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All Means All: Cherishing Children

> There are so many chances to intervene. To stand up and protect, or to look into the shadows which surround your school's grounds and corridors, and find the child, teen, young adult, who needs to know his or her value . . .
>
> – Ira Socol (2010)

Pam: Every day educators make a thousand decisions. I think about what drives decisions all the time and I have a short checklist of one question: "How will this decision benefit all children?"

Ira: Every school system in our nation, and most in the world, was developed as segregated, and not just racially. Consider "gifted" classrooms, "honors" courses, even robotics clubs. Then look at in-school suspension, at the classrooms with the most rote learning, the most worksheets. You will see they are divided by race, by class, and by disability.

Chad: And that's why we have to make the case that everybody needs enriched, engaging experiences; and it can't be about competition for such experiences. It's got to be about finding the exceptional talents, virtues, and interests of every kid. When we create an environment in which kids find some sort of passion that ignites a

> greater interest in coming to school, that doesn't necessarily mean they're going to be in direct competition. They might. But, we need to get out of this notion that for my kid to be successful, your kid must fail, or be held down in a compliant way. That's a bigger problem to solve really. I think that maker education, as simple as it may sound, could be just the key pathway to that.

Paths to Equity and Access: The Grand Challenge

Educators respond to all kinds of forces that lead them to make decisions that don't benefit *all* children. If you're the parent of one of the 10% of the kids who are in experiences that will get them, by today's standards, ahead in high school, accepted at Harvard, and then into a professional job, then you do not want school to change. That alone puts enormous pressure on educators to maintain the status quo.

Homework, grades, schedules, leveled courses, ability grouping – all are strategies that teachers today inherited from their parents' teachers. We know from experience, data, and research that these practices work against all children getting access to full and rich curricula, engaging experiences, challenging work, and even relationships with adults who matter. School reforms of the twentieth century created different educational experiences for what our parents' generation referred to as the "haves and have nots." Over time, parents, educators, and community members have become comfortable with that model.

The cultural biases of those in power, and yes, the desire to preserve privilege, have filtered out both an interest in change and reasons to change, so the structural consequences of schools created by past generations are seldom challenged, even today. Neither are the implicit biases that impact the way we see kids. These biases have played out in schools so that those identified as high performing or gifted have been entitled to special and more interesting learning experiences than those identified as needing extra assistance. And, extra assistance often translates into the mind-numbing work of drill and practice.

Creating paths to equity and access for all children remains the grand challenge of public education in America. We can name all the problems and we can generate an endless list of solutions. We also know that educators can do little to nothing about home and community poverty. What we can control is what we choose to do more of, or less, in our learning spaces to give us the chance to notice children, to see their faces, hear their voices, find their strengths, and help them know their own value. This doesn't happen by chance. Rather, these are outcomes of school communities that focus on leveraging resources to authentically engage learners, not just to provide rich opportunities but also to insist on children getting access to opportunities that challenge their curiosity, stimulate their urgency to seek knowledge, and encourage their interests, questions, and passion to learn more. This is our life's work.

> It's my time to git it, and I won't be late
> I said it's my time to git it
> So I stepped up to the plate
> Let's make the world a better place
> With no mistakes
> Where every race can come together
> At a growin' rate
> Let's celebrate
> Let's jus' show and elevate
> So one day I can make it to Heaven's gate
> I got a lot of questions for God
> I can barely wait
> Ever since I was born I knew I would be great
> Cuz
> I have a dream . . .
>
> *– Kolion Troche, 2016 high school graduate and rapper (Moran et al. n.d.)*

The decision in our district a few years ago to support two librarians in creating a very inexpensive sound studio in their

library (at first just old desktop computers and a basic sound board) created a new pathway for teens to write, perform, record, and produce their own music. Teens from all walks of life found their way into the studio. Kolion was one such teen. When he enrolled in one of our high schools, Kolion, a Brooklyn native, was fresh out of the juvenile justice system, and headed to a high school placement. Most people would have bet against this 17-year-old's odds of staying out of trouble. However, when he walked by a newly constructed space in his new high school, a music studio connected to the school library, he made perhaps one of the most important decisions of his life. He wandered in and asked, "What's this space?" The teacher – young, a minority, and wise beyond his years – connected with Kolion and invited him to join in the work of nascent studio musicians.

Kolion wasn't on a path to graduation at that point but he did have a love for rap music, and inside was a poet ready to be unleashed. In November, the principal indicated that he was working hard, but the barriers of state tests and verified academic credits seemed insurmountable. Pam crossed her fingers, hoping he would make it to the winter holidays. He did. Days became weeks and learning seemed to become timeless for him. He came to school early. He stayed late. He wrote rap lyrics for himself, for friends, for his biology class. By May, he had one state test left, earth science which was a ninth-grade course. On a sunny day driving in her car to and from schools, Pam got a call from the principal's office. She listened, then pulled off on the side of the road, palpable joy coming into her car from the other end of the line. Kolion's voice. The principal's voice. He'd made it. He would walk in June. He had found his voice, and in doing so, changed his trajectory from being on the verge of dropping out to graduating from high school. Pam says now that she knew whatever the investment that had been made in creating the music studio – and it was small even in our advanced versions – was worth every dime when she saw Kolion poised on stage, waiting to hear his name called to come forward and receive his diploma.

Equity provides resources so that educators can see all our children's strengths. Access provides our children with the chance to show us who they are and what they can do. Empathy allows us to see children as children, even teens who may face all the challenges that poverty and other risk factors create. Inclusivity creates a welcoming culture of care so that no one feels outside the community. We've all seen that children are not impossible challenges, but their needs can challenge a teacher's capacity to serve them well. And we've learned, along with other progressive educators, that we must willingly search our values and make decisions differently if we believe that every child matters. In doing so, we come to cherish all our children.

The "Insurgent Mission" to Create "Habitable Worlds" of Learning

Kolion was no magic student. No magic intervention or remediation programs existed to pull him through. He made it to graduation because he found a mentor with an "insurgent mission," a teacher who chose to "upend the status quo" as he connected with kids to change what learning opportunities in high school could become (Zook 2016). In discovering his passion for writing and performing rap music in a school that made that not just okay but promoted it, Kolion found a reason to keep coming back to school every day to connect with peers, diverse teens united through their voices, agency, and influence in their school community. Indeed he found his way as a learner. We are fortunate because we have Kolion's and many other learners' stories to share. Their stories give us hope for a different future, a progressive future, where school is much different than it has been for more than a century.

> What I've seen the most change in was that students were encouraged in their participation in the studio to understand the person across the table from them. If you have that student who wears the pants with the holes in them and the earrings and the tattoos and he may be an outsider to someone who wears a fitted cap and

> baggy pants and a hoodie. They share so much in common but yet through appearances they seem so distant. What a program like this does, from what I've observed, is that it puts them in the same room and it allows them to speak a common language because their language is not their fashion or their group of friends or their family background; their language is music, it's words, it's writing, and – it's sound and it's fluent. What it does is create a connectivity between them. And, literally I've seen it demolish barriers between individual students, between teachers and students, between teachers and teachers. I've witnessed that and I think Kolion can attest to that same thing. He's experienced that and he's become a role model on his own just because he's become an example of not succumbing to the stereotypes that are so relevant and strong in our society right now. (Moran et al. n.d.)

We share stories of children, adolescents, and teens all the time, for it is through their voices that we challenge educators with whom we interact in our district, state, nation, and around the world. We challenge them to consider their own beliefs and values about the young people who are required to occupy our learning spaces for up to 13 years – 180 days a year, five days a week, about seven hours a day in school, and into the night and weekends as they take work home. And many of the educators we work with can tout fantastic tales of bootstrap successes among graduates not unlike Kolion.

Sadly though, the social, political, and economic narrative of schooling in the past has been grounded in a "soft eugenics" belief that while some children have the capacity to become whatever they choose to be in life, others do not. This plays out in the decisions that educators make, often based on decontextualized data and confirmation biases that stem from immersion in traditions of education that did the same to us. Even if lip service is given to words such as equity, accessibility, inclusivity, empathy, cultural responsiveness, and connected relationships, schooling today is still far more likely to support practices from the past that have created school cultures in which none

of those words define who educators really are, no matter what they aspire to be.

Consider how the "habitable world" concept developed by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Emory University researcher and professor, sits at the core of the philosophy of educators who developed and now sustain the structures and processes of schooling that impact young people such as Kolion (Garland-Thomson 2017b). Garland-Thomson views public, political, and organizational philosophy as representative of one of "two forms of world-building, inclusive and eugenic" (Garland-Thomson 2017a). Unfortunately, often it's the soft educational eugenics philosophy that is most often expressed in practice, if not in words, across the nation's schools rather than the creation of habitable worlds that are inclusive of all learners.

When children lacking the privileges of growing up in middle-class, mostly Caucasian families enter school, they often are sorted and selected into remedial programs, sometimes labeled as disruptors, and excluded from the normative culture because of cultural differences (Hammond 2015). This sets the stage that schools become increasingly difficult for children of color and poverty to successfully inhabit, worlds they may choose to leave as soon as legally possible to find a place where they can negotiate different life choices even if by measures that may challenge social norms. What does it say about schools that young people might not consider their learning communities as habitable worlds? No matter the source of data, educators know that familial opportunity gaps lead to school achievement gaps that have become established story markers of predictive demographics (Decker 2017). To change the story, we must change the narrative of the schools we build for learners.

The decisions we make at every level of the educational system create a narrative that often refutes the belief that we truly value all children. Our urge to use averages to describe the state of children in our schools – below, on, or above level – works against young people such as Kolion. Kolion isn't an average young person. No child is. If we want our schools to be learning

spaces that reveal the strengths of children to us, we have to create a bandwidth of opportunities that do so. That means making decisions differently, decisions driven from values that support equity, accessibility, inclusivity, empathy, cultural responsiveness, and connected relationships inside the ecosystem. Those are the words representative of habitable worlds, not words such as sort, select, remediate, suspend, or fail.

> The solution, the way decisions are best made, lies in empowering teachers and students to make choices. Any systemic or institutional decision made for "all kids" or "most kids" or based on quantitative research will – guaranteed – be the wrong decision. Any decision based in "miracle narratives" will be at least as bad. We are not discussing "the average child" or "the average dyslexic" (neither of which exists), nor are we going to base policy on the exceptional case. Instead, we will "solve this" by making individual decisions with individual students. (Socol 2008)

From a Good Idea to a Learning S-Curve Culture

Kolion's story illustrates a counternarrative to the common organizational philosophy that if it's not in the strategic plan, staff should not be doing it. The addition of music studios in a school library didn't start with a strategic plan. It started with two librarians who identified the challenge of getting more kids who never step foot in a library to see the school library as a useful space. From that point, Chad and Ira began to work with the principal and the librarians to make changes in the library. The principal had given permission in a prior year to convert an old storage closet and two old desktop computers into a tiny music recording studio. The librarians and the principal fell in love with the idea of incorporating a larger music studio into the library. They also realized the importance of looking to teens to tell them what they were interested in doing in such a space. The librarians gave up their office and storage space, and the music studio was born. As a result of that initial invention work in 2011

by librarians, thriving music studios now exist in all high school libraries in our district.

Sometimes visitors to our schools ask Pam some version of this question, "How does ____ fit into your strategic plan?" She always answers first that the district has a robust strategic plan, and the strategic plan certainly supports applications of innovation work. Her key words, however, to visiting administrators capture her philosophy that when good ideas emerge, don't wait to capitalize on them because students don't always have time to wait on us:

> What we don't do is let a strategic plan get in the way of doing work that helps us invent something that we haven't done before. I think that's a really important philosophical difference because I've had superintendents say to me, "Well, we have a lot of good ideas like maker education that are out there, but it's not doable in our strategic plan right now."

In Chris Zook's book *The Founder's Mentality*, he speaks to the role of the founder inside a company who often times distances him- or herself from continued nurturance of a team's original insurgent mission (efforts to upend the status quo) and that distance often leads to a company growing stale (Zook 2016). Pam feels that drift to staleness herself on some days, and it's usually when she senses decisions are being co-opted by our urge in education to be controlled by external forces, adult conveniences, or those who hold tight to the status quo. Supporting the explorers, the pioneers, and the settlers is critical in the initial phases of change, but once staff move past the euphoria of initial change startup, that's when the hard work begins. When everyone settles into change routines, they tend to lose that early momentum. Sustaining momentum comes from understanding when an organization's learning S-curve is flattening and the time is right to resource a positive inflection point in that curve (Kahan 2012).

To that end, Pam took what some might consider a risk during the height of the recession era to use capital funding to turn libraries into learning commons with spin-off spaces that inspired teens to design, make, and hack, advancing the district's vision of all students being engaged and inspired as learners. The music studios created a new inflection point that encouraged change agency among other teachers and building administrators. This led to a variety of connected initiatives including interdisciplinary core coursework, build-out of mechatronics labs, experiential learning, inquiry, 1:1 device rollout, and modernization of learning spaces. And, through these changes, available learning tools, space design, and contemporary pedagogies have spread across the district. As a result, the culture of learning has shifted from a more traditional one-size-fits-all "sit and get" model to multiple learning pathways grounded in project work, choice and comfort, making, Universal Design for Learning, instructional tolerance, connectivity, and interactive technology applications.

The evolution of learning culture is the most critical work educators need to do inside schools today. Culture reflects community values and school culture remains a relatively compliance-driven system even with our best efforts to change that. The only way to change culture is to constantly create situations in which people together respond to the question "Why are we here?"

To borrow the term *last mile* from the telecommunications industry (Bartolic n.d.), the last mile work of educators to include all children in our learning communities won't happen without adults exploring their own biases, reaching deep to find empathy for children who sometimes don't engender that, understanding that accessibility is a right and not an option, and being willing to address equity even though it means giving up a share of resources that educators feel are owned through the entitlement of privileged past practice. A former superintendent, Kevin Castner, used to say that our district isn't a system of schools, it is a school system. This means working together to collaboratively solve challenges. Kolion's success in his last year of high school belongs to all of the community, not just his school or his

teachers. Seeing learners like Kolion not as impossible challenges but as members of the full community is a critical insurgency that is essential if "all means all" is to become reality and not just educational rhetoric.

All Means All: Fostering a Pedagogy of Equity Inside and Outside the District

Educators also can learn from Kolion that while he did, in the end, pass tests and classes to graduate, even more importantly, he taught members of the school community, including the School Board, to see him not as below average but rather as a unique individual with a talent that would not have been seen without a continuum of opportunities. We have learned from our young people's stories that it's not just that educators provide access to opportunities, but rather it's their strong advocacy for individual children that makes real the value-laden meaning of the words – equity, accessibility, inclusivity, empathy, cultural responsiveness, and connected relationships.

To turn those words into reality in schools, educators must learn to braid decisions and resources together to create inflection points so that continuous growth and development occur. That does not happen by chance. In our district, for example, that's been done with preschool programming. Federal, state, and local funds are leveraged each year across the program to be able to get as many kids in pre-K seats as possible. It's also happened with the use of multiple sources of funding – e-rate, capital improvement, operational, and state tech funds – to finance projects that allow all students to move from guaranteed broadband access only inside our schools to, through a significant strategic investment by the district, having that service available inside their homes and apartments. Keeping the needs of young people, from children to teens, at the center of adult decisions means using resources differently to effect changes essential to contemporary learning.

Staff in our district must simultaneously attend to both the microlevel mission of building a community of learners and

learning one student at a time and to the macrolevel vision that "all learners excel, embrace learning, and own their futures" (Albemarle County Public Schools n.d.). This means attending to the importance of resourcing change at both individual and community levels. It's absolutely critical that leaders understand and respect the role that humans play in the change equation. How, otherwise, are leaders able to find people who can envision how to leverage resources to grow the invention and innovative work needed to help all young people not just dream but act to pursue those dreams?

For example, an S-curve inflection point moved our work closer to a last mile solution a few years ago when staff leveraged resources to open a pop-up makerspace for children and even adults in a local barrio. That same community became the first that the district's tech department powered up with free Wi-Fi access for students so their school laptops actually functioned in their homes, not just in class. Making the connection from the pop-up makerspace to broadband access represents a "walking the walk" investment in equity work writ small and large. It's also a statement of how we cherish all children, regardless of who they are and where they live.

At the microlevel of beliefs and mission, educators must work to ensure every child knows their voice matters, they have agency in making choices and decisions, and they can be responsible for their own learning. Learners who have that level of control can influence their own lives. They also can influence people around them. They can influence their community and benefit others. Kids who believe in their own efficacy likely will be kids who, even when confronted with a teacher who is less contemporary in their pedagogy or who assigns work that learners don't really like doing or want to do, will still persist in pursuit of their own goals.

Young makers, such as children served in the popup makerspace, have shared when they create they feel a sense of control, agency, and some influence. We hear from children that when they find meaning and value in their work, they are more likely to be able to push through challenging situations. Their sense

of self becomes valuable. When learners have a sense that they have value and their learning has value, they believe they can get where they want to go in life. It's why we philosophically believe kids who embrace learning are more likely to both own their learning as well as to excel (Albemarle County Public Schools n.d.). This comes from the kind of work kids do; first, creating ideas of what they want to do and then getting a chance to form, with their hands, those ideas into reality in our schools. As Chad says, "that's progressive education made real."

Traditional power brokers in education, on the other hand, often promote, advocate, and support an educational model that sorts and selects, promoting interesting, rich learning for just certain students. Chad spoke to that in a discussion with Jessica Parker, former director of community and learning with MakerEd.org, noting that progressive educators can't let their commitment to progressivism get co-opted by those who have in the past dominated the educational hierarchy:

> For example, teachers last year were participating in a Twitter chat and a teacher who indicated she worked with gifted students tweeted that making should be only for gifted programs because that's where the pioneering work for new educational models should reside. There are ten different problems in just that one tweet. First, if somebody believes in that kind of elitism it's a problem. Education has a history of allocating enriched opportunities to only the kids who don't need traditional schooling. Bright kids, which typically means privileged kids of educated parents, under the guise of "enrichment" are taken out of regular classes and given learning opportunities that are cooler, better, more enjoyable to do, because the idea is they're smarter by birth. This sends an immediate message to all kids that regular class sucks. The smart kids don't need to do something that sucks. Then educators use strategies to try and fix kids who aren't achieving like the gifted kids. They double block classes. They force students into summer school which means a kid is labeled as the worst kind of worst student. (Parker and Ratliff 2016)

What education has done literally to almost all kids now, everywhere across the country, is communicate through its structures that if a learner can't do the work in class, we'll give that student twice the amount of English and math in a school day, more by far any other content area, which includes science and social studies – and particularly any sort of art or physical education. That's called double blocking. Kids in remedial classes find themselves doing twice as many worksheets, listening to twice as many lectures, and taking twice as many tests because a single block of math and/or reading didn't work. So, once again, educators double down on compliance-driven schooling. That's the design of the institution – it's not conspiratorial. This exists publicly as the strategy of choice if a student is struggling in school. Significant literature and historical research document how and why this was set in motion a long time ago. President Woodrow Wilson (Wilson 1909) and then Ellwood Cubberley (Cubberley 1919) from Stanford both basically said in the early twentieth century that we only need a small group of people to get a liberal education, and a much bigger group to forego the privilege of a liberal education. Unfortunately, for many people today that's still okay. But it's not okay with us.

The district mission to create an inclusive community of learners and learning is no longer limited to just what we do in our own schools, but rather has expanded to influence equity and access beyond our schools. This has occurred through purposeful connectivity of our educators and learners with others across our district's 25 schools as well as to other states and even countries. Our efforts are different and unique here because educators are working to convert a public school system that over years and years wasn't designed for what we are doing now to empower children. We're working – against rules and excuses – to convert an institution to a progressive model of education grounded in an "all means all" philosophy when it comes to every child participating in rich, experiential learning.

For those, like us, who are committed to the insurgent mission of creating habitable school worlds for all children through

progressive education, we also know that addressing equity and access can be accelerated with strategic partnerships and that we can't limit our work to the boundaries of our own communities. A small grant from the Battelle Foundation, an international health and science research nonprofit, helped fund purchase of equipment in the district's makerspaces and support for professional development (Bragg 2016). When Chad built the partnership funding proposal for this project, he also included strategies to connect work he was building out in our district with support for a school in a higher poverty district in Virginia. With Battelle's support for this partnership, two of our district's maker teachers packed up a van with maker resources and drove five hours to help another school community implement maker work. After spending an evening with the superintendent, the next day the teachers co-taught with a teacher from that middle school, doing activities with her kids, and Skyping back to our district so their kids could share work with our kids. The superintendent in that district wrote a post about the experience in his local newspaper in which he said that this was the best professional development he'd ever seen (Gearhart 2016).

What's Possible: Systems Thinking as Change Process

We have rejected the mass standardization of learning that has dominated schools for decades. Doing this work means that educators must confront personal and professional beliefs and values that hold students back and penalize those who come to us from families with fewer resources, less education, and insecurities emanating from stressful situations. They also cannot simply admire the problems we face, and, at best, create strategic plans full of tactics and programs, or, at worst, give up on kids.

Ira asked this question recently: "Isn't social justice just a question of how do you make it happen?"

In response, consider that resources are mostly there but decision makers must be willing to change the way they use them to support kids. We look for opportunities to do that all the time. As Ira has said about architectural renovations, staff have to take

what's already there and figure out how to improve space for kids. For example, the area at one high school that Ira helped reconceptualize as the makerspace today at one point had been the wood shop. The shop had, sadly, been taken out of the school during the late 1990s in response to pressure from state testing of core curricula along with school capacity needs. Walls were built to divide the shop and use it as regular classroom space.

Ira and the facilities planner discussed a variety of ways to restore that space for maker work, but the solutions involved removing very thick walls that held up the second floor. And so, staff went with what was possible. A glass garage door was dropped in to get light in the space. A bridging area was added so eventually there would be a connector with what's now a CAD lab. This work represents a systems thinking approach by a staff team who work together on innovation projects. Chad uses career and technical education (CTE) funding as a match to access resources from building services and facilities planning staff. Ira supports with our system's technology resources. They work in a joint effort to leverage resources together to ultimately answer the question "What can we do?"

If Chad says, "I can cover the costs of mechatronics equipment because it aligns with CTE at the secondary level," then Ira may say, "Okay I will cover tools for makerspaces at the elementary schools." Instead of seeing barriers such as perceived constraints of funding streams or siloed departments that can be used to make excuses for why a project can't be done, staff here see opportunities for what's possible. This doesn't mean that staff operate outside of fiscal rules. Federal CTE money is used exactly as it is intended to be used, but staff add in local resources and supports to ensure projects are robustly funded. If federal CTE funds can't pay for architecture, then a facility need gets solved a different way. Too often, what people will do is to use the law, policy, and regulation as a barrier to change instead of saying "How can I help you figure out how to do this if it's going to benefit the kids?"

Our goal is to make responsible decisions, but always while keeping our kids' needs in mind and with the desire to engage

them in meaningful learning always as the driver. Our district staff often find themselves figuring out how to support teachers who have innovative ideas that will pull in more kids as active learners through their passion, interests, and curiosity. We've said yes to adding beehives to our school grounds, offered support to student drone builders and pilots, found a way for kids to exhibit their work in a community-wide Hustle Showcase complete with an evening of student rap performers, and helped fund a coop with nests for a flock of chickens in an elementary school courtyard. We don't discount that as long as there are state tests, teachers must attend to standards. However, if educators cherish children, that means they're always looking for ways to connect with, accept, support, empathize, and value every single child, no matter what.

One example of what it means to cherish children by authentically supporting their interests occurred a few years ago with a middle school project that resulted in kids building rolling tree houses in one of the district's cafeterias. The kids wanted to redesign the cafeteria as a dining experience. However, they didn't want to build the booths that the adults wanted. They wanted to build tree houses. The project faced potential constraints that could have created significant barriers to the middle schoolers achieving their goal. Instead the School Board's attorney helped staff figure out how to support the tree house project by taking a couple of actions that kept staff coloring inside the lines of essential safety rules. He said first that the structure needed to be inspected and any recommendations for changes required by the inspector must be made. Second, school staff needed a plan to ensure that learners were taught to use the structure safely. But he didn't say, as he easily could have and as might happen in many school systems, "That's a liability. Take it down."

Equity and Opportunity

If we want to have an inclusive community, equity and accessibility, a sense that every child matters, and that children's individual diversity adds value to our schools, we have to constantly look for ways to extend opportunities that engage all our young

people. Schools have to change, and that starts with valuing each child, trusting in them, and not treating them as if mistakes are a life sentence. Building those tree houses sent a message to the kids that their sense of mission, their voices, and their agency was important and valued. In realizing their interests and passion, they could see their influence on adults.

So how does a public school work towards equity without seeming to be unfair to the people who are providing funding and support? Those with wealth control the community agenda, many of the resources, and, ultimately, jobs. It is a fine line and, truly, nobody is anywhere near solving it. In school districts that try to pool PTO contributions, for example, there are often threats that wealthy areas will secede from the pool. In others, attempts to please the upper and middle classes result in programmatic segregation – with gifted programs and AP classes looking very different from the rest of the school.

But the need remains urgent. "I see the incredible pain that it causes educators working with kids in poverty day after day," Ira says. "We have a principal who spent 10 years as a principal in our highest poverty schools. I've known her a long time now and I've seen how that's hurt her. I see what it does to teachers, and I know we have to find ways as a nation to solve this." If we cannot create ways to support those who work in schools of at-risk students, we obviously will fail to give those children what they need. And what they need is abundance of opportunity, which we can sometimes give without adding a lot of money. All we need to do is understand how capable all kids are. However, as we pursue a mission of all means all, if we don't truly cherish all learners, our children will not succeed, no matter our words.

"Kids in poverty don't come to school knowing less," Ira repeatedly writes, "they know different" (Socol 2016). If we prize that "different," we take our first steps toward equity.

Educators in our schools work hard to find the strengths within individual learners and their own communities here, as do others in progressive districts across the nation. Empowering young people occurs along different pathways, and we see that

happen in our small rural schools. As an example, when children who bring a maker mindset from their own country homes and farms get the chance to build in school with woodworking tools, their teachers bring joy and a sense of accomplishment and winning to a group of kids who have never had it before.

We empower kids in many other ways, too. A few years ago, one of our elementary librarians in a high poverty school worked with a group of kids in Guatemala who were even poorer than our poorest children are. Our kids helped to design a reading bus for them. That gave them a real sense of agency and power in the world. That helped the kids, and it helped the teachers too. In progressive educational work, teachers see all kids as competent, capable people. Who doesn't believe that all children deserve to be cherished?

Your Own Learning

Provocation

The educational reform movement advocates of the 1980s and 1990s pushed hard for the standardization of curricula, instruction, and assessment. Over time, subtle degradation of the teaching profession in communities across the nation that had traditionally placed educators on pedestals led to political outcries to do something about the deterioration of education in public schools. By the late 1990s, politicians on the left and the right came together to press for reform, basing their points of view on results from international assessments such as TIMMS and PISA tests along with media-incited coverage of poor conditions of schools primarily in urban settings such as Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C.

Their response? The high stakes accountability mandate, the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, eventually passed into law, ultimately impacting every teacher, classroom, and learner in America's public schools. This charge to close gaps by adopting an "all means all" philosophy was underpinned with the loss of local and state control and sanctions from the federal government for schools whose students did not make "adequate

yearly progress" to reach 100% proficiency by 2014. Here's where K–12 public education had landed by 2014, according to Anya Kamenetz on National Public Radio as she shared perspectives from her discussions with colleagues in the education field:

> "At least in the academic community, it was well known that 100% proficiency wasn't going to happen without gamesmanship, and the amount of improvement that was needed in some states was not plausible," says Morgan Polikoff (education professor at the University of Southern California).
>
> In response, he says, schools gave more and more tests to prepare students to take the state tests. They practiced "educational triage," focusing more resources on students who were just below passing, to the detriment of both higher and lower achievers. They classified more students as disabled to get them out of taking the tests. In certain cases, they cheated . . . As the years passed and the "adequate yearly progress" targets grew, he says, more and more schools in more and more states fell into the category of "failing" – 50 percent, 60 percent, even 70 percent. "By setting up an unattainable target, states stopped paying attention," says Polikoff. They just gave up. (Kamenetz 2014)

After reading this first chapter, "All Means All: Cherishing Children," and the information provided in the **Provocation**, do you agree or disagree with the premise that schools have failed to educate all children? How would you defend your argument to someone who disagreed with you? In your opinion, can all children be successful as learners? How would you measure success? What needs to change to create learning communities where all children are cherished?

Structured Inquiry

In the last decade, educators, parents, and politicians began to consider that a commitment to "all means all" did not, or could not, mean *all* if the sole measure of competence happened to be

high-stakes tests. As schools' lack of adequate progress according to federally approved criteria became apparent in middle-class communities, parents who felt their schools were just fine became concerned that their children were being overtested and overstressed by the requirements of the accountability czars in Washington. This led to a backlash against standardized testing and prescribed curricula.

As mostly middle-class parents pushed back against state testing, stories of educators leaving the profession because of high stress, the publication of teachers' scores by name in some mainstream media outlets, and cheating scandals in high-stakes, high-pressure school environments led educators to increase their challenges to NCLB accountability measures. Sometime around 2010, it appeared that the nation woke up, took a look at its schools, and began to see that the federally reinforced structures of twentieth-century schooling had driven the passion for learning from classrooms, had eliminated joy in the pursuit of curiosity and interests, and had discouraged the belief that teachers make a difference. Parents didn't like hearing from children that school was boring or watching as their children's disengagement rose and their creativity dropped. Something seemed to be missing from almost every school.

How might you find out what's missing from learning in your district, school, or classroom? If you perceive nothing is missing how do you know that? Take time to reflect out loud with a friend or write your thoughts about whether deep, meaningful learning occurs for all kids where you work. Who gets to engage in deep learning, to find their passions, and to be joyful in their work? Who gets challenged with interesting questions that push thinking and emotion? Who gets time to work on meaningful projects? Who is cherished and how do you know that?

Reflective Pause

In some places today, "all means all" is being redefined as more than simply all kids, regardless of their demographics, special

needs, or geographic location, passing other people's tests. Paul Reville notes that:

> We have a batch-processing, mass-production model of education that served us very well if we wanted to achieve a society in which we were sending a lot of people into low-skill, low-knowledge jobs. But for high-skill, high-knowledge jobs in a post-industrial information age, we need a very different system. (Walsh 2014)

Does *all really mean all?* What changes to the system do you think are needed to overhaul it from one that sends kids into a future of low-skill, low-knowledge jobs or even no job at all? Why would you make those changes? Make a list of your priorities for change. Which create a more personalized learning environment rather than a one-size-fits-all approach? Reflect upon a change that you can personally implement in your own setting.

Take Action: Four Actions to Create Paths to All Means All

1. Collective efficacy, according to John Hattie, has the greatest impact of any educational strategy on learners' performance. Identify or build a peer network that collectively can support your work to guarantee access and equity to rich and challenging learning experiences. This could be a Twitter chat, a critical friend in your school or another school, or a mentor.
2. Seek all the sources of information you can find on how children perform in your class, school, or district. Spread those in front of you and figure out what kind of assessments dominate kids' work. Become an advocate for learners becoming engaged in their own assessment reflection process. Ask kids for feedback, and you will get points for informing your own learning.
3. Pick a couple of learners you know who are struggling in your school. (It doesn't matter if they are in elementary, middle, or high school.) Observe them in class, hallways,

and the cafeteria or on the playground. Record what you notice about the learners. Reach out to talk with each of them. What questions might get at their sense of why they struggle? How might you invite them to ask their own questions of you? How can you use this information to inform your own understanding of what it means for all learners to be cherished?

4. Identify a barrier to learning success that exists in your class, school, or district that defeats the *all means all* philosophy. This could be a barrier of time, furniture, technology, or adequate resources. It might also be a barrier created by rules or norms. Identify three strategies that you can use to advocate to take down that barrier. Make your work to eliminate barriers for kids a message to others about your own values and beliefs.

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