifts from their shoulders. But these are the **conditions** without which no innovation, no technology, no policy reform will take root.



If we think of education as a garden, then:

- Policy is the irrigation plan.
- Curriculum is the seed catalogue.
- Technology is the set of tools in the shed.

Important, yes. But useless if the **soil** is depleted.

The practices in this chapter are about **rebuilding that soil**:

- Protecting leaders from being eroded by impossible roles.
- Embedding care into the daily language and rituals of school.
- Drawing on Indigenous wisdom to anchor young people in identity, belonging, and responsibility.

Only in such soil can new, lasting forms of learning grow.

As we move forward in this Atlas, keep this in mind: every structural change we propose, every AI tool we deploy, every new model we design, will either **deepen the soil** or **strip it further**.

The real question for any innovation is not just “Does it work?” but:

“Does it nurture the humans who must live with it — and the land on which they stand?”



The chapters ahead will explore how schools are reimagining learning, assessment, and technology. But unless we keep returning to the work of erosion and growth — to the slow, patient task of nurturing the soil — any change we map will be temporary.

Culture, care, and deep roots are not “nice extras.”

They are the ground on which the future of education either withers... or takes hold.

Chapter 5 – Student Agency

The New Explorers

1. The Paradigm Shift: From Passengers to Pilots

In earlier chapters, we looked at systems, leadership, and culture. But at some point, every conversation about the future of education must circle back to the people who sit in the seats, stare at the whiteboards, and wait for the bell to ring.

Students.

If we are honest, most of our inherited structures still treat students as **passengers**: we decide the route, set the timetable, and measure how well they stay in their seats while the bus moves.

Agency is often reduced to cosmetic gestures:

- “You can choose where to sit.”
- “You can pick which topic you do for homework.”

These choices can be pleasant, but they are not what Shei Ascencio, working on *solutionary learning* across

Mexico and Canada, means by **student agency**.

In the Institute for Human Education’s framing, agency is:

The capacity to take meaningful action on the world.

Not just to participate in a pre-designed activity, but to **change something real**—a relationship, a process, a space, a problem that someone actually feels.

That shift has two big implications:

1. We stop seeing students as consumers of a standardized curriculum and start seeing them as **creators of genuine value**.
2. We design learning not only for “engagement,” but for **impact**—on self, on others, on environment.

In this chapter, we meet students who have stopped being passengers and have become, in different ways, **pilots** of their own learning:



- Makers building robots for farmers and safety systems for buses.
- Communicators who turn their dislike of sports into a podcast that speaks for the quiet kids.
- Learners who plate food with Michelin-level precision and manage esports teams with real strategic pressure.

They are not waiting for the future to arrive. They are already exploring it.

2. The Makers: Engineering and Innovation

When we talk about student agency, engineering and design often come to mind first. Tools in hand, code on screen, prototypes on the table. But the most powerful examples we heard were not about shiny gadgets; they were about **purpose**.

India: Engineering for Social Good

At the **Salwan Education Trust** in India, innovation is not an abstract celebration of “STEM.” It is anchored in local needs and sustainability — a deliberate move **from abstract to applied**.

Students are invited to look outward:

- What makes life harder for families around us?

- Where are people losing time, income, or safety?
- How might we design something that helps?

One group of students took this challenge into the fields.

Case Study 1: The Solar Farmer

Farmers in their region were facing a familiar set of pressures: unpredictable weather, rising costs, and the physical grind of repetitive tasks. In response, a student team designed the **“7-in-1 Automated Farmer”** — a solar-powered rover capable (in prototype) of performing multiple agricultural tasks:

- Planting seeds in regular patterns.
- Irrigating rows with precision.
- Monitoring soil conditions.
- Supporting basic harvesting actions.

This was not a toy. To make it work, students had to:

- Integrate robotics, coding, and mechanical design.
- Understand local agricultural practices.
- Design for solar conditions specific to their environment.

Most importantly, they had to answer a real question from real people: *“Will this actually help us?”*

Case Study 2: Life Safety on the Road

Another team turned their attention to a more urban concern: the daily journey to and from school. Stories of accidents caused by drowsy drivers or chaotic attendance routines were common enough to feel personal.

Their solution was a **“Smart School Bus”** system:

- **IR sensors** monitored the driver’s eye-blink speed to detect signs of drowsiness or micro-sleep.
- A **face-scanning attendance system** tracked which students were on board, reducing anxiety for families and allowing quick checks in emergencies.

Again, this required more than technical skill. Students had to think about privacy, ethics, user experience, and reliability in messy real-world conditions.

In both cases, agency was not a slogan; it was experienced as the moment when something they had built **made another human being safer or more secure**.

The message they received was unmistakable:

“Your ideas can change how people live.”

New Zealand: The Breakthrough Identity

At **Stonefields School** in New Zealand, student agency is woven into a structure called the **Breakthrough Project**.

Each student is expected to design and complete three interlocking challenges:

1. A **Passion Project** – something they genuinely care about and want to deepen.
2. A **Physical Challenge** – a stretch to build resilience, health, or capability in their body.
3. A **Social Impact Project** – a contribution that improves life for others.

These are not posters for the wall. They are **evidence of identity**.

We heard of students who:

- Wrote a **recipe book**, rigorously tested with families and peers, learning not just to cook but to iteratively improve instructions so others could reproduce their results.

STONEFIELDS SCHOOL: THE BREAKTHROUGH PROJECT



PASSION PROJECT



PHYSICAL CHALLENGE



SOCIAL IMPACT PROJECT

EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY: WHAT YOU'VE DONE, NOT JUST STUDIED

- Took on the challenge of learning a **new instrument**, culminating in a performance that required them to manage nerves, discipline, and public vulnerability.
- Designed a **math game** for younger students, iterating until it was both fun and mathematically rigorous, tested in real classrooms.

At Stonefields, what goes into a student's story is not just their exam scores, but what they have actually **done**:

- What problem did you care enough to stick with?
- What skill did you deliberately build over time?
- How did you make life better, even in a small way, for someone else?

One student summed it up in a line that could be the chapter's epigraph:

"I feel ready for the future because I've done things, not just studied them."

In that sentence is the difference between being a passenger and being a pilot.

3. The Communicators: Finding a Voice and Purpose

Not every student wants to build a robot or run a vertical farm. Agency is not confined to labs and makerspaces. Some students find their power in **words, stories, and communication.**

Mexico: The Sports Podcast

At **Colegio Simón Bolívar** in Mexico, teacher **Oscar** faced a familiar problem in his compulsory sports class:

A group of students **hated** it.

They were the ones who avoided the ball, lingered at the back, or forgot their sports kit on purpose. The field was not their territory; it was a weekly reminder of what they supposedly couldn't do.

Instead of forcing them harder into traditional participation, Oscar tried a different invitation:

“What if you made **My First Sports Podcast?**”

The idea was simple but subversive. Students who didn't want to play became:

- **Analysts**, breaking down tactics and interviewing their more athletic classmates.

- **Hosts**, learning how to script, question, and keep a conversation flowing.
- **Technical producers**, handling sound, editing, and publishing.

The most popular episode they created was titled: **“When Sports Isn't Your Thing.”** It became a platform for the quieter, more introverted students to talk about:

- Pressure and embarrassment in PE.
- The feeling of being on the outside of school culture.
- Alternative ways to be part of a sports community (stats, commentary, logistics).

Something subtle and powerful happened:

- Students who had been *marginal* on the field became **central** to the story about sport.
- Their classmates began to see them not as “the ones who never play,” but as **the voices of the class.**
- The sports period became a place where different talents could surface and matter.

Agency here was not about forcing everyone to love the same activity. It was about giving every student a way



to **contribute meaningfully** to the shared experience.

Spain: Entrepreneurship as Identity

At **Brains International School** in Spain, entrepreneurship is not primarily about starting companies. It is about **learning how to be yourself in uncertain conditions**.

Teachers there talk about entrepreneurship as a vehicle for:

- Practicing resilience in the face of setbacks.
- Learning to pitch ideas clearly and confidently.
- Navigating ambiguity, when there is no single right answer.

Students like **Nuria** and **Carlota** exemplify this approach.

They saw an everyday irritation in their school — long, messy lines in the cafeteria — and built a solution: a **queue management app** that allowed students to:

- Reserve slots.
- Check waiting times.
- Reduce crowding and frustration.

This was not just a classroom exercise. They had to:

- **Code** the app so that it actually worked.
- Gather feedback from peers.

- Present the idea to school leaders and even **pitch to real investors**.

In the process, they experienced the emotional rollercoaster of entrepreneurship:

- The rush of the first prototype.
- The sting of things not working as planned.
- The discipline of iteration.
- The vulnerability of standing in front of adults and saying, “We think this is worth backing.”

By the end, whether or not the app became a long-term product, something more important had taken root:

“I can see a problem, and I can *do* something about it.”

In both Mexico and Spain, student agency is exercised through **voice and initiative**: narrating, questioning, designing, persuading. The path to becoming a new explorer runs through microphones and pitch decks as much as through labs and workshops.

4. The Experiential Learners: A Rigorous Reality

Agency does not mean avoiding difficulty. In the schools we met, some

of the most powerful experiences of agency came from contexts that were **demanding, unforgiving, and real.**

Dubai: Seed to Table

At the **American School of Dubai**, a program centered on **food design** takes students from seed to plate, blending science, art, and responsibility.

The experience is immersive:

- In one phase, students work with a Michelin-starred chef, **Magnus Mumbi**, learning the craft of plating: color, texture, temperature, timing. The bar is high; “good enough” is not good enough.
- They visit **vertical farms**, studying how technology can produce food sustainably in land-constrained, harsh climates.
- They learn **fermentation** from master bakers, discovering how microorganisms, time, and care transform basic ingredients into something nourishing and complex.

Throughout, students are held to real-world standards:

- If the flavors are poorly balanced, the dish fails.
- If the dough is not tended, the bread does not rise.

AMERICAN SCHOOL OF DUBAI: SEED TO TABLE PROGRAM



EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: RIGOROUS REALITY, NOT JUST WORKSHEETS



- If they forget to water the seeds, **the plants die**.

One student contrasted this with traditional assignments:

“A worksheet would just stare back at you.”

You can fake your way through a worksheet—guess, copy, or stay half-present and still “finish.” But you cannot fake the physics of heat, the chemistry of fermentation, the biology of a seed.

Experiential learning, at its best, is not “fun instead of work.” It is **rigorous reality**. It gives students the experience of acting in a world that pushes back honestly.

UK: Reimagining Physicality

At **Queen Ethelburga’s Collegiate** in the UK, a similar rethinking is happening around physical education.

For years, PE has been dominated by **competitive team sports**. For some students, this is heaven. For others, it is a weekly reminder of inadequacy: chosen last, benched, or simply uninterested.

The school’s **Fitness for Life** program reframes the goal. Instead of treating athletic performance as the primary measure, it focuses on helping each student build a **personal, lifelong relationship with movement**.

This might involve:

- Personalized conditioning programs tailored to individual goals and bodies.
- Alternative activities like **rollerblading**, dance, or outdoor pursuits that appeal to different temperaments.
- Conversations about sleep, nutrition, stress, and sustainable habits.

The message is: you don’t have to be a star athlete to be **in a good relationship with your own body**.

Parallel to this, the school has developed **esports** as both an enrichment activity and an **academic qualification**.

In structured esports programs, students:

- Analyze strategy and game theory.
- Train as **teams**, with roles, communication protocols, and post-game debriefs.



- Perform under high pressure in live competitions, where reflexes, decision-making, and collaboration are all tested.

Far from the stereotype of solitary gaming, this model treats esports as:

- A context to practice **leadership** and **team management**.
- A legitimate career pathway into game design, shoutcasting, coaching, or digital media.
- A space where students who may not excel in traditional sports can still experience the intensity of competition and the satisfaction of mastery.

By validating esports and Fitness for Life side by side, Queen Ethelburga's sends a clear signal:

There are many ways to inhabit your body and many arenas in which you can be strong.

Agency here means choosing how to engage with physicality, not opting out of it.

5. Conclusion: From Consumers to Creators

When you put these stories together—robots in Delhi, breakthrough projects in Auckland, podcasts in Tepic, apps in Madrid, fermentation labs in Dubai, esports

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arenas in Yorkshire—a pattern emerges.

Across very different contexts, these young people share a **common trait**:

They have shifted from being **consumers of curriculum** to **creators of value**.

- The Salwan students aren't just learning about engineering; they are designing tools that could change how their neighbors farm or travel.
- Stonefields students aren't just filling in future-plans worksheets; they are building a track record of doing challenging, meaningful things.
- Oscar's students in Mexico aren't just enduring sports class; they are creating media that speaks to the unspoken experiences of their peers.
- Brains School students aren't just reading about entrepreneurship; they are pitching real solutions to real people.
- American School of Dubai students aren't just memorizing food chains; they are growing, cooking, and serving food that lives or dies by their attention.
- Queen Ethelburga's learners aren't just ticking PE boxes; they are crafting a personal,



sustainable relationship with movement and competition.

These are not “extras” on the side of a traditional education. They are **signals** of what the core could become.

The students in this chapter are not waiting to be told what the future will be. They are:

- **Building** it (in code, metal, dough, soil).
- **Broadcasting** it (through podcasts, pitches, streams).
- **Growing** it (in gardens, in bodies, in communities).

They are the **new explorers**—not because they have GPS or VR headsets, but because they are practicing something older and deeper:

Seeing what is in front of them, caring about it, and taking action.

In the chapters that follow, we will look at the tools, structures, and assessments that can either fuel or frustrate this shift. But the direction of travel is already clear:

From passengers to pilots.

From subjects of a system to agents in a world.

From consumers to creators.

Chapter 6 – Leadership Landmarks

The Adults Who Clear the Path

1. The Inner Transformation of the Leader

Before we talk about strategies, frameworks, or organizational charts, we have to talk about the human being at the center of the classroom or the school.

Because no matter how sophisticated our pedagogy, **who the adult is** leaks into everything.

At HumanEdu in Argentina, this idea surfaces again and again. In the quiet moments between sessions, in circles of principals and teachers, someone will say what everyone feels but few admit publicly:

“If I don’t do my own inner work, I’m going to contaminate my students with my fears.”

It’s a confronting word, *contaminate*, but it’s chosen deliberately. A leader who is secretly terrified of failure may preach growth mindset but punish mistakes. A teacher whose ego needs control may talk about student agency but design tasks where every real decision is still theirs. A principal carrying unresolved anger may adopt the language of wellbeing while modeling permanent urgency and stress.

Ralph Waldo Emerson’s line hangs over these conversations like a quiet verdict:

“Who you are speaks so loudly that I cannot hear who you say you are.”

In this light, leadership is not just a role; it is a **vocation**—a calling that requires inner transformation, not just professional development hours.



One story captures this shift with particular clarity.

From Contamination to Vocation (HumanEdu, Argentina)

Leandro Bulacio had, by most external measures, “made it.” He held a high-paying corporate job, with status, stability, and a trajectory that many would envy. Yet beneath the surface, something was misaligned. The work was not feeding the part of him that cared deeply about people’s growth and potential.

So he did something that, from a traditional success narrative, looked irrational: he left, and he answered a call to the classroom.

At St. Andrew’s, he did not step into teaching as a demotion, but as a deliberate act of aligning life with vocation. In conversations, he describes leadership not as a promotion from teaching, but as a **deepening** of it. To lead, he insists, is to be continually shaped.

The core principle he lives by is simple and demanding:

- A teacher or leader must be engaged in ongoing inner work—
- So that what spills over into the classroom is not unprocessed fear, ego, or bitterness,



- But a grounded presence that gives students permission to be fully themselves.

That doesn't mean perfection. It means honesty. It means being willing to say, "I'm learning," and modeling the vulnerability we keep telling students is important.

The Joy of Walking Alongside (Peter Hutton, Australia)

On the other side of the world, **Peter Hutton** speaks about leadership from another angle.

Having led radical school models and now working globally through Global Village Learning, Peter has seen his share of "administrative junk"—the emails, the compliance forms, the politics. He does not romanticize the role of principal.

And yet, when asked why he keeps going, why he still believes this work is worth his life, he comes back to one thing:

"The absolute honor, thrill, joy of working with young people, and walking alongside them on their journey."

For Peter, that joy is not a nice extra; it is the **fuel**. Without it, the role collapses into bureaucracy. With it,

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even a hard week contains moments of meaning that justify the effort.

Inner transformation, then, is not only about purging what might contaminate. It is also about **rediscovering joy**—that sense of privilege at being allowed into the formative years of another human being.

The landmarks of leadership begin here, inside the person:

- A move from career to calling.
- A commitment to inner work.
- A quiet, stubborn joy in the company of the young.

Everything else rests on that foundation.

2. The Organizational Architect: Building Trust

If inner work is the hidden root of leadership, the visible trunk is organizational design: how leaders build structures that either suppress or unleash the people around them.

The leaders we met were not only managing schools; they were acting as **architects of trust**.

“Brushfires to Bonfires” (Canada)

In Canada, **Ainsley Rose** offers a simple but powerful theory of change.

He describes innovation not as a policy to be rolled out, but as a series of **brushfires**—small, authentic projects started by two or three teachers who see a problem, care about it, and decide to act.

A new advisory model. A land-based learning project. A reimagined assessment approach. None of them begins with a press release. They start with a conversation in a hallway.

In many systems, these brushfires are extinguished early:

- “We don’t have a policy for that yet.”
- “Let’s wait until the strategic plan catches up.”
- “What if everyone wants to do it?”

Ainsley argues that the leader’s role is the exact opposite:

Protect the brushfires until they grow large enough to become a bonfire the system cannot ignore. That means:

- Shielding early innovators from premature judgment.

- Giving them cover to experiment and time to iterate.
- Helping them share their learning—not as a mandate, but as an invitation.

When enough brushfires spark across a school or system, they eventually merge into a **bonfire**—a visible, undeniable shift in how learning happens. At that point, policy often follows practice, not the other way around.

The organizational architect, in this model, is less a commander and more a **guardian of flame**.

The Tribe vs. the Hierarchy (Mexico)

In Mexico, **Gerson Cepeda** and **Ever Gómez** offer another landmark: *The Coaches Couch*.

On paper, it’s nothing fancy—no budget lines, no grand titles. It is a horizontal network where educators voluntarily:

- Share their practice.
- Coach one another.
- Offer workshops and conversations free from the usual hierarchies.

The principle behind it is quietly radical: Professional development does not require top-down authority; it requires a **tribe**—a community of peers committed to mutual improvement.

In The Coaches Couch, there is no stage reserved for “the expert” and rows of passive recipients. Everyone is both learner and contributor. Trust grows not from position but from authenticity: “This is what we tried, this is what failed, this is what worked with our students.” For many participants, the experience is liberating. They are no longer waiting for someone above them to grant permission to grow. They are **co-constructing** their own learning ecosystem.

The contrast with traditional PD hierarchies is stark. In a tribe:

- Knowledge flows in many directions.
- Vulnerability is valued.
- Agency belongs to the community.

The Systemic Reform Engine (TAMAM, Lebanon)



STRUCTURES TO AMPLIFY LEARNING, NOT CONTROL

TAMAM begins with the premise that educational reform is complex and non-linear, shaped by the ongoing interaction of practice, research, and policy. **Change starts within schools**, the foundational unit of improvement, where educators learn by doing, reflecting on evidence, drawing on research, and adapting within



the realities of the system around them. Schools are positioned not as passive recipients of reform but as active sites of experimentation and renewal.

Accordingly, TAMAM focuses on building **broad-based leadership capacity** across teams of educators by bringing together teachers, coordinators, middle leaders, and principals in schools to lead improvement within their own contexts. Educators are positioned not as implementers of external reform, but as knowledgeable contributors to whole-school learning. They are supported to exercise professional judgment, facilitate peer learning, shape improvement initiatives, and think systemically about their school's development. Leadership becomes distributed and embedded in everyday practice, strengthening the school's capacity for continuous renewal. Capacity-building is enabled through a human-centred, context-sensitive, and multi-dimensional coaching approach. Coaching typically moves through phases of preparation, coaching, and gradual handover, with the goal of building ownership inside the school and supporting sustainability over time.

School improvement also requires intentional attention to instructional supervision as a core dimension of leading learning. TAMAM reframes supervision as a distributed, developmental practice shared across teacher leaders and heads of department. Through structured observation, reflection, feedback, and collaborative inquiry, **improvement is embedded in classroom practice** and institutional routines, becoming part of the school's culture rather than a temporary initiative.

Across Ainsley's brushfires, The Coaches Couch, and TAMAM, organizational structure serves not to control but to enable agency and amplify collective learning. Trust is not a sentiment, it is **embedded in the design of systems** that make sustained improvement possible.

3. Empowering the Marginalized Leader

Leadership landmarks are not only about *what* leaders do, but also about **who gets to lead**. In every system, there are potential leaders who are sidelined by culture, history, or prejudice. The cartographers we spoke with are actively working to change that.

The WILL Network (Ireland)

In Ireland, **Dr. Katherine Corbett** from Bishop Galvin School saw a pattern she could no longer ignore.

Women made up a large proportion of the teaching workforce, but as you climbed the leadership ladder, their numbers thinned. Those who did step into principalship often reported the same set of barriers and doubts.

Katherine summarized them as the **Three Cs**:

1. **Confidence** – Internal doubts: “Am I good enough?”, “Do I have what it takes?”
2. **Culture** – External messages that leadership is a “big ask” for women, especially if they have families.
3. **Childcare** – The practical reality that caregiving responsibilities disproportionately fall on women, making long hours and inflexible expectations harder to sustain.

She founded the **Women in Learning and Leadership (WILL) Network** to address all three, not with slogans but with **high-level support and mentorship**.

In WILL, aspiring and current female leaders:

- Hear from women who have navigated the pathway, including the missteps and compromises.
- Access coaching to build confidence that is rooted in competence, not bravado.
- Share strategies for negotiating family expectations, system demands, and their own wellbeing.

WILL also challenges the culture that asks female principals, “How are you going to juggle everything?” in ways their male counterparts rarely face.

The message is two-sided:

- To women: *You belong in leadership, and we will support you.*
- To the system: *You must redesign leadership so it is humanly possible for people with caregiving responsibilities, not just for those who can outsource their lives.*



The “Steersman” Model (Queensland)

In Queensland, **Nathaniel Edwards** extends the idea of marginalized leadership to Indigenous communities.

Too often, Indigenous students are positioned at the back of the educational “bus”—expected to adapt to a system built without them, grateful for whatever inclusion is offered.

As seen before, Nathaniel offers a different metaphor: the **Steersman**.

Using the **Gundoi (Cassowary)** metaphor from local Indigenous knowledge, he teaches students that they are like the cassowary—creatures that replenish the land by spreading seeds, essential to the ecosystem’s health.

Translated into school terms:

- Indigenous students are not “at risk” in a deficit sense; they are **at potential**—holders of knowledge and perspectives that the whole community needs.
- They should be seen as **steering the bus**, not just riding in the back.

Practically, this means:

- Giving Indigenous students real voice in shaping programs, not just consulting them after the fact.
- Embedding Indigenous languages, stories, and land-based practices at the heart of school culture.
- Supporting Indigenous educators into leadership roles where they can influence the whole system, not just “Indigenous programs.”

The shift is profound: from tokenism to **inherent value**, from assimilation to **shared leadership**.

In both WILL and the Steersman model, empowering marginalized leaders is not about charity. It is about **correcting a distortion** in who we allow to shape the future.

4. Alignment of Purpose: What the World Demands

As AI advances and the future of work becomes more uncertain, it is tempting to see leadership as primarily a technical problem: how to prepare students with the right skills,

how to integrate the right tools, how to predict the right trends.

But again and again, our conversations with leaders came back to something older and more stubborn: the **human condition**.

The Human Element (E3)

At E3 in the Bay Area, **Dr. Juan Carlos Arauz** works with leaders across sectors. When he asks CEOs and global decision-makers about their number one challenge, the answer is rarely “we need more data” or “we need a better algorithm.”

It is **conflict**:

- Between teams.
- Between cultures.
- Between competing visions of what success should look like.

Technical problems are often solvable. Human problems are not so easily coded.

Juan Carlos draws a stark distinction:

“AI is going to teach us how to do math and read and write. But as human beings, only human beings can teach us how to navigate being this unique creature.”

THE HUMAN ELEMENT: NAVIGATING CONFLICT & VALUES		THE ALIGNMENT PRINCIPLE: PURPOSE & PRAGMATISM	
TECHNICAL PROBLEMS: DATA & ALGORITHMS	HUMAN PROBLEMS: EMPATHY, BOUNDARIES, COURAGE	PARENT ANXIETY: TRADITIONAL METRICS	HOLISTIC VISION: SOUL & CV REINFORCE EACH OTHER
DESIGNING SCHOOLS WHERE PURPOSE AND PRAGMATISM MEET.			



In other words:

- The **purpose** of education cannot be limited to cognitive mastery.
- It must include the messy, essential work of learning to live with ourselves and each other: empathy, boundaries, courage, humility, justice.

Leaders who understand this align their school's mission with what the world actually needs:

- Graduates who can sit in difficult conversations without fleeing or attacking.
- People who can hold multiple perspectives, negotiate conflict, and remain anchored in their values.
- Adults who know how to be both strong and kind in a world that will test both.

The Alignment Principle (Uruguay)

At **The Garzón School** in Uruguay, **Sam Irving** and **Leona Dauphin** face a more intimate version of the alignment challenge.

Their school's mission emphasizes authenticity, purpose, and a deep love of learning. They want students to be intellectually adventurous, emotionally literate, and connected to land and community.

Many parents, however, arrive with entrenched expectations shaped by more conventional systems:

- Grades.
- Test scores.
- Familiar metrics that reassure them their child is "on track."

There is a tension:

- The school wants to lean into a rich, holistic vision.
- Some parents fear that stepping outside traditional markers might endanger their child's future.



Sam and Leona’s response is not to abandon their mission, nor to fight parents as adversaries. Instead, they practice what might be called the **alignment principle**:

“If we deliver, with integrity, the culture we promise—where children are known, happy, and in love with learning—parents will become our strongest advocates.”

They focus relentlessly on:

- Daily practices that make students feel seen and stretched.
- Learning experiences that are joyful, demanding, and meaningful.
- Communication that helps families see the growth in their children beyond grades.

Over time, the most powerful admissions tool is not a brochure or a ranking. It is a parent saying to another parent:

“My child has fallen in love with learning again.”

In a world where families are, understandably, anxious, leaders like Sam and Leona are charting a path

where **purpose and pragmatism** meet:

- Yes, students will be prepared for pathways beyond school.
- But not at the cost of their curiosity, wellbeing, or humanity.

Alignment of purpose, at its core, is about refusing to choose between what is **good for the soul** and what is **good for the CV**—and designing schools where the two reinforce rather than undermine each other.

5. Conclusion: The New Definition of Power

If we step back from these leadership landmarks—from HumanEdu to Garzón, from WILL to The Coaches Couch, from TAMAM to E3—a new definition of power begins to emerge.

In the old model, power in education was largely about:

- Position in the hierarchy.
- Control over information and decisions.
- The ability to enforce compliance.



In the emerging model, power looks very different.

It is:

- The **courage** to leave a misaligned career and step into the classroom.
- The **humility** to do inner work so you don't contaminate students with your unresolved stuff.
- The **patience** to nurture brushfires instead of demanding immediate, neatly packaged reform.
- The **vision** to design structures—like TAMAM's school-based improvement model or Ireland's leadership supports—that honor complexity rather than denying it.
- The **commitment** to lift voices that have been sidelined—women, Indigenous leaders, young leaders—and position them at the steering wheel.
- The **clarity** to insist that education's true mandate is preparing humans to live and love and lead well in a difficult world.

In this sense, the **true power** of a leader is not in how many people they command, but in the **quality of the spaces they create**:

- Spaces where students can safely discover and exercise their agency.
- Spaces where teachers can take risks, fail, and grow without fear of humiliation.
- Spaces where conflict is faced, not avoided, and where dignity is non-negotiable.

Leadership landmarks are not monuments. They are waypoints that help us navigate:

- From control to trust.
- From ego to service.
- From hierarchy to community.
- From fear to vocation.

The adults who clear the path for young people in this new landscape are not perfect heroes. They are flawed, learning, often tired human beings who have decided that their authority will be measured not by how tightly they hold on, but by **how many others find their own power in their presence**.




In the chapters ahead, we will explore how assessment, technology, and global networks can either support or sabotage this new definition of leadership. But the map is already changing.

The question for each of us is simple and demanding:

In whatever sphere you lead—classroom, school, system—

What kind of power are you practicing?

Chapter 7 – Islands of Innovation

 School Case Studies for a New Era

1. Reimagining the Structure of School

If you want different outcomes, you eventually have to change the **containers**—the shape of the day, the rhythm of time, the way people are allowed to relate to each other. The schools in this chapter are not just doing new activities inside old boxes. They are **redesigning the box**.

Decompressing Time (New Zealand)

At **Albany Senior High School** (ASH) in New Zealand, principal **Philipa Wintle** describes a simple but radical question:

“What if the problem isn’t the lesson, it’s the *clock*?”

Like many secondary schools, ASH used to run on the “factory timetable”: 40–45 minute periods, five or six subjects a day, bells slicing attention into tiny fragments. Teachers rushed. Students rushed. Deep work was constantly interrupted.

So they decompressed the day.

The school shifted to **100-minute lesson blocks**, and built the rest of the structure around that decision:

- Fewer transitions, more continuity.
- Space for hands-on work, projects, conferencing, reflection.
- Time to start, struggle, get stuck, and push through.



REIMAGINING STRUCTURE: CHANGING THE CONTAINERS FOR DIFFERENT OUTCOMES.

Alongside the longer blocks, ASH strengthened its **Tutorial system**—a blend of pastoral care and academic coaching. Each student belongs to a small tutorial group with a dedicated adult who:

- Knows their story.
- Tracks their progress across subjects.
- Helps them plan, set goals, and navigate life beyond grades.

Tutorial time is where questions like “How are you really?” sit next to “What’s your plan for next week’s project milestone?” It is the human glue between the extended blocks.

Culture shifts followed. At ASH, teachers go by their **first names**. This is not a gimmick; it is a deliberate choice to flatten hierarchy and signal partnership:

- “We are adults with responsibilities.”
- “You are young people with responsibilities.”
- “We’re in this learning journey together.”

Longer lessons, tutorial groups, first-name culture—none of these alone is magic. But together, they form a structure where **depth is possible**. Time is no longer the constant enemy.



The Business of Learning (USA)

In Phoenix, Arizona, the **Tempe Union Innovation Center** asks a different structural question:

“What if school was the place you *leave* to do your real work?”

Dr. **Christine Berrella** describes a model where students remain enrolled in their home high schools, but travel to the Innovation Center for **three-hour blocks** dedicated to authentic, community-based projects.

One case stands out.

The **Tempe Community Council**, which supports local charities, was wrestling with a persistent problem: a chaotic inventory system. Donations came in; some spoiled, some went missing, some never reached the right people. The system was costing time, money, and trust.

A group of students took on the challenge.

Over weeks, they:

- Shadowed staff to understand the real workflow.
- Mapped where items were lost, duplicated, or delayed.
- Prototyped and refined an inventory management system that actually fit the messy reality on the ground.

These were not the students traditionally labeled “gifted.” Many

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were **“C” students** in their home schools—young people who had learned to play the minimum game: do enough to pass, not enough to shine.

At the Innovation Center, something flipped.

With real-world stakes—families relying on those supplies, charities trusting their work—those same students became:

- Project managers.
- Data trackers.
- Presenters who could explain their system to skeptical adults.

Their teachers watched them step into leadership roles they had never claimed in traditional classrooms. The difference was not a motivational speech. It was **structure**:

- Extended time blocks.
- Work that mattered to the community.
- Clear responsibility, visible impact.

The message to students was unmistakable:

“We trust you with something real.”

And many rose to meet that trust.

2. Radical Models: Breaking the Mold

Some schools push the existing structure to its limits. Others decide that the structure itself has to go.

The Jailhouse School (Australia)

In Castlemaine, Australia, **Global Village Learning** did something almost theatrical in its symbolism: they **bought an old jail**.

Led by **Peter Hutton**, the team turned a place once designed for confinement into a campus dedicated to **freedom**.

The decisions are deliberately radical:

- There are **no “teachers”**—only **guides**. Adults are there to coach, question, and support, not to deliver content from the front.
- There are **no traditional classes**: no 10A Math, no 11B English. Learning is organized around projects, inquiries, and individual pathways.
- There are **no exams** in the conventional sense. Assessment is woven into the work—through products, performances, feedback from real audiences.

The building itself is shared as a **Community Precinct**:

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- Around half the space is used by local artists, radio stations, and community organizations.
- Young people work alongside adults who are living the creative and civic lives students might one day pursue.

The language is intentional. Peter insists:

“We don’t have *students*; we have **young people**.”

The difference is more than semantic. “Student” can imply a subordinate role in a closed system. “Young people” are citizens-in-the-making, already part of the community, already capable of contribution.

Turning a jail into a school could have been a gimmick. In practice, it’s a **daily reminder**:

- Structures are not sacred.
- Places can be repurposed.
- Education can be about liberating potential, not containing it.

The Industry School (Australia)

Further north, **Peter Foster** leads another unconventional model often referred to as an **“Industry School.”**

At its core is a simple pairing:



- **The Will** – students’ motivation, interests, and emerging sense of purpose.
- **The Skill** – the academic and technical competencies they need to realize that purpose.

Students like **Charlie** and **Evie** split their time between:

- Academic work on campus, and
- **Industry placements**, such as working in racing stables or veterinary clinics.

For Charlie, the traditional academic route had been a long, discouraging slog. She was failing, disengaged, and increasingly convinced that she “wasn’t academic.”

Then she began working in a veterinary context.

Suddenly:

- Biology was not an abstract unit; it was the living systems she cared for every day.
- Math was not a worksheet; it was dosage, measurement, timing.
- Communication skills were not marks on a rubric; they were the difference between clarity and dangerous mistakes.

As she saw the **relevance** of academic knowledge to her work in veterinary nursing, her grades shifted dramatically—from failing marks to **As**. The “ability” had been there all along; the structure had not invited it.

Peter’s insight is blunt:

“When engagement comes first, academic success often follows.”

The Industry School doesn’t abandon rigor. It relocates it—into contexts where rigor feels **necessary** instead of arbitrary.

3. The Inquiry Engine: Curiosity as Curriculum

Many of the schools in this Atlas share a quiet but revolutionary belief:

Curiosity is not a distraction from the curriculum. It *is* the curriculum.

The Levit Lab (USA)

At Arizona State University, **Camille Brics** and **Hana Horiuchi** work with the **Levit Lab**, inspired by economist **Steven Levitt** of *Freakonomics* fame.

The Lab runs on two main cylinders:

1. **Wonder Sessions**
2. **In-Depth Explorations (IDEs)**

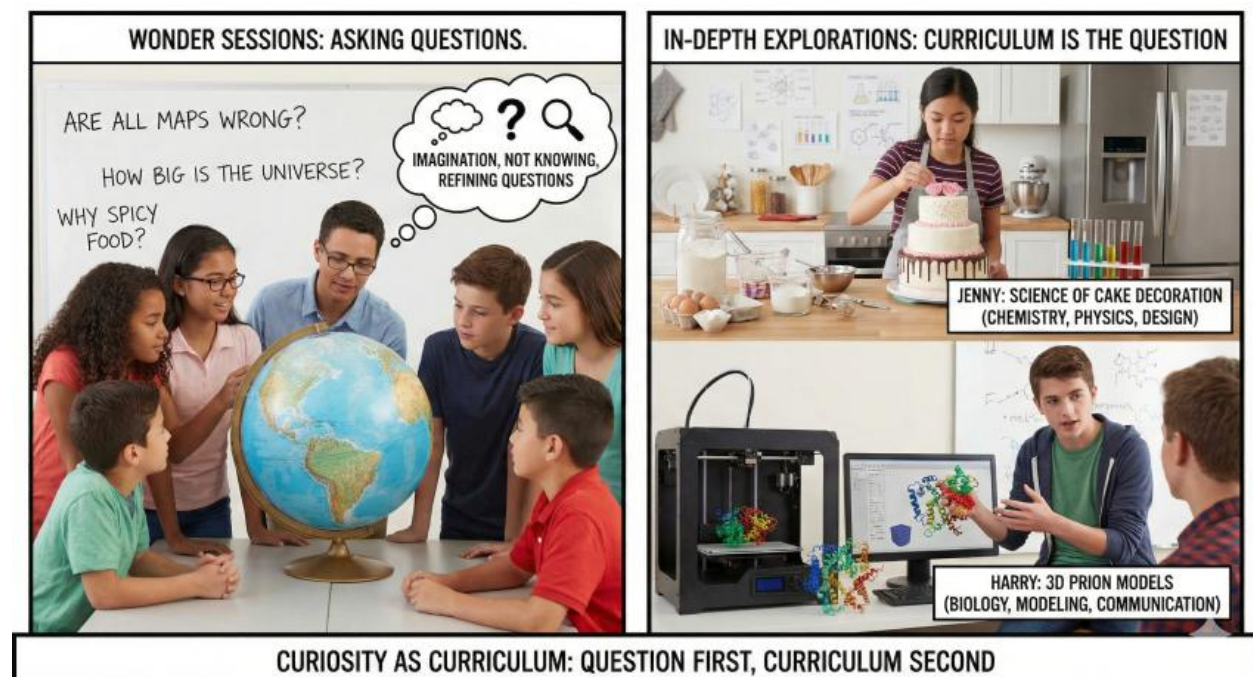
Wonder Sessions are weekly labs dedicated purely to *questions*:

- “Are all maps wrong?”
- “How big is the universe, really?”
- “Why do some people love spicy food and others hate it?”

There is no test at the end of the session. The goal is to:

- Stretch imagination.
- Normalize not knowing.
- Practice framing and refining questions worth chasing.

From this sea of questions, students sometimes spin off into **In-Depth Explorations (IDEs)**—quarter-long deep dives where, as the team puts it, “*the curriculum is the question.*”



We heard about:

- **Jenny**, who spent a term studying the **science of cake decoration**. That might sound trivial until you notice what it required: chemistry of emulsions, physics of structural support, design principles, user experience when others taste and rate her creations.
- **Harry**, who built **3D models of prions**—infectious proteins associated with neurodegenerative diseases. His project required biology, modeling, and communication skills to explain something complex to non-experts.

In each case, the content is rich, but the deeper skill is **research as a way of being**:

- Ask something that matters to you.
- Figure out how to find out more.
- Struggle with complexity.
- Produce something that shows what you've learned.

The Levit Lab doesn't reject curriculum; it **rearranges the order**:

- Question first.
- Curriculum second.

Curiosity becomes the engine, not the reward for finishing the worksheet early.

4. Early Foundations: Agency from the Start

Student agency doesn't begin in high school. It can start when tiny humans are holding paintbrushes with two hands and concentrating so hard their tongues stick out.

High Scope (USA)

In the HighScope early childhood model, as described by **Beth Schultz**, one routine sits at the heart of each day:

Plan - Do - Review

Even very young children—toddlers and preschoolers—are invited into this cycle:

- **Plan:** Before activity time, the adult asks, "What are you going to do?" A child might say, "I am going to paint a red line," or, "I will build a tower taller than me." The goal is not eloquence; it is intention.
- **Do:** The child then carries out their plan as best they can. The adult supports, but does not take over.

- **Review:** Afterwards, they reflect together: “What did you do? How did it go? What might you try next time?”

It looks simple. It is cognitively profound.

Over time, children learn:

- That their ideas matter.
- That they can **shape** what happens, not just react to it.
- That reflecting on actions is normal, not a punishment.

The long-term impact of this approach is not just theoretical. The famous **Perry Preschool Study**, which followed children from a HighScope-inspired program into adulthood, showed significant differences decades later:

- Higher levels of income.
- Lower involvement in crime.
- Greater educational attainment.

Crucially, researchers argue that these outcomes were less about early academic content and more about **executive function**:

- Self-regulation.
- Planning.
- Persistence.

In other words, the same Plan-Do-Review muscle that helps a four-year-old stick with a block tower helps a 24-

year-old stick with a course, a project, or a difficult job.

From the Atlas perspective, HighScope is a reminder:

If we want 18-year-olds who can direct their own learning, we should start treating 3-year-olds as people who can, in age-appropriate ways, **plan, act, and reflect**.

Agency is a habit, and habits are easier to build early than to bolt on later.

5. Conclusion: Islands in the Stream

At first glance, these schools look like **islands**:

- A decompressed timetable in a New Zealand secondary school.
- An innovation center in Phoenix sending students into the community.
- A jail in Castlemaine turned into a freedom lab.
- An Industry School where racing stables count as classrooms.
- A curiosity lab in a university, where cake and prions share the same timetable.
- A preschool where “I am going to paint a red line” is considered a valid plan.



Different countries. Different ages. Different buildings.

Yet when you step back, you can see the **stream** connecting them:

- A refusal to accept the **industrial factory model** as the default.
- A belief that **time** should serve deep learning, not just logistics.
- A conviction that **real work**, with real stakes, is the best teacher.
- A commitment to **student agency** as more than decoration.

None of these innovations required a gleaming new campus designed from scratch. In fact, one of the most radical models operates in an old jail. Another in borrowed community spaces. Another in a conventional preschool classroom with carefully chosen materials.

What they all required was a **new mindset** about what young people are capable of:

- Capable of managing inventory for a city's charities.
- Capable of designing safety systems and agricultural robots.
- Capable of shaping their own questions and following them through.
- Capable, even at four years old, of saying, "This is what I plan to do," and then doing it.

These islands of innovation are not escape fantasies. They are **prototypes of the possible**.

The challenge for the rest of us is not simply to admire them, but to ask:

- Which of their structural shifts could we adapt in our context?
- Where could we decompress time, share space, invite real-world work, or trust curiosity?
- What small move—one timetable change, one pilot program, one Plan-Do-Review ritual—could be our own **brushfire**?

In the end, the future will not be built by one flagship school or one grand reform. It will be built by many islands slowly joining into a larger landmass, a new continent of practice.

The stream is already flowing. The question is whether we will wade in.

Chapter 8 – Bridging the Gap

Technology as Cognitive Infrastructure

We have always built tools to extend ourselves.

Books extended our memory.
Microscopes extended our sight.
Railways extended our reach.

Now, for the first time, we have tools that extend our **thinking**.

Artificial intelligence, adaptive platforms, simulations, and generative models are not just new gadgets. Used well, they become a kind of **cognitive infrastructure**: an invisible system that supports, amplifies, and connects human minds.

The danger is that we talk about this infrastructure as if it were either a threat to be banned or a miracle that will “fix” education. The reality, as with all infrastructure, is more complex:

- Built badly, it entrenches inequality and anxiety.
- Built wisely, it can bridge the gap between what each learner

needs and what systems can currently provide.

This chapter is about that bridge.

1. Brain-Based Learning: The Science of Adaptation

The starting point is not the device or the app. It is the **brain**.

In Singapore, Professor **Er Meng Hwa** reminds us of a basic but radical fact:

“Every brain is uniquely organized.”

Not metaphorically. Literally. Each learner’s neural wiring has been shaped by genetics, experiences, traumas, interests, sleep patterns, nutrition, and countless other variables. Two students may sit in the same classroom, listening to the same explanation, and their brains may respond in entirely different ways.

For most of the industrial era, schooling has quietly ignored this. We



have treated learners as if their brains were interchangeable containers: same content, same pace, same assessment.

Professor Er's work on neuroplasticity—the brain's capacity to change its own wiring in response to experiences—undoes that assumption. If every brain is uniquely organized and continually rewiring itself, then:

- **One-size-fits-all instruction is neurologically misaligned.**
- The real task is not to deliver the same information, but to **adapt** experiences so that each brain can build effective, healthy patterns.

That is where technology enters the story.

AI as the Scale Problem-Solver

In a small tutorial group, a skilled teacher can differentiate: giving more scaffolds here, more challenge there, different representations of the same idea across the group.

But at the scale of a system—hundreds of students, thousands, millions—human effort alone cannot provide fine-grained personalization. It was never designed to.

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Professor Er frames AI not as a novelty, but as **the only scalable tool** we currently have that can:

- Detect patterns in how each student learns over time.
- Adjust level, pace, and modality in response.
- Provide instant practice, feedback, and alternative explanations.

In that sense, AI is not just about efficiency. It is about **justice** for neurodiverse brains:

- The student who needs ten examples, not three.
- The student who thrives with visual models rather than verbal ones.
- The student who can learn rapidly in bursts rather than in constant, low-level exposure.

Without adaptive tools, these learners are often labeled “slow,” “disruptive,” or “unmotivated.” With them, they become visible.

Relaxed Alertness: The Optimal State

Professor Er borrows a concept sometimes referenced in



neuroscience-informed education: **“relaxed alertness.”**

It is the state where:

- The brain is **challenged**, so attention is engaged.
- But not **threatened**, so the stress response does not flood working memory with anxiety.

Too little challenge, and the brain drifts. Too much threat, and it locks down. In between lies a narrow band where learning is maximized.

AI, used wisely, can help us keep learners in that band:

- By adjusting difficulty in real time.
- By noticing when a student is stuck and offering a hint instead of another red X.
- By providing multiple chances to try without the public shame of failure.

This does not replace the teacher. It **supports** the teacher in doing what humans do best:

- Reading faces and body language.
- Sensing social dynamics.
- Building the safety and trust that make “relaxed alertness” possible in the first place.

Technology, in this view, is cognitive infrastructure designed around the brain’s reality—not the other way around.

2. AI as a Tool for Humanity

Whenever a new technology arrives with transformative potential, fear follows close behind. Fire, printing presses, radio, the internet. Each time, we have asked, “Will this destroy us?” and “How will this change who we are?”

AI is no different.



In the Bay Area, **Dr. Juan Carlos Arauz** (E3) offers a powerful reframing, especially for those working in equity and justice:

“AI is the best friend of the social justice warrior.”

His point is not that AI is inherently good. It is that AI is a **multiplier**:

- Used by those who wish to dominate, it can accelerate harm.
- Used by those who wish to liberate, it can **scale the impact of good ideas** in ways previously impossible.

Fireworks or War: The Gunpowder Analogy

Juan Carlos uses the example of **gunpowder**.

Before it was used in weapons of war, gunpowder powered **fireworks**—explosions of color and light in the sky. Over time, humans chose to direct its energy into killing rather than celebration.

The substance itself was neutral. Our use of it was not.

AI is similar:

- It can be used to monitor, sort, and punish at scale.



- Or it can be used to translate, explain, amplify, and connect.

The question for educators is not “Is AI good or bad?” but:

“Will we train a generation to use this power for fireworks—creativity, equity, understanding—or for war?”

Failing Forward (Silicon Valley)

In **Silicon Valley**, Jorge Zavala describes a culture where **failure is a data point, not a verdict**.

Startups ship products, run experiments, then run **post-mortems**:

- What did we assume?
- What went wrong?
- What did we learn?

Failure is expected. The shame lies not in failing, but in refusing to learn.

AI fits this culture naturally. It can:

- Analyze large numbers of attempts—code, essays, designs—and surface patterns in errors.
- Offer targeted feedback: “Most of your mistakes are in this concept; let’s focus here.”

- Simulate scenarios so students can try multiple strategies without real-world risk.

Imagine a classroom where:

- A student builds a prototype that doesn’t work.
- Instead of just “marking it wrong,” an AI assistant helps them **debug**: comparing versions, highlighting differences, suggesting directions to explore.
- The conversation shifts from “You failed” to “What did this version teach us?”

This is **failing forward**: each iteration becomes a step, not a dead end.

AI, in this mode, is not the judge. It is the **analyst**—a tool that helps students and teachers see more clearly what is happening, so they can make better decisions.

Used this way, technology does not harden perfectionism. It **normalizes iteration** and reduces the emotional weight of mistakes.

3. Art & Tech: The Hybrid Canvas

There is a persistent myth that technology and the arts are in tension. That screens erode creativity. That algorithms will flatten the soul.

In Mexico, **Gaby Michel** at **Colegio Simón Bolívar** quietly dismantles that myth every day.

She teaches **traditional art**—charcoal, paint, anatomy, light. Her students draw bones and muscles, study Renaissance masters, wrestle with proportions and perspective.

The difference is the tool.

Mexico's Digital Renaissance

Gaby integrates **iPads** into her studio, not as toys, but as instruments of **seeing**.

A typical flow might look like this:

1. **Capture Reality**

Students take photos of a model or their own hands, faces, or objects in the room.

2. **Convert to Grayscale**

On the device, they remove color to focus on **values**—the spectrum from dark to light. Suddenly, shadows and highlights appear more clearly.

3. **Trace Geometric Forms Over Reality**

Using a stylus, they draw simple shapes over the image: cylinders, spheres, cubes. A leg becomes overlapping cylinders. A head becomes a sphere with planes.

4. **Return to Paper or Canvas**

With this scaffolding in mind, they switch back to charcoal or paint, now seeing the underlying structure rather than being overwhelmed by surface detail.

Technology, in this flow, does not replace drawing. It **accelerates the technical learning curve**:

- Students grasp anatomy faster because they can manipulate references instantly.
- They experiment more freely because undo/redo lowers the cost of risk.
- They reach the stage of **creative expression** sooner, because less energy is spent on painstaking trial and error in the early stages.

As Gaby puts it:



“My classroom is now a hybrid space of creation.”

The room contains:

- The smell of real materials—chalk, paint, paper.
- The glow of screens used as dynamic sketchbooks.
- Students moving fluidly between digital and analog modes.

This is a microcosm of what technology as cognitive infrastructure can be:

- Not a parallel “digital world” separate from “real learning,”
- But a set of tools woven into the fabric of practice, helping students see more, try more, and express more.

4. The Human Advantage: What Machines Can't Do

If AI can already write essays, generate images, and solve equations, what is left for humans?

This is the question under the surface of every staffroom conversation about AI, every worried parent meeting, every late-night scroll through headlines.

In our conversations, two intertwined answers emerged.

Deep Intuition: The Centaur Metaphor

Drawing on the world of chess, **Peter Hutton** and **Gabriel Rshaid** use the metaphor of the **centaur**—half human, half machine.

In chess, humans can no longer beat top computers. The raw calculative power of engines outstrips human capacity. But the most effective teams in certain contexts have been **human + computer**:

- The computer offers **breadth**: brute-force calculation, pattern recognition across millions of games.
- The human offers **depth**: strategic framing, choosing which lines to explore, interpreting when a move is “ugly but right” or “beautiful but risky.”

DEEP INTUITION: THE CENTAUR METAPHOR



OUR GOAL: TEACH STUDENTS TO USE AI WHILE GROWING THEIR OWN CAPACITY TO SENSE, DISCERN, AND DECIDE.

Together, they outperform either alone.

Education, they argue, should be training **centaurs**, not trying to defend purely human territory or surrender entirely to machines.

That requires cultivating something AI does not have: what we might call **deep intuition**.

Deep intuition is not superstition. It is the uniquely human capacity to:

- Synthesize information with **emotion** and **ethics**.
- Read context that is not written down.
- Account for histories, power dynamics, and subtle signals that numbers alone cannot capture.

An AI can summarize a conflict resolution strategy. A human with deep intuition knows:

- When to stay silent and let someone finish their story.
- When a joke will diffuse tension and when it will wound.
- When a technically optimal decision is morally wrong.

If we outsource too much cognitive work to machines *without* deliberately training this intuition, we risk becoming excellent button-pushers with shallow judgment.

The goal, then, is not “keep students away from AI.” It is:

“Teach students to use AI while growing their own capacity to sense, discern, and decide.”

The Ambiance of Care

The other irreducibly human element comes from **Chris Duncan** in Australia, circling back to what he calls the “**ambiance of care and trust.**”

AI can simulate conversation. It can remember preferences, adapt tone, even offer encouragement phrases that sound warm. But it cannot **be** in the room:

- It cannot stand quietly beside a student who just failed a test and say, “Let’s figure this out together,” with a hand on their shoulder that communicates safety.
- It cannot pick up the micro-signals—a slightly longer pause, averted eyes—that tell an

experienced teacher that something at home is wrong.

- It cannot build a shared history with a class over years: the in-jokes, the rituals, the hard moments survived together.

Chris puts it plainly:

“First we feel, then we learn.”

No amount of adaptive problem sets can compensate for a classroom where students feel unsafe, unseen, or disposable. Conversely, in a space where trust and care are palpable, even imperfect materials can become vehicles of powerful learning.

Technology can support that ambiance—by reducing admin so teachers have more time for relationships, by providing tools for shy students to express themselves, by giving teachers better insight into who needs help.

But it cannot **generate** the ambiance. That remains the responsibility and privilege of humans.

Our advantage, then, is not speed or memory. It is **presence, intuition, and care.**

5. Conclusion: The Centaur Teacher

Put all of this together, and a new figure emerges on the horizon of education:

The **Centaur Teacher**.

Not a superhero, not an early adopter chasing every app, but a professional who:

- **Understands the brain**, and uses technology to honor its diversity rather than override it.
- Sees AI as a **tool for humanity**—a way to scale justice, creativity, and learning, not just efficiency.
- Weaves devices into practice as **hybrid canvases**, not replacements for human expression.
- Cultivates **deep intuition** and protects the **ambiance of care** as the non-negotiable core of their work.
- Models failing forward—using AI to analyze, iterate, and grow, rather than to cheat or shortcut.

The future is not **Human vs. AI**.
It is **Human + AI**.

The question is: **which human, wielding AI in what way?**

Right now, too many systems are responding to AI with reflex bans and blanket restrictions. This is understandable—fear arrives faster than understanding—but ultimately unsustainable. Students will meet these tools in universities, workplaces, and daily life, whether we prepare them or not.

We do not ban calculators and hope students will never see numbers again. We teach them:

- What a calculator is good at.
- When mental math is better.
- How to estimate, so they can catch nonsense outputs.

We must do the same with AI:

- Teach prompt literacy, critical reading of outputs, and ethical use.
- Design tasks where AI is a **partner**, not a shortcut—where using it well requires more thinking, not less.
- Invite students into the moral questions: “Should we use AI for this? Who benefits? Who might be harmed?”



The call, then, is simple and demanding:

We must stop banning the tool
and start **training the human** to wield it with wisdom.

If we do, technology can become what electricity once became for schools:

- Mostly invisible.
- Always present.
- Powering lights, devices, and systems we now take for granted.

Except this time, the infrastructure is cognitive, not just physical.

The bridge we are building is not from “school” to “technology.” It is from:

- A world where only some brains fit the system
- To a world where the system flexes to fit many brains.
- A world where tools are feared or fetishized
- To a world where they are **responsibly mastered**.
- A world where we pretend to compete with machines
- To a world where we stand beside them, fully human, fully awake.

The Centaur Teacher is not science fiction. They are already in classrooms, labs, and studios around the world.

Our task is to recognize them, support them, and help the next generation of educators grow into that role—so that the cognitive infrastructure we are building does what all good infrastructure should do:

Quietly, powerfully, it makes it easier for humans to become **more fully themselves**.

PART V: THE ITINERARY (ACTIONABLE STEPS)

Chapter 9 – Plotting the Course

Tools for the Journey Ahead

By this point in the Atlas, we've met the cartographers, visited the islands of innovation, walked through the pressure points of policy, and watched young people step into agency with surprising courage.

This chapter is different.

It is not another set of stories to admire from a distance, but a **navigation kit**—a set of frameworks, questions, and tools you can take back to your own context.

Because sooner or later, after all the inspiration and indignation, every educator faces the same question:

“Okay. So what do I do on Monday?”

This is where we begin to plot the course.

1. The Strategic Framework: Moving from Maintenance to Vision

In Phoenix, **Dr. Connie Kamm** offers a deceptively simple image: the **Leadership Continuum**.

On one end of the continuum is **Maintaining**. On the other is **Envisioning**.

Most school leaders, she suggests, spend the overwhelming majority of their time at the maintenance end:

- Keeping the timetable running.

- Signing forms, answering emails, returning calls.
- Sorting transport, supervision, minor conflicts, broken photocopiers.
- “Keeping the lights on,” literally and metaphorically.

Maintenance is not unimportant. Someone has to keep the machinery moving. But if leaders live there permanently, they become what we saw in Ireland before the Executive Officer project: **administrators of systems**, not leaders of learning.

Connie’s question is diagnostic:

“When you look at your week, how much of your time is spent on **maintenance**, and how much on **envisioning**?”

Envisioning is the other end of the continuum. It is the work of:

- Anticipating future conditions rather than reacting to yesterday’s crises.
- Asking, “What will our students need ten years from now?” and designing backward.
- Creating space for teachers to invent, not just comply.

- Building structures that reduce future fires instead of forever fighting current ones.

In conversations with leaders, Connie often finds a pattern:

- When they *estimate* their time, they like to think they’re fairly balanced.
- When they actually **audit** a week or two in detail, they discover that 80–90% of their time lives at the maintenance end.

That gap is the problem.

If our Irish principals had never been freed from building maintenance and procurement by Andrea, their shared Executive Officer, there would have been **no room** for rethinking leadership, no energy for flourishing, no headspace for innovation.

So Connie turns the Continuum into a practical tool:

1. **Track your time for a week.**
 - Color-code tasks: blue for maintenance, gold for envisioning.
2. **Face the ratios honestly.**

- If 90% is blue, don't beat yourself up—but don't pretend it's otherwise.

3. Choose one structural change.

- Delegate or redesign one category of maintenance work.
- Protect one recurring block of time for envisioning, and guard it like a class.

This is not about personal heroism. It is about admitting a basic law of leadership physics:

If your schedule is full of maintenance, innovation has nowhere to live.

Plotting the course begins with where you spend your hours.

2. The Mandate: Redefining Success with Community

Even if leaders reclaim time for envisioning, another obstacle often stands in the way: **fear of the community's expectations.**

Parents, boards, ministries—everyone says they want innovation, but will

they still want it if test scores wobble or the school's practices look unfamiliar?

In New Zealand, at **Birkdale Primary School**, principal **Natasha Teinakore** decided not to guess. She asked.

Instead of crafting a new school vision in a closed boardroom, Birkdale used what has since become known as the **Birkdale Method**—a simple, disarming process for involving the community.

At parent meetings, Natasha handed out **post-it notes** with three questions:

1. "What are your **aspirations** for your child?"
2. "What **skills** are non-negotiable?"
3. "What does **success** look like?"

No long surveys. No jargon. Just three prompts, one note at a time.

Parents filled them in: at the back of the hall, in corridors, at kitchen tables. The team then collected and sorted the responses.

The revelation was unmistakable.

Parents did **not** write:

- "Top decile test scores."



- “More homework.”
- “Higher NCEA results at any cost.”

Over and over, they wrote variations of:

- “I want my child to be **happy**.”
- “I want them to feel **safe**.”
- “I want them to **contribute**—to do something good in the world.”

Happy. Safe. Contributing.

The staff laughed, a little out of relief, a little out of recognition. These were the very things they talked about in their internal meetings, often nervously, wondering if the community would see them as “soft” compared to metrics and rankings.

Instead, the post-its gave them something precious: a **mandate**.

When pushback comes—when someone asks why the school timetable includes wellbeing, community projects, or experiential learning—they can point, quite literally, to the wall of community voices:

“We are doing what you asked for.”

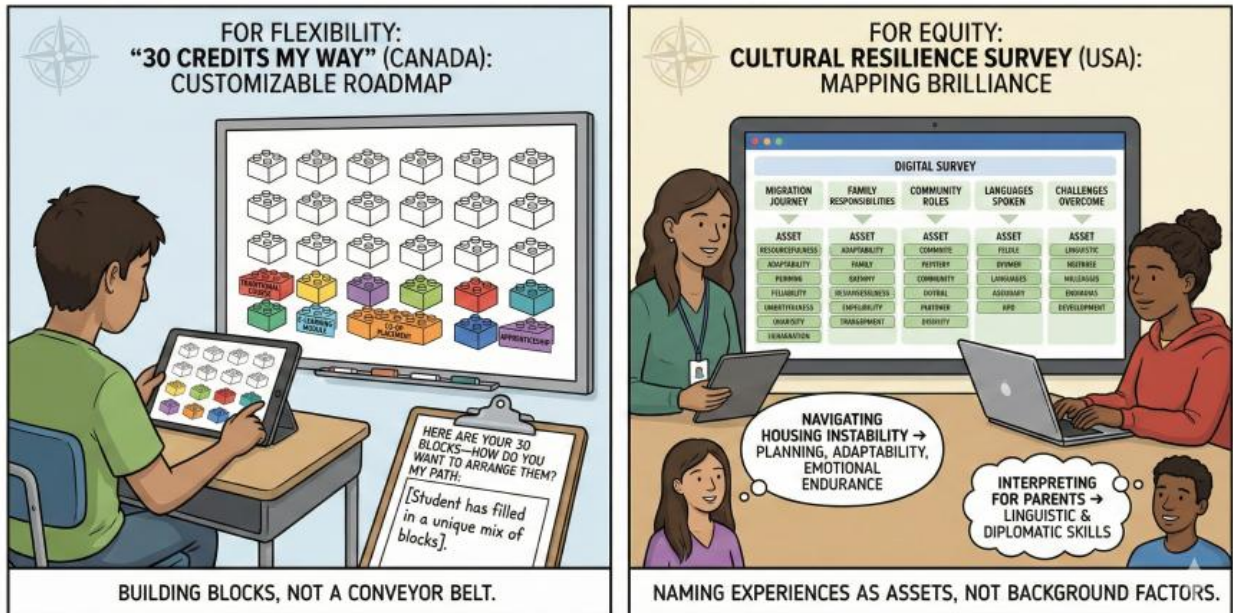
Redefining success with the community doesn’t mean abandoning academic excellence. It means placing it in context:

- Grades matter, but as **tools**, not as the definition of a life.
- Safety and happiness are not “nice extras”; they are foundations.
- Contribution—being useful, kind, and engaged—is the long arc we’re aiming at.

The Birkdale Method is simple enough to use anywhere:

- Three questions.
- Post-its or a digital equivalent.
- The courage to listen.

NAVIGATIONAL INSTRUMENTS FOR MONDAY MORNING



Plotting the course means we stop **assuming** what families value and start **co-constructing** a definition of success with them.

3. The Toolkit: Navigational Instruments for Monday Morning

Frameworks and mandates are important, but there comes a moment when a leader or teacher sits down at their desk and asks, “What can I *actually* use?” From across the Atlas, certain concrete tools emerged—practical instruments you can adapt on Monday morning.

For Flexibility: “30 Credits My Way” (Canada)

In the **Durham District School Board** in Canada, **Monique Muller** and her team wrestled with a familiar problem: high school pathways that looked linear on paper but felt like a maze in reality.

Students saw their future as a narrow track:

- Complete a set list of courses.
- Choose from limited electives and not always aware of all the available options.



The district aims to create **inclusive learning environments** where all students can succeed by offering flexible, personalized pathways through a wide range of courses and programs. The **“30 Credits My Way”** approach moves beyond traditional, linear program planning to empower students to design customized high school pathways that reflect their interests, strengths, needs, and future goals.

Developed by Monique and the DDSB Student Success team, 30 Credits My Way is an interactive roadmap that allows students to combine **in-person courses, e-learning, co-op placements, apprenticeships, dual-credit programs**, and other learning options. By considering **individual interests and constraints**, students and families are supported in making informed choices, fostering engagement, confidence, and long-term success.

On Monday morning, you may not have Durham’s exact infrastructure. But the principle is transferable:

Even a simple paper template that says, “Here are your 30 blocks—how

do you want to arrange them?” can be transformative.

For Equity: The Cultural Resilience Survey (USA)

Traditional assessment asks, “What content can you recall?” or “What skills can you demonstrate on this test?”

At E3, **Dr. Juan Carlos Arauz** invites schools to ask an additional question:

“Where does this student’s **brilliance** show up in their life—especially in places our tests don’t see?”

The **Cultural Resilience Survey** is a tool that:

- Maps the **life experiences** of students—migration journeys, family responsibilities, community roles, languages spoken, challenges overcome.
- Identifies **resilience patterns**: resourcefulness, conflict navigation, translation between worlds, leadership outside school.
- Names these not as “background factors,” but as **assets**—forms of brilliance.

For example:



- A student who has navigated housing instability has developed planning, adaptability, and emotional endurance.
- A child who regularly interprets for parents in a new country has advanced linguistic and diplomatic skills.

The Survey doesn't romanticize hardship. It refuses, however, to let hardship be seen **only** as a deficit.

On Monday morning, you might not implement the full survey. But you can:

- Create a class activity where students map "things I've had to figure out in my life" and talk about what that reveals about their strengths.
- Build a profile system where teachers can record **non-academic strengths** and refer to them in planning.

Equity begins with **seeing** brilliance where our existing instruments are blind.

For Digital Ethics: The Manifesto for Responsible Tech (Spain)

At **Brains International School** in Spain, teachers faced a situation common around the world: phones, AI tools, social media—students using powerful technologies with few shared norms.

The default responses were familiar:

- Ban it.
- Restrict it.
- Punish misuse.

Brains tried a different approach: **"Let's write the rules together."**

Students were invited to draft a **Manifesto for Responsible Tech**—their own constitution for how they would use AI, phones, and digital platforms in the school community.

They debated questions like:

- When is it appropriate to use AI in homework, and when is it not?
- What does respectful phone use look like in common spaces?
- How should we respond if someone posts something harmful about a peer?



The manifesto they produced was specific:

- Commitments to transparency when AI was used in assignments.
- Agreements about device-free spaces and times.
- Peer-driven guidelines for online behavior and consequences.

The lesson is not that their exact manifesto should be copied. It is that **students must be legislators, not only subjects**, in the digital domain.

On Monday morning, you could:

- Dedicate one lesson to drafting a class “AI and Tech Charter.”
- Have students propose, discuss, and amend clauses.
- Revisit it regularly as tools and contexts change.

Instead of saying “Don’t use it,” we can say, “You **will** use it. Let’s decide, together, how to use it well.”

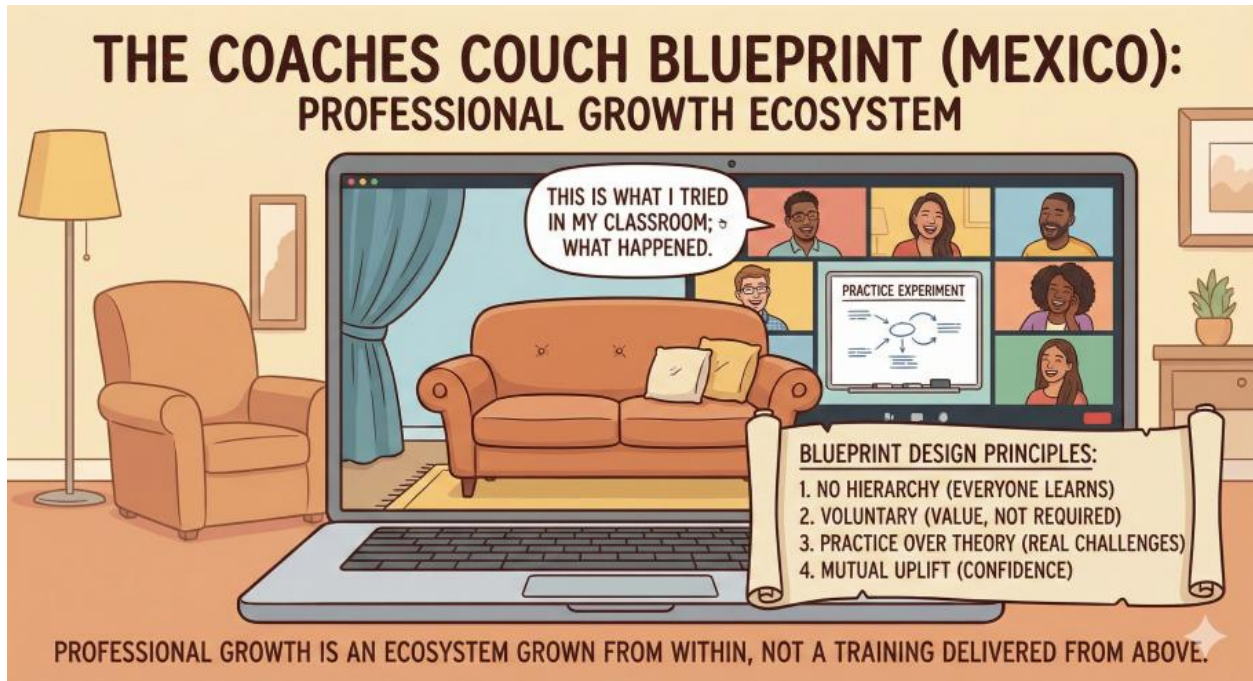
For Professional Growth: The Coaches Couch Blueprint (Mexico)

We met **The Coaches Couch** in Mexico in earlier chapters—a volunteer-led, horizontal professional learning network built by **Gerson Cepeda** and **Ever Gómez**.

Its DNA can be summarized in a few design principles:

- **No hierarchy of experts.** Everyone can host a session. Everyone can learn.
- **No compulsory attendance.** People come because they find value, not because they are required.
- **Practice over theory.** Sessions center on “This is what I tried; here’s what happened.”
- **Mutual uplift.** The measure of success is not prestige, but the growth and confidence of participants.

As a blueprint, The Coaches Couch suggests that any school or cluster of schools can:



- Set up regular, voluntary meetups (online or in-person).
- Rotate facilitation among teachers.
- Focus each meeting on a real classroom challenge and actual experiments.

On Monday morning, you might start by:

- Asking two colleagues, “Would you be up for a monthly ‘practice share’ at lunch?”
- Creating a simple shared doc where people can propose topics and dates.
- Keeping it light, honest, and non-evaluative.

Professional growth, in this mode, is not a training delivered from above. It is an **ecosystem** grown from within.

4. The Solutionary Mindset

Tools and frameworks matter. But underneath them all lies a more fundamental shift in how we see the purpose of education.



From the **Institute for Humane Education**, **Shei Ascencio** speaks of the **Solutionary Framework**—a process and a mindset that can reshape what we think school is for.

The process is straightforward:

1. **Identify a problem.**

- Something real, in the classroom, school, community, or world.
- Not a hypothetical, but a tangible harm or injustice.

2. **Investigate deeply.**

- Who is affected, and how?
- What are the root causes, not just the symptoms?
- Where do systems, habits, and narratives keep this problem in place?

3. **Innovate a solution.**

- Generate ideas that are **practical** and **ethical**.
- Consider all stakeholders, trying to avoid creating new harms while solving one.

4. **Implement.**

- Take action. Test the idea in the real world.
- Gather feedback, reflect, iterate.

This is not a project week add-on. It is a redefinition of the mission:

Education isn't about **preparing for the future**; it's about **solving the present**.

When students see their learning as ammunition for a distant, abstract future, motivation is fragile. When they see it as equipment for addressing what hurts now—in their schoolyard, their neighborhood, their planet—motivation changes flavor.

They are no longer just “learning about climate change.” They are analyzing local energy use and designing reduction strategies.

They are not only “studying media literacy.” They are investigating misinformation in their community chat groups and developing campaigns to counter it.

They are not simply “discussing inequality.” They are mapping how it shows up in their own city and proposing interventions.



The Solutionary Mindset ties together everything in this Atlas:

- Leadership that moves from maintenance to vision.
- Communities that redefine success as happy, safe, and contributing.
- Flexible pathways, equity tools, ethical tech use, professional tribes.

All of it, in service of young people who are not waiting passively for the world to act on them, but are learning how to act on the world—thoughtfully, courageously, together.

We began this book with a legend of Maui slowing the sun so people could live fully in their day.

Plotting the course means:

- Slowing the frantic maintenance long enough to **envision**.
- Asking our communities what they truly value and listening when they say “Happy, Safe, Contributing.”
- Equipping ourselves with concrete tools—roadmaps, surveys, manifestos, networks.
- And, above all, adopting a solutionary stance: “If something is broken, we are allowed to try to fix it.”

The Atlas cannot give you a single map. But it can offer you a compass and instruments.

The rest of the journey—the lines you draw, the routes you test, the brushfires you light—that part is yours.



EPILOGUE

The Unfinished Map

1. The Return to the Sun

At the very beginning of this book, we met **Maui**, the trickster hero of Aotearoa New Zealand, who slowed the sun so that people could live their days fully—so there would be enough time to plant, to learn, to laugh, to love.

For 24 hours, we tried to do something similar.

We followed the sun as it rose in New Zealand and swept westward around the planet. For one full revolution of the Earth we **slowed time on purpose**: listening to principals, students, elders, parents, guides, innovators and skeptics. We entered schools built in jails, classrooms under trees, online hubs, early years centers, industry campuses, and university labs. We sat in on conversations about joy and burnout, AI and Indigenous wisdom, spreadsheets and spearfishing.

For one day, the factory clock loosened its grip.

Instead of racing from period to period, we listened to stories long enough to hear what lay underneath them. Instead of reacting to the latest crisis, we paused to notice the quiet, brave experiments already reshaping the landscape of education.

Now, though, the sun picks up speed again.

The livestream has ended. The tabs have been closed. Your inbox is full. The bell rings. The photocopier jams. A parent wants to talk “just for a minute.” A child arrives late and teary-eyed. A policy document lands with a dull thud in your email.

The question that matters now is painfully simple:

After slowing the sun together for a day,
will we go back to the factory clock—

or will we **protect the human pace** we discovered in these stories?

Because Maui did not freeze the sun forever. He only bought us time.

THE THREE UNIVERSAL TRUTHS: A RADICAL, SUFFICIENT COMPASS



EVERYTHING ELSE IS DETAIL. A NEW COMPASS FOR LEARNING.

What we do with that time is, and will always be, up to us.

2. The Universal Truths

Across 5 continents and 20+ hours of conversation, from early childhood centers to post-pandemic leadership networks, a surprising consensus emerged.

Different languages. Different funding systems. Different histories and politics.

And yet, again and again, the same three truths surfaced—sometimes whispered, sometimes shouted, sometimes revealed in the pauses between words:

1. **Wellbeing is the prerequisite, not the byproduct.**

We heard it in the guilt of Irish teaching principals and in the relief when Andrea, the Executive Officer, took admin off their shoulders. We saw it in hot chocolate check-ins in Dublin, in the Responsible Thinking Classroom in Queensland, in Akinomaagaye circles on the land in Canada. Nothing sustainable grows in depleted soil. If leaders are crushed, if students are anxious, if teachers are running on fumes, no “innovation” will matter for long. Care is not a reward for performance; it is the **condition** for any real learning.

2. **Agency is the engine, not the reward.**

From Indian robotics students building the “7-in-1 Automated Farmer” to teenagers in Spain designing queue-management apps, from podcast

creators in Mexico to preschoolers planning their block towers, one pattern held: students come alive when they are invited to **do something that counts**. Agency is not the treat you get at the end of the unit if you behave; it is the **motor** that drives motivation, understanding, and resilience from the very beginning.

3. **Connection is the purpose, not the distraction.**

Human connections—to peers, to mentors, to culture, to land—are not “nice extras” squeezed in around “real work.” They *are* the work. Indigenous programs in Hawaii, Queensland, and Canada reminded us that learning is fundamentally about belonging: to a story, a place, a people. E3’s work in the US reminded us that conflict, not content, is the defining challenge of leaders—and that only human beings can teach other human beings how to navigate the human condition. Technology, timetables, assessments: all of them are in service to this or they are just noise.

We could add more patterns, more findings, more frameworks. But if all you carried forward from this Atlas were these three truths, you would already have a radical, sufficient compass:

- **Wellbeing first.**
- **Agency central.**
- **Connection as the point.**

Everything else is detail.

3. The Call to Action

On World Children’s Day, as the first segment of the livestream opened, we said:

“We are the World. We are the Future.”

At the time, it was a line on an infographic and a sentence spoken into a camera. By the time the Hawaii sun set, it had become something else: a description of what is already true.

There is no “they” coming to fix education.

- Ministries will publish frameworks.
- OECD will release reports.



- Foundations will launch initiatives.

All of that matters. All of it can help.

But the **map of education** is not drawn in those documents.

It is drawn every day in:

- How you greet students at the door.
- Whether you rush through the lesson or leave space for wonder.
- The way you respond when a colleague tries something new and imperfect.
- The courage you show in pushing back, gently but firmly, when metrics threaten to swallow meaning.
- The risks you take in protecting brushfires until they become bonfires.

The policy documents are the official charts. The **real map** is in your decisions.

You are already a cartographer.

This Atlas is not finished because the work it describes is not finished. The map is, and must remain, **unfinished**—alive, evolving, redrawn with every new context, every new cohort of children, every new tool and challenge.

The question is not whether you will draw on the map. You already do.

The question is **what lines you will choose to draw now**.

Will you:

- Protect time for deep learning, even when the timetable creaks?
- Let students legislate their own responsible use of AI and devices, rather than simply banning them?
- Notice the quiet child whose brilliance lives in a place school has never honored—and redesign something so that it finally counts?
- Start a Coaches Couch-style circle with two colleagues instead of waiting for “professional development” to arrive from above?
- Ask your community, like Birkdale, what success really means to them—and believe their answers?

None of these moves requires permission from a ministry. All of them require **courage, patience, and a refusal to forget what you’ve seen** in these pages.



BE THE CARTOGRAPHER. THE MAP YOU DRAW NOW IS THE WORLD OUR CHILDREN WILL WALK.

The Māori proverb that has been our quiet companion throughout this project says:

“Turn and face the sun,
and the shadows will fall behind you.”

You know where the sun is now.

You have seen it in:

- The joy on a student’s face when their first podcast episode goes live.
- The relief of a leader who finally has time to walk into classrooms again.
- The pride of a young person who discovers that spearfishing, caregiving, or community leadership is not “nothing,” but a gift.
- The awe of a child looking through a microscope, or watching bread rise, or hearing an elder tell a story on the land.
- The quiet focus of a teacher who has made peace with AI as a partner, not an enemy.

Turn toward that.

Face the practices, people, and possibilities that give life.

Let the shadows—the fear, the cynicism, the old industrial reflexes—fall where they must.

And then, draw.



- Redraw one hour of your schedule.
- Rewrite one policy with wellbeing at the center.
- Rethink one assessment so that agency, not compliance, drives the task.
- Reimagine one meeting as a space for shared inquiry, not information dumping.

You do not have to remake the whole system this year.

You do have to **start somewhere**.

Be the cartographer of your own classroom.

Be the cartographer of your own school.

Be the cartographer of your own system, however small your corner may seem.

Because **we**—the scattered, stubborn, hopeful community of educators—
are the World.

We are the Future.

And the map we draw now is the world our children will have to walk.

Contributing Schools

Thanks to the following schools that either contributed directly or were mentioned during 24h for Change in Education

AU AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

- **Global Village Learning (Victoria)** gvl.vic.edu.au
 - **The Industry School (Queensland)** theindustryschool.com.au
 - **Radiant Life College (Queensland)** radiantlife.qld.edu.au
 - **Parklands Christian College (Queensland)** parklands.qld.edu.au
 - **John Paul College (Queensland)** jpc.qld.edu.au
 - **Barker College (New South Wales)** barker.college
 - **Stonefields School (Auckland, NZ)** stonefields.school.nz
 - **Birkdale Primary School (Auckland, NZ)** birkdaleprimary.school.nz
 - **Albany Senior High School (Auckland, NZ)** ashs.school.nz
-

IN INDIA (SALWAN EDUCATION TRUST)

- **Salwan Public School, Rajendra Nagar** salwanpublicschool.edu.in
 - **Salwan Girls Senior Secondary School, Rajendra Nagar** salwanschools.org.in (Branch page via Trust)
 - **Salwan Public School, Gurugram** spsgurugram.edu.in
 - **Salwan Public School, Mayur Vihar** spsmayurvihar.edu.in
 - **Salwan Public School, Trans Delhi Signature City** salwanpublicschooltdsc.edu.in
 - **Salwan Junior School, Naraina** salwanjuniorschool.edu.in
-

US NORTH AMERICA

- **Imagination Lab School (Palo Alto, CA)** imagination-school.org
24hforchange.education



- **Tempe Union High School District (Innovation Center)** tempeunion.org
 - **ASU Prep Tempe (The Levitt Lab)** asuprep.asu.edu/tempe-levitt-lab
 - **Colegio Simón Bolívar (Nayarit, Mexico)** simonbolivar.edu.mx
 - **Cawthra Park Secondary School (Ontario, Canada)**
cawthrapark.peelschools.org
 - **Rick Hansen Secondary School (Ontario, Canada)**
rickhansen.peelschools.org
 - **Maxwell Heights Secondary School (Ontario, Canada)**
maxwellheights.ddsb.ca
-

EU EUROPE & GB UK

- **Brains International School La Moraleja (Spain)** colegiobrains.com
 - **Queen Ethelburga's Collegiate (UK)** qe.org
 - **Colina Learning Center (Romania)** colinainternational.com
-

AE MIDDLE EAST & UY SOUTH AMERICA

- **American School of Dubai (UAE)** asdubai.org
- **The Garzón School (Uruguay)** thegarzonschool.edu.uy



Organizations Leading Change in Education

These organizations took part or were referenced during 24h for Change in Education as leading examples of innovation in learning.

GLOBAL & INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- **24h for Change in Education**
 - *Type:* Global Event / Initiative
 - *Website:* 24hforchange.education
 - **The Learnerspace**
 - *Type:* Education Organization / Event Host
 - *Website:* thelearnerspace.org
 - **OECD (Schools+ Project)**
 - *Type:* International Organization / Research
 - *Website:* oecd.org
 - **Institute for Humane Education (IHE)**
 - *Type:* Non-profit / Solutionary Education
 - *Website:* humaneeducation.org
 - **Link Online Learners (LOL)**
 - *Type:* Global Youth Network
 - *Website:* linkonlinelearners.org
 - **Mastery Transcript Consortium (MTC)**
 - *Type:* Assessment & Credentialing
 - *Website:* mastery.org
 - **What School Could Be**
 - *Type:* Education Network & Media
 - *Website:* whatschoolcouldbe.org
-
- ### AU AUSTRALIA & NZ NEW ZEALAND
- **Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA)**
 - *Website:* appa.asn.au
 - **Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA)**
 - *Website:* aspa.asn.au

- **Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ)**
 - *Website:* isq.qld.edu.au
- **Queensland Independent Schools Parents Network**
 - *Website:* parentsnetwork.qld.edu.au
- **Young Change Agents**
 - *Type:* Social Entrepreneurship Education
 - *Website:* youngchangeagents.com
- **FutureMakers (NZ)**
 - *Type:* Education Consultancy
 - *Website:* futuremakers.nz
- **EdRising (NZ)**
 - *Type:* Educator Network / Event
 - *Website:* edrising.net
- **Blues Charitable Trust**
 - *Type:* Youth Leadership (Sports)
 - *Website:* theblustrust.org

US NORTH AMERICA (USA & CANADA)

- **HighScope Educational Research Foundation**
 - *Type:* Early Childhood Research
 - *Website:* highscope.org
- **The Levitt Lab**
 - *Type:* Learning Innovation Lab (Steven Levitt)
 - *Website:* thelevittlab.org
- **Ontario Principals' Council (OPC)**
 - *Type:* Professional Association
 - *Website:* principals.ca
- **Ever Forward Club**
 - *Type:* Youth Support Organization
 - *Website:* everforwardclub.org
- **NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children)**
 - *Type:* Early Childhood Association
 - *Website:* naeyc.org

- **E3: Education, Excellence & Equity**
 - *Type:* Education Consultancy
 - *Website:* facebook.com/E3EducationExcellenceEquity
- **Getting Smart**
 - *Type:* Education Media
 - *Website:* gettingsmart.com

IE IRELAND & GB UK

- **Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN)**
 - *Website:* ippn.ie
- **Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)**
 - *Website:* into.ie
- **The Duke of Edinburgh's Award**
 - *Type:* Youth Development Program
 - *Website:* dofe.org
- **Morrisby**
 - *Type:* Careers Platform
 - *Website:* morrisby.com

- **Student Motorsport**
 - *Type:* STEM/Motorsport Program
 - *Website:* studentmotorsport.com

LB MIDDLE EAST & IN INDIA

- **TAMAM Project**
 - *Type:* School-Based Reform Initiative (Lebanon/Arab Region)
 - *Website:* tamamproject.org
- **Arab Thought Foundation**
 - *Type:* Cultural/Educational Foundation
 - *Website:* arabthought.org
- **Food Nation**
 - *Type:* Sustainable Catering/Education (UAE)
 - *Website:* foodnationme.com
- **UNS Farms**
 - *Type:* Vertical Farming (UAE)
 - *Website:* unsfarms.com

- **INSPIRE Awards - MANAK**
 - *Type:* Innovation Awards (India)
 - *Website:* inspireawards-dst.gov.in
-

SG Singapore & AR Argentina

- **Principals Academy Inc. (PAI)r**
 - *Type:* Professional Learning & Consultancy
 - *Website:* pai.sg
 - **HumanEdu**
 - *Type:* Educator Retreat / Organization (Argentina)
 - *Website:* humanedu.org
-

Books and Publications

These are the books, reports, and significant publications mentioned, along with their authors and context.

Education & Leadership Books

- **"How to Raise an Adult"**
 - *Author:* Julie Lythcott-Haims
 - *Context:* Recommended in the conversation with Chris (Imagination Lab School) and Sam & Leona (The Garzón School) regarding parenting, independence, and the shift away from "helicopter" parenting.
- **"The Having of Wonderful Ideas" (and Other Essays on Teaching and Learning)**
 - *Author:* Eleanor Duckworth

- *Context:* Referenced by Juan Mora in the Argentina segment to describe the kind of classroom spaces that invite deep, meaningful learning experiences.
- **"What Really Works in Special and Inclusive Education"**
 - *Author:* David Mitchell
 - *Context:* Recommended by Simon Reynolds during the Singapore segment as a key resource for evidence-based strategies in Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- **"Leaders of a Thriving Future"** (Upcoming)
 - *Author:* Dr. Connie Kamm (and colleagues at Kamm Solutions)
 - *Context:* Mentioned by Dr. Connie Kamm in the Phoenix segment as an upcoming book that features the leadership and systems continuum she presented.
- **Gabriel Rshaid's books on AI in schools**
 - *Author:* Gabriel Rshaid
 - *Context:* In the Hawaii segment, Susannah Johnson explicitly shows Gabriel's books on camera, citing them as practical, ethical guides for educators using AI.

Future Thinking & Innovation

- **"Imaginable"**
 - *Author:* Jane McGonigal
 - *Context:* Cited by Susannah Johnson (Hawaii segment) as an inspiration for future-thinking, scenario planning, and preparing students for the unexpected.
- **"Think like Silicon Valley, being anywhere"**
 - *Author:* Jorge Zavala
 - *Context:* Mentioned in the Educator Spotlight; the book focuses on how entrepreneurs outside the US can adopt a Silicon Valley mindset to solve problems globally.

- **"Freakonomics"**

- *Authors:* Steven D. Levitt & Stephen J. Dubner
- *Context:* Mentioned to identify Steven Levitt, the founder of "The Levitt Lab" (which powers the ASU Prep Tempe high school model), as the co-author of this famous book.

 **Major Reports & Research Publications**

- **"Unlocking High-Quality Teaching: OECD Schools+ report"**

- *Organization:* OECD (Schools+ Project)
- *Context:* The flagship report presented by Paola Rodríguez Sánchez, offering a global taxonomy of high-quality teaching practices co-created with schools.

- **"The Future of Jobs Report" (2020 & 2025)**

- *Organization:* World Economic Forum
- *Context:* Queen Ethelburga's Collegiate (UK) explicitly uses these reports to redesign their curriculum and prioritize skills like critical thinking and problem-solving.

- **"Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report 2024 - Leadership"**

- *Organization:* UNESCO
- *Context:* Cited in the Ireland segment as a key influence on Irish policy regarding school leadership workload and support.

- **"Maximising learning and teaching: moving ahead with educational neuroscience"**

- *Context:* A rapid literature review commissioned by the Association of Independent Schools of NSW (AISNSW), referenced by Chris Duncan (AHISA) as defining six "necessary conditions of learning".

Key Quotes & Philosophies

On Education Reform & Purpose

- **"Schools do not have an inherent right to exist; if they don't add value, they should shrink or close."** — *Peter Hutton (Global Village Learning)*
- **"Schools should be in the 'business of human development'."** — *Susannah Johnson (Hawaii)*
- **"Start Well, Learn Well."** — *Angela Falkenberg (APPA), referring to the primary school campaign*
- **"Back to basics is not enough; children deserve more than a 'basic education'."** — *Angela Falkenberg (APPA)*
- **"Scalable is not same-able."** — *Angela Falkenberg (APPA), on adapting practice to context*
- **"In the business of maintaining dreams."** — *Nathaniel Edwards (Radiant Life College), on the role of his school*
- **"To be the best that I can with the gifts that I have."** — *School Motto, Queen Ethelburga's Collegiate*
- **"Kasserian Ingera?"** ("How are the children?") — *Raquel Walker (Peel DSB), citing the Maasai greeting to frame student wellbeing*

On Teaching & Learning

- **"Teachers should never do for kids what kids can do for themselves."** — *Ainsley Rose (Canada)*
- **"Shift from 'what to teach' to 'how to learn'."** — *Ainsley Rose (Canada)*
- **"Do you teach them or do they learn?"** — *Jorge Zavala (Educator Spotlight)*
- **"Here we don't memorize, we build."** — *Ruvener Bas (Brains International School), defining the 'maker' mindset*
- **"I am not a spectator, I can be a creator."** — *Carlos (Brains International School), on entrepreneurship*
- **"We did something real. We are capable."** — *Students Nuria & Carlota (Brains International School)*

On Leadership & Change

- **"Brush fires to bonfires."** — *Ainsley Rose (Canada), describing how small pilots grow into systemic change*
- **"You can't pour from an empty cup."** — *Leandro Bulacio (Argentina), on the necessity of teacher inner work*
- **"Innovation happens when vision meets courage."** — *Dr. Christine Bella (Tempe Union)*
- **"The people who sort the data control the narrative."** — *Natasha Jackson (Birkdale Primary), on sharing power with parents*

On Future & Culture

- **"Turn and face the sun and your shadows will fall behind you."** — *Philly (Albany Senior High School), quoting a Maori whakatauki*
- **"He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata."** (What is the most important thing in the world? It is the people, the people, the people.) — *Philly (Albany Senior High School)*
- **"Analogue afternoon."** — *Peter Hutton (Global Village Learning), on reclaiming tech-free time*
- **"The inclusion dividend."** — *Mr. An Lu (Singapore), on how technology for inclusion benefits all learners*
- **"In-premiums."** — *Jorge Zavala, criticizing the chase for prizes and diplomas over creating value*

Segment Leaders

Special thanks to the organizations and individuals leading segments and taking part in Educator Spotlights

American School
of Dubai



E3: EDUCATION, EXCELLENCE & EQUITY





OECD Schools+ Project
🇪🇸 SPAIN



Chris Bezsylko
🇺🇸 USA



Sam Irving
🇺🇷 URUGUAY



Leona Dauphin
🇺🇷 URUGUAY



Peter Hutton

 AUSTRALIA



Shei Ascencio

 MEXICO



Peter Foster

 AUSTRALIA



Jorge Zavala

 MEXICO



Ben Davies

 ROMANIA



Andre Mamprin

 CANADA



Ainsley Rose

 CANADA

Our Team



Valeria Chichotky

An expert in educational innovation, Valeria specializes in weaving artificial intelligence and technology into compelling learning experiences. With a solid track record in project management, educational leadership, and content creation, she has successfully coordinated high-impact initiatives for diverse institutions and companies, covering everything from formal schooling and informal learning to corporate training. She currently holds the position of Learning Experience Specialist at Crack the Code and is the visionary behind the SequoIAs program, which empowers educational communities to responsibly integrate AI.



Victor Capeluto

Victor is a seasoned educator with decades of experience in programming instruction and interactive educational project development. His passion for technology, space, and education drives his work, where he's implemented STEM and robotics programs at both high school and university levels. Currently, he engages students with Scratch, MIT App Inventor, and Python programming, alongside robotics, using hands-on activities and challenges to ignite their interest in technology and science.

Beyond the classroom, Victor designs and leads programming and robotics courses that cultivate advanced technological skills. He has developed integrated STEM projects that bridge theory and practical application, fostering innovation and critical thinking. As coordinator of International Space Week, he's organized inspiring events that encourage students to explore the universe, and he's a contributor to educational web systems, enhancing interactivity and accessibility in learning.



Gabriel Rshaid

Gabriel is the co-founder and Director of [The Learnerspace](#), a company whose mission is to help build the future of learning. He is also co-founder of [The Global School](#), the first school of its type in Latin America, attempting to make educational change a reality. Formerly Headmaster of St. Andrew's Scots School in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the oldest bilingual school in the world, he is a passionate educational futurist who is intent on sharing his belief that it is the best time in history to be an educator. Gabriel is the author of eight books, and has contributed as a co-author to numerous other books and anthologies. A former board member of ASCD and chair of ESSARP, he has spoken and led professional development workshops all over the world, working with educators to help create the future of education. He can be contacted at gabriel.rshaid@thelearnerspace.org



24h for Change in Education is a production of [The Learnerspace](#), one of the world's leading innovation engines in education.

Since 2018, The Learnerspace has created and run events and conferences both online and face to face, professional development projects, developed software solutions and other innovative programs.

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