

BECAUSE WE NEED YOU!

Learning advocacy for
educational change

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The contents of this book were developed under grant “York University FSL Teacher Recruitment and Retention 2024-2025 (TPON 2024-06-1-2949860918)” from the Province of Ontario, Ministry of Education and Canadian Heritage. Please note that the views expressed in the publication are the views of the Recipient of the award and co-authors of the book and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province.

We also wish to acknowledge the generous support of grants from the University of Ottawa, the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation and York University.

We are grateful to York’s Glendon campus for hosting us, and for Camerise and C4 for inspiring us all and bringing us together.

We thank Prisca Ng and Nitzi Savie who seamlessly worked behind the scenes to make sure we had what we needed.

We are eternally grateful to Jana Mendelski for facilitating this group of educational advocates through our process.

And we thank the families and friends of all us writers for giving us the privilege of a week to focus on this project.

And we recognize that many Indigenous Nations have longstanding relationships with the territories upon which York University campuses are located, where this book was written, that precede the establishment of York University. York University acknowledges its presence on the traditional territory of many Indigenous Nations. The area known as Tkaronto has been cared for by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat. It is now home to many First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities. We acknowledge the current treaty holders, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. The territory on which this book was written is subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region.

ISBN: ebook 978-1-0697553-0-8
 book 978-1-0697553-1-5

*Collectively edited by authors. Published by Franz Newland
Cover photo by Sam Javanrouh*

Table of contents

Chapter 1: An invitation to the reader	23
About this book	23
Our call to adventure	25
Our process	25
Positionality	26
Chapter 2: Opening education for learning through life	28
Where is education headed?	28
A Call to Action	29
Join us	34
Chapter 3: Resisting the Learning Crisis	36
What Are We Seeing?	36
Accessibility and Inclusion: Beyond Getting Through the Door	37
Agency: Reclaiming Purpose and Power	38
Humanity: Rebuilding the Ethical Core of Education	39
Creativity: Reclaiming the Imagination and Curiosity	40
Final Thoughts	41
Chapter 4: Stories from and for the (r)evolution	42
Stories from the past	42
Stories from the present	48
Stories from our futures	53
Chapter 5: Opening learning for transformation	63
Calling for a (r)evolution	63
Beyond Design Tweaks	65
Educational Utopia	67
Chapter 6: Learning Through Life	71
Expanding spaces for learning through life	71
Reclaiming spaces for learning through life	72
Rebuilding spaces for learning through life	73
Supporting civic literacy for Learning Through Life	74

Because we need you!

How do we get there?	75
Chapter 7: Sustaining learning transformation through communities	76
Education at a Crossroads: the Promise of Community	76
Communities Supporting Learning	77
Communities Supported by Learners	78
Communities as learners	81
Pathways for Collective Transformation	82
Chapter 8: The Advocate's Toolbox	85
Tools for Driving Systemic Change	85
Tool 1: Sustained Optimism and Conviction	86
Tool 2: Community for Change	87
Tool 3: Knowledge of the System	88
Tool 4: Pragmatism and clarity	90
Tool 5. The reflexive advocate	92
Putting the Toolbox to Work	94
Chapter 9: The road ahead	95
This begins, and ends, as an invitation.	95
Where will we now journey?	96
Chapter 10: Afterword	98
On the writing of this book	98
About the Authors	100
Appendix A: Unsettling the Defaults	106
Futures Thinking and Design: Naming the Dystopia to Backcast the Alternatives	106
Designing Dystopias to Reveal Possibilities	107
Toward what comes next	115
Glossary	117
References / Reading list	161
For further reading	166

Chapter 1: An invitation to the reader

Are you disenchanted, disconnected, or in despair when you think about what learning has become and how learning is undervalued? Have you ever allowed yourself to imagine a different future for learners, supporting learning or simply being in learning spaces? What might that look like, feel like, sound like? And what would it take for you to build that future with us?

We warmly invite you to read this book to engage in that task. This book is not intended to explain the need to change learning. We hope that our stories resonate and inspire. We invite you to join us as advocates for educational change. Your insights, experiences, perspectives are essential. This is not work to be done alone. It is the hard work of creating a vision of what could be, and creating a community to get there. It requires us to co-create the catalysts for change.

Join us as we engage openly, listen actively and act together. We look forward to your participation.

About this book

The foundations of learning in Canada are cracking. Many no longer trust our educational systems to meet the needs of learners, educators, or communities. The disillusionment is real and growing. We can no longer watch from the sidelines. We are choosing instead to step forward, to build community, and to reimagine the future of learning as something more meaningful, more equitable, and more humane. This book is a tool to spark that shift, to prompt action, encourage sharing, and support intentional change that can be sustained.

This is a journey. Each section leads us deeper into the possibilities of reconstruction, of educational practices, structures, and cultures that reflect

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care, justice, and collective responsibility. This is about building something worth believing in.

The book is organised into sections, each offering a distinct lens on the challenges and opportunities we face. We open up with our why. We then explain the courageous journey we are taking, and provide context on the eroding foundation of learning that we see.

After this opening, we dive into stories. Stories are vital for this work. They engage, compel, and move us to action. An imagined future challenges us to rethink our fixed ideas and framings, to co-imagine something different. These stories lead us to four paths: the (r)evolution we can see, the drive for learning throughout life, the glue we need to connect across learning, and our shift to open learning to embrace the change we must create.

Next, we offer you our advocate's toolbox to help us navigate change. We invite you to think about how we can build this future together.

And we close with a reflection on the story of this book, itself a unique journey of courageous educational advocacy, as a way to imagine the possible.

You are welcome to begin wherever you feel engaged. Skim, dive deep, jump between chapters. This is your learning journey. There is no one right way to read this book. Bring to it what you want and take from it what you need.

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Our call to adventure

This is not a hero's journey. Indeed there are many rich story metaphors on this small blue dot of earth that we could draw from. But we do ask you to begin with some simple questions:

- Have you ever imagined another way of learning, of teaching, of simply being in educational spaces?
- What might that look like, feel like, sound like?
- What would it take to begin building it together?

This book is a starting point, not the final word. We invite you into dialogue; with us, with each other, and with yourself. Whether you arrive with lived experience, academic knowledge, or simple curiosity, your voice has a place here. Your questions matter. Your presence matters.

Bring your stories. Bring your doubts. Bring your hopes.

Join us as we engage openly, listen actively, and reflect collectively.

Our process

We are a collective of thirteen Canadian practitioner scholars, educators, and learning advocates who carry with us a rich diversity of perspectives, lived experiences, and professional expertise. Each of us has walked different paths through education, as learners, as teachers, as disruptors. What binds us is a shared refusal to accept the status quo. We have all seen how the current

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systems fail too many times. We have all asked: What if learning could be something else?

This book was born from that question.

We came together, willingly, urgently, and optimistically, for one intense week of collective reflection, deep listening, co-imagining, and co-creation. It was not a retreat. It was a convergence. A gathering of minds and hearts determined to write not only about what is wrong, but about what could be right.

Together, we have shaped this book as an invitation to action. Not a blueprint. Not a policy prescription. It is the start of a journey.

Positionality

We are practitioner researchers, educators, and advocates working in the Canadian learning context. We recognize that our approaches, observations, and analyses are shaped by our identities, backgrounds, and personal experiences within a society characterized by profound cultural diversity and a plurality of perspectives.

Aware of the diversity and richness of the cultural mosaic that makes up Canada, we strive to adopt a reflective and critical stance. We recognize the presence, both visible and invisible, of power dynamics, colonization, challenges related to representation and equity. We acknowledge the many contributions, recognized and unrecognized, of diverse communities to Canadian society.

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We situate our knowledge production within a perspective that respects situated knowledge, is attentive to the plurality of voices, and is committed to contributing to an inclusive and respectful intercultural dialogue.

The voices of many authors and ideas, present in different ways in this process, are reflected in this book. The process of open co-creation aims to collectively build understanding through collaboration and iteration.

This is open learning.

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Chapter 2: Opening education for learning through life

Where is education headed?

Across society, deepening inequalities, environmental breakdown, and the growing control of technology threaten democracy, dignity, and the future of learning. Education is increasingly shaped by standardisation, surveillance, and exclusion, while digital systems reinforce bias and contribute to ecological harm. Learning itself is being treated as a product to be bought, sold, and measured through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), reducing it to a series of transactions. The emphasis has shifted from learning as a transformative, reflective process to a deliverable end product. In response, this book aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals by reclaiming learning as a space for critical inquiry, social justice, and collective transformation.

Commodification and disconnection

The fundamental relationships at the heart of education are being steadily eroded: between learners, educators, knowledge, and communities. Barriers to access remain high. Even when learners and educators meet in the learning space, many are disconnected. The spark — a love of learning for its own sake — is fading.

Education should nurture curiosity, creativity, and a passion for learning across life. Instead, it too often functions as a system of compliance. The risk is not just disengagement, but a loss of purpose in our learning, careers, and our lives.

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Standardisation and managerialism

The push to standardise teaching, and to present this as common sense, is a key feature of managerialism. Evidence-based models are increasingly used to justify rigid rules, narrow targets, and fixed protocols for learning. This erases nuance. Standardised systems overlook the genuine needs of diverse learners and diminish the creative, context-specific work of educators. Inclusive learning requires flexibility. Belonging cannot be imposed by a template. Learning grows through adaptation, by recognising and valuing differences.

A Call to Action

Education must be reclaimed as a public good. Learning spaces should invite growth. That is, they should create open learning spaces that are welcoming, inclusive, and built on relationships; they should enable experimentation, creativity, and collaboration, and they should inspire us to be learners through our lives and our communities.

Let this be our collective commitment: to work together to build learning through life that is bold, open, inclusive, and ready for the future.

Becoming a learning advocate

Advocacy in education takes many forms. For some, this may involve leading public debates or enacting policy changes. For others, it means choosing quiet but powerful refusals, such as declining to participate in initiatives that perpetuate exclusion or creating space for marginalised voices in everyday interactions. Learning advocacy lives in these moments of agency, both large

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and small. It recognises that personal circumstances shape our capacity to speak out and that strategy and care are part of resistance. Everyone can be an advocate from their own place, with their own resources.

This is an invitation for all of us to see ourselves as stewards of learning. Education is not confined to classrooms; it lives in families, neighbourhoods, and communities. Whether we are teachers, students, caregivers, or community members, we all have a role in shaping what education can be. As educational advocates, we share a responsibility to co-create a vision of learning that is equitable, inclusive, and empowering.

Building such a vision means imagining and constructing learning environments where every individual feels a sense of belonging and possibility and where cycles of exclusion and inequity are actively dismantled. Working together, we can ensure our learning spaces are inclusive and that the rights and needs of every learner are upheld.

Education is ready for a profound shift from a rigid, one-size-fits-all model to one that is connected, flexible, and deeply human. The pandemic revealed the fragility of existing systems while also catalysing significant innovation. Simultaneously, growing concern for mental health and well-being has amplified demands for more humane approaches. This moment invites us to move beyond box-ticking and towards an education that is resilient, inclusive, and future ready.

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If we choose this alternative path, we can shift education towards recognising the complexity of reality, valuing diversity, linking knowledge, and preparing learners for uncertainty and collective responsibility. As Edgar Morin points out, it is not a matter of passing on knowledge, but of learning to live, think, and shape one's life in a complex and uncertain world.

Why do we need courage?

As members of Canada's educational community, many of us recognise the tensions and limitations of the current system. But recognition alone is not enough. Awareness must lead to action.

Every transformation meets resistance. Change is disruptive. There will be obstacles that stand in our way. These obstacles are different across our varying learning spaces.

Transforming our education systems takes more than just new rules. It means moving past resistance and finding the motivation to get involved. Change challenges our well-established schemas, cognitive pathways, and routines. The role of the education system should be to make change accessible and meaningful. It is about having the courage to question the way things are and to imagine the way they could be. Facilitating this change requires patience, resilience, and persistence.

Much is already being asked of us. We already feel stretched to the limit. Telling each other to be brave, without supporting each other or sharing the tools and resources we need, is unfair. Courage is not about one person standing against the world; it is about finding strength in each other to question old habits and

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try new things. That kind of strength comes from the power of collaboration through community building and co-creation.

Forcing change from the top down often fails. For transformation to take root, it must also come from the bottom up: from teachers, learners, families, and communities. When we take ownership of change, we gain the power to influence policy and outcomes. It's time to create a counterculture of change: a culture driven by communities, which encourages exchange, co-construction, and innovation.

Courage in education means acting on our convictions, even in the face of fear, resistance, or uncertainty. It means stepping beyond comfort, taking risks, and being willing to learn through failure. This kind of courage fuels resilience, deepens commitment, and opens the door to collective transformation rooted in social justice.

Of course, the path is not always easy. Obstacles like feeling isolated, doubting your right to speak up, or lacking support can stand in the way. Even if we were not ready before, we now understand that change is not optional. It is necessary.

Being courageous together

Encouraging each other to be courageous is not enough. We must also create the conditions that make courage possible. Not everyone has the same power, privilege, or position to feel safe enough to take risks within the current system. While some may benefit from the security of institutional support, others face real barriers, including precarious contracts, marginalisation, a lack

Learning advocacy for educational change

of recognition, or fear of retaliation. We must acknowledge these asymmetries and avoid romanticising courage as something equally accessible to all.

Courage, then, must be understood through multiple lenses, including power, positionality, and intersectionality, while recognising that different forms of discrimination intertwine and that not everyone faces the same challenges, even if they share a common role. Recognising these dynamics helps us move from an unconditional call to action toward a more inclusive and pragmatic understanding of what courage can look like in different spaces.

This is where communities play a vital role. Collective courage grows in environments where people feel supported, not isolated, and where they can take small steps within a culture that values reflection, care, and shared learning. Transformation often begins not with grand gestures, but with small, intentional acts. We must create pathways that meet people where they are and offer spaces to explore, question, and imagine without fear.

In these spaces, learning becomes a relational and collaborative process, shaped by everyday experiences and grounded in real-life challenges. When people come together to exchange knowledge, support one another, and build connections across neighbourhoods, organisations, and institutions, they create the conditions for meaningful change. These interdependent local networks strengthen our collective ability to learn and to reimagine the future together.

Embrace a growth mindset

Embracing a growth mindset is a key support for courage in advocacy.

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Growth is a continuous lifelong journey that moves vertically through formal structures, but also horizontally, through personal experiences, relationships, and informal learning.

Growth invites us to say, “I am not there yet.” It takes courage to admit gaps in our own knowing, to face discomfort, and to trust in our collective capacity to evolve.

Growth requires us to step out of our comfort zone. It strengthens our capacity to take risks, to leverage failure for growth, and to embrace uncertainty with openness rather than fear.

Growth is about moving past the familiar to explore the unknown; it’s having the courage to ask for directions, connect with other travellers, and bravely step forward even when you can’t see the full path ahead. And it’s knowing where to find the tools to support your new discoveries.

Growth is not about perfection or certainty. It requires movement, however slight, and a belief that transformation is possible. Systems do not change in a single sweep. They change when we dare to think differently, act intentionally, and support one another in doing the same.

Growth is not a solitary act; it is building the courage to participate in a shared transformation.

Join us

In a rapidly changing world, our learning spaces must become sites of real, lasting change. The old, top-down approaches are no longer sustainable.

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Uncertainty, inequality, and technological disruption require more than quick fixes. They call for a shared commitment to adapt, grow, and act with intention.

Resistance, in this context, is not about opposition for its own sake. It is about standing against what dehumanises, excludes, disconnects, or commodifies learning and standing for justice, care, and transformation. It means questioning inherited systems and imagining alternatives rooted in solidarity, dignity, and joy.

Transformation takes root when people across roles, communities, and generations come together. Education thrives when it is shaped through collaboration, grounded in care, driven by purpose, and open to possibility.

This moment invites us to return to the heart of learning: connection, critical reflection, joy, and shared responsibility. When we feel connected to what we learn and to one another, education becomes not only more inclusive but more powerful. Everyone benefits.

Please join us. Help us reimagine education as something bold, responsive, and deeply human. Let's build learning environments where all voices matter, where purpose is restored, and where the future is shaped not by fear, but by collective hope.

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Chapter 3: Resisting the Learning Crisis

What Are We Seeing?

The commodification of education has generated or worsened the most significant challenges we face in education today. Over recent decades, learning institutions have rebranded themselves as global enterprises in the business of producing market-ready graduates. They have adopted industrial-era models, colonial legacies, and bureaucratic governance designed for control and standardization rather than adaptability or equity. They have become change- and risk-averse, immobilised by rigid hierarchies, laden with outdated policies, and resistant to bottom-up innovation. As a result, institutions often operate within siloed structures, where interest holders work in isolation, limiting collaboration and innovation.

Educational institutions are increasingly responding to policy and funding pressures that do not align with educational values, like critical thinking, innovation, collaboration. It's important to acknowledge this context, not to justify it, but to recognize the historical and structural forces that have led to the current state of education.

Rather than dwell on what is not working within educational systems today, we would like to shift focus to four clusters of resistance that offer us hope for the future—accessibility and inclusion; agency and empowerment; humanity; and critical-creative imagination that are effectively the antidotes to today's most significant educational challenges.

Accessibility and Inclusion: Beyond Getting Through the Door

Today's Challenge

Accessibility and inclusion have historically been aspirational goals in education, yet commodification has intensified structural exclusions. As universities operate increasingly like businesses, access is often shaped by the ability to pay, technological literacy, and institutional fit. This prioritizes profit over equitable participation.

The Key Issues

Access is more than just gaining entry. While educational institutions often claim to be more inclusive than ever, many learners remain excluded, not necessarily at the threshold, but once they are inside. Commodification has only worsened this landscape. Education is increasingly treated as a transaction: if you can pay, you belong; if you do not fit the mould, you are left behind. Tuition costs and rising student debt act as economic gatekeepers. Meanwhile, standardised digital platforms often exclude the needs of neurodiverse learners, differently abled learners, or those from non-dominant language groups. Metrics of efficiency undermine inclusive and individualised pedagogies that require time, cultural responsiveness, and sustained relational effort.

The Path Forward

True inclusion cannot be reduced to poster children, slogans, or checklists. It must be reimagined as an ongoing, relational process. This requires educational institutions to move beyond performative access and begin asking deeper

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questions: not only “who is allowed in?” but “who thrives here?” and “whose knowledge is valued?” This means embedding universal design and trauma-informed teaching in all learning environments. It means building pedagogies that sustain, value, and leverage the power of difference rather than erase it. Most of all, it requires a structural shift: one that recognizes inclusion not as charity or policy, but as justice. Anything less renders accessibility a performance. An illusion with no real transformation.

Agency: Reclaiming Purpose and Power

Today's Challenge

In corporatised educational institutions, agency has been eroded by top-down managerialism and performance-based governance. Educators and learners alike are increasingly governed by systems that prize efficiency over meaning and impact. Teaching becomes compliance and content delivery. Learning becomes passive absorption. No one feels genuine ownership of the process or its outcomes.

The Key Issues

This erosion appears in many forms. Educators are disempowered by precarious contracts and stripped of meaningful freedom of inquiry by the rise of audit culture through a system that values metrics over mentorship and compliance over curiosity. Decisions about pedagogy and learning materials are often made without consulting those who actually teach. Learners, meanwhile, are recast as consumers of standardised content, rather than co-creators of

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knowledge. Risk, experimentation, and dissent are not banned outright, but slowly worn down by exhaustion, paperwork, and institutional indifference.

The Path Forward

Reclaiming agency demands more than individual freedom. It requires institutional trust. Pedagogical agency must be reconnected to professional dignity and learner autonomy: the ability to learn with integrity, to innovate without penalty, and to adapt to context and need. This calls for shared policy making that decentralizes decision-making and values local, context-specific knowledge. When educators and learners are given the power to shape their own learning spaces, they are invited into that same freedom.

Humanity: Rebuilding the Ethical Core of Education

Today's Challenge

The human dimensions of education have been dismissed by systems obsessed with metrics and measurable outcomes. The logic of datafication reduces emotion and complexity from threats to productivity. Rising mental health challenges among both learners, educators and staff are met with Band-Aid solutions or fragmented responses. Burnout is interpreted as personal failure rather than a consequence of institutional design.

The Key Issues

Too often, educational spaces ignore the full identities of those within them. Learning spaces rarely make room for emotion, for discomfort, for

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contradiction, for individuality. Power imbalances, especially those rooted in race, gender, class, ability, and colonial histories, are silenced in favour of a supposedly neutral curriculum. But neutrality is a myth. It is a political choice that privileges dominant norms and cultures.

The Path Forward

To reinforce the humanity of education, we must treat care as foundational, not as an afterthought. It requires acknowledging that learners and educators are not disembodied minds, but people who are complex, situated, and relational. Institutions must shift from individualised wellness rhetoric that puts the onus on individuals to structural practices of care. This includes rewarding collaboration, empathy, and shared responsibility. Education must become a space where people can show up fully and be met with ethical engagement rather than bureaucratic indifference.

Creativity: Reclaiming the Imagination and Curiosity

Today's Challenge

Critical and creative thinking, once the lifeblood of education, has been displaced by market-driven curricula that prioritize employability over thoughtfulness. The purpose of learning is not just to build transferable skills for the workforce, but more importantly, to cultivate deep and critical thinking. Even when creativity is encouraged, it is often siloed within the arts, while professional and STEM disciplines remain stripped of imagination and curiosity. Imagination disrupts. It invites learners to ask uncomfortable

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questions and to envision alternative futures. It challenges power. Critical thinking, particularly when it interrogates whiteness, colonialism, or systemic inequality, is increasingly dismissed as ideological, even as neoliberalism remains the unchallenged norm.

The Path Forward

Critical and design thinking, speculative methods, and collaborative inquiry should be embedded across disciplines. Learners must be given space to sit with ambiguity, to embrace uncertainty, and to engage with real-world complexity. This is not academic fluff; it is civic necessity.

Our goal is not just to train learners to become compliant workers. It is to cultivate curious, courageous people who can question, imagine, and reshape the worlds they inherit. This is what the world needs.

Final Thoughts

Accessibility, agency, humanity, and imagination are not isolated reforms, they are interwoven, interdependent values. Agency nurtures critical thinking. Inclusion makes our shared humanity visible. Creativity opens space for alternative futures. Together, they form a counter-narrative to corporatised education, one that prioritizes people over profit, process over product, and relationships over rankings.

This is not a nostalgic call to return to what was, but an invitation to build what could be: an educational system rooted in justice, care, and collective possibility.

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Chapter 4: Stories from and for the (r)evolution

This chapter gathers a constellation of narratives, each one a fragment of truth, imagination, or possibility. Some are drawn from lived experience and moments we witnessed or were entrusted with. Others are speculative fictions, visions that stretch toward the futures we long for, or confront the truths we hesitate to name.

Each story stands alone, yet together they form a chorus. Penned by different contributors, they vary in tone, rhythm, and form. This variation is intentional. At one point, we considered weaving them into a single, seamless voice. But instead, we chose to honour their differences to let each voice speak in its own cadence, unfiltered, and true.

A central thread in this book is the belief in many ways of knowing, many ways of learning, many ways of expressing. It felt only right to reflect that in our own process. As lifelong learners and storytellers, we embraced the diversity of our creative approaches, not as a flaw, but as a strength.

We offer this mosaic with care and intention. It is not a map, but an invitation to listen with curiosity, to reflect with openness, and to find meaning in the spaces between the stories.

Stories from the past

The stories from the past, case studies in truth, highlight ways in which systems that were designed to suppress learning have been leveraged as tools of

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oppression. Though we frame them as stories of the past, we know they echo loudly in the present and threaten to spill forward into the future.

Classroom Without Windows

Winter, 1920. Mary wakes in the iron-cold air of the Shingwauk Residential School dormitory. She is eleven. The day she arrived, they cut her hair, shearing away the thick black braids her mother had woven that morning. Ojibwe's words still sit on her tongue, heavy and warm, but she knows she will be punished for speaking them. The silence here is a new language she must learn.

After prayers, mumbling under the watchful eyes of the nuns (also known as sisters or supervisors), she is marched with the other children into a classroom without windows. The lessons are a litany of foreign sounds: English, arithmetic, obedience. Speak only when spoken to. Ask no questions. The world shrinks to the scrape of chalk on a blackboard and the hard line of the teacher's mouth. After class, the learning continues. She scrubs floors until her knuckles are raw and peels a mountain of potatoes for supper. The school calls this training. She calls it erasure.

This story is a fiction based on a collection of testimonials.

Commentary: Mary's story is not fictional. It reflects a deliberate system of cultural erasure sanctioned by Canadian law, notably the 1876 Indian Act. Residential schools did not fail—they functioned as intended: to dispossess, assimilate, and sever Indigenous children from their cultures and communities. In these institutions, the classroom was not a space of learning but a site of violence. Language, spirituality, and identity were punished; obedience and servitude were taught. The curriculum was not incomplete, it was designed to suppress Indigenous knowledge and reinforce settler dominance. This was not a pedagogical failure, but a moral one. Under the guise of education, these schools perpetuated what the Truth and Reconciliation Commission rightly

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named cultural genocide. They trained submission and erased futures in the name of civilization.

And yet, children resisted. In whispers, songs, and acts of care, they preserved their identities. These quiet refusals were radical, sustaining a lineage of resistance and reminding us that even in the darkest places, learning—and unlearning—can be a form of defiance and survival.

The Archive Excludes Us

The textbook was glossy, newly issued, and thick with the weight of official stories. Seventeen-year-old Marsha Campbell already knew what she wouldn't find. Sitting in her Grade 12 Canadian history class in Scarborough, she flipped through the pages, searching for a trace of her own story. She looked for her grandfather, who arrived from Kingston in 1967, ready to build a life. Nothing.

There were a few paragraphs on the Underground Railroad, a single photo of Viola Desmond, and a half-page on residential schools, carefully worded to sound like a tragedy of the distant past. But the Caribbean domestic workers, the nurses and labourers who built this city, the immigration crackdowns of the 1970s? Not even a footnote.

Her teacher saw her searching. He leaned in and frowned sympathetically. "I know," he muttered, his voice low. "The curriculum doesn't really cover that."

Marsha nodded. It was a familiar silence. She'd heard it from the guidance counselor, who "forgot" to tell her about the advanced academic stream. She'd heard it from the drama teacher, who once asked if her natural hair was a "costume." She'd heard it in the phone call from the principal, explaining why her ten-year-old brother was being suspended for "disrespect." The curriculum wasn't just silent about her; it was carefully crafted to ignore her.

This story is a fiction based on a collection of testimonials.

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Commentary: Marsha's exclusion from the textbook is not accidental, it reflects a deliberate narrative that upholds whiteness as the norm while erasing Black and immigrant histories. The official curriculum is less about truth than about national myth-making, where selective memory defines who is seen, heard, and valued. Her family's legacy—of labour, resistance, and resilience—is left out, not due to oversight, but by design. The archive extends beyond textbooks; it lives in disciplinary policies, course outlines, and whose voices are legitimised. Schools may celebrate diversity rhetorically, but too often suppress the political and present-day realities of Black life.

Marsha's real education came from beyond the classroom, from family stories, community knowledge, and the refusal to be forgotten. Her experience reveals that a challenging curriculum is not just about adding content, it's about confronting the systems that decide which stories matter. The work of building a new archive starts with those who refuse silence.

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Learning Under Watch

The hallway went silent, but it wasn't the silence of calm. It was the silence of compliance. Jerome Taylor, fifteen, sat motionless as a uniformed officer passed his classroom door for the third time in ten minutes. The fire alarm had just been shut off, but the emergency felt like it was just beginning.

The officer didn't need to speak. His presence was the point. He watched. He wrote. He marked.

Moments earlier, Jerome's friend had been pulled from the line, late for class again. No questions asked, no explanation offered. The buses had stalled that morning after another police "safety check" in the neighbourhood, but late, was late. The record would say noncompliance, not context.

This was school under the School Resource Officer (SRO) program. It had been sold to parents as a way to keep kids safe. But the officers weren't in every school. They were here, at Emery Collegiate, in schools like his. The uniform in the hallway was policy. The officers patrolled during lunch, leaned against lockers during assemblies, and stood beside principals during fire drills. They were not guests; they were fixtures.

Jerome knew the choreography. Eyes down. Voice level. A hall pass became a test. A wrong tone was a threat. Innocence had to be proven daily, and even then, the presumption of guilt lingered. This was not a performance he volunteered for; it was survival, a lesson passed down through generations of students learning to shrink inside systems never built for them.

What Jerome experienced was not exceptional. It was architectural.

Across the city, Black students described the same reality. Hallways were gauntlets. Classrooms were cells. This was the school-to-prison pipeline made literally: a corridor patrolled like a courthouse, where a ten-year-old child could be read as defiant, dangerous, and disposable. The child was erased; the suspect was manufactured. This was not a flaw in the system. This was the system.

Learning advocacy for educational change

But by 2017, the students had had enough. Black organizers, many of them veterans of this daily policing, led a campaign to get the SROs out. At board meetings, they presented evidence and spoke the truth: the staff were not mentors, but guards who made the school feel like a prison. The school board's own review proved them right. Over half of the students surveyed said the officers made them feel anxious or unsafe.

The program was suspended. It was not reformed. It was a rupture, forced by students who refused to be managed any longer.

Even then, the surveillance continued. It just changed its shape, re-emerging in behavioural flags, predictive software, and guidance referrals. The system evolves to sustain its reach.

This was the real curriculum, not the one in any textbook. It was a carceral curriculum, and its lessons were clear: Be quiet. Stay low. Expect surveillance. You are not safe here. You are a risk to be managed.

The message was not just disciplinary; it was existential. Any breath out of place could become a report, a detention, a charge. The school was not teaching Jerome algebra; it was teaching him his place.

And so Jerome sits still, eyes fixed on the door as the officer passes again. He does not flinch. He learned the lesson perfectly. School is not a sanctuary. It is surveillance. His education continues—not the curriculum the province published, but the one the system imposed. This, too, is pedagogy. And it has a history.

This story is a fiction based on a collection of testimonials.

Commentary: Jerome's story highlights a hidden curriculum of surveillance and control in schools, especially those serving Black communities. Programs like SROs don't just enforce rules, they teach students they are suspects, not scholars. Even when removed, surveillance reappears in new forms, reinforcing mistrust and exclusion. This is not a policy failure, but a systemic design. Yet,

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student-led movements have shown that this structure can be challenged, reminding us that education must be about dignity, not discipline.

Stories from the present

Our next set of stories is not bound to a specific moment. They do not declare arrival, but offer beginnings, the seeds of the (r)evolution. These are hopeful glimpses, not of where we are, but of where we might go. They gesture toward possible paths forward as stories to nurture, to build upon, to grow into a stronger and more connected community.

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Learning Together for Community Safety

I was excited to be a partner for the Cross-campus capstone classroom (C4) course at York University. I had been told the course was designed to bring community partners, learners, and academics together from across campus and disciplines to solve real-world problems. I got to campus a little early and had the chance to meet all the other community partners for this course. I was impressed by the varied backgrounds they had and the different ways they looked at the world.

We were then ushered into the room as a couple of the teaching teams wrapped up their introduction. I was surprised how the faculty members placed themselves in the room when I first arrived. I was accustomed to a different order of authority in my own lessons.

“We are on our own learning journeys, so we will be huddling too as you meet with your partners,” one of them announced as we walked in.

I could see they were working on removing some hierarchy (although I understand they were still grading their students... this was still a University course, after all). After our introductions, I was introduced to my ‘team 6’. This was a diverse group of learners from disciplines including computer science, criminology, education, and social work. Everyone seemed on an equal footing as they came together to solve ‘my’ problem. I left particularly energised by that first conversation. Discussing the problem with people who looked at it so differently sparked so many new ideas and really opened the door to new ways for me to think about it.

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So what was 'my' problem? I was looking to help remove barriers to education for learners with precarious or no immigration status in Ontario. Even though education is recognised as a right in Ontario, I work every day with students who face many barriers to accessing K-12 education. Many do not know that access to education is a legal right and that there is free, confidential help available (from my organization and a small handful of others, legal clinics, etc.). With the increasing popularity of AI, I had more and more clients who used tools like ChatGPT to find information anonymously. This was beginning to worry me greatly because of how many misleading answers the tools provide, framed in a U.S. context. One of my clients came in, believing there were protections in place for undocumented students, like the DACA, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy, but this is a U.S. policy, and Canada does not provide any similar promise or protection.

I heard from my team (yes - I was part of this team!) a number of times over the next few weeks as they enthusiastically tackled the challenge head-on. After some months of research and consultation with their course instructors (aptly called "project shepherds" for facilitating the learners' process rather than dictating it), I arrived for my 'design check-in' with my team. The team had told me ahead of time that they were working on a mobile app. The app's goal was to connect parents, guardians, and learners with precarious or no immigration status to trusted community organizations and legal support. With all the great research they had done and the depth of their questions, I could not wait to see their detailed design, but I must admit the idea of an app did concern me.

I let my team present their design to me, but it was clear they were missing some key information, and so I needed to give them some new critical questions to consider. There were some potentially very serious implications of asking a vulnerable person to download an app and provide personal information.

"Do you know where your data will be stored?"

"In the cloud," answered one of them.

Learning advocacy for educational change

“Yes... but do you know which country? Canada's privacy laws are fairly strong, but many cloud storage spaces are in the U.S. or China. They have very different and far less protective data laws. Can you imagine what risks some of our clients might face if their data crosses the border? This could expose the very learners you are trying to help with significant harm.”

I realised my questions might have come across as a little harsh. My team looked a little crestfallen that I had not been quite as enthusiastic as they had hoped about their design, but I was still impressed with how far they had come already, and they eventually left with my concerns about privacy implications, but also with a spring in their step. They, in fact, went back to the drawing board.

After conducting more research and consultation, I was truly impressed with their final product. In just a few short weeks, they had torn down their app and produced a customised, closed AI chatbot. The benefit of using a closed AI chatbot for this target audience is that it only provides information to users that it has been fed intentionally by organizations such as mine, preventing it from connecting to an open AI that could provide misleading or legally incorrect information.

Ultimately, this project's success was driven by its interdisciplinary approach. My team's different perspectives were essential to developing a safe and effective solution for the vulnerable populations I work with every day.

This story is fictional based on true events.

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We Are Never Too Old

I was talking to this young lawyer once, a really sharp guy. I was curious how he ended up in law, so I asked him the usual question: "Is your family full of lawyers?"

He said, "No, not at all. My mom was my biggest inspiration."

To be honest, I was expecting a story about some high-powered executive or a well-known community leader. But what he told me next was way more impressive.

He told me that for years, while raising a big family, his mom worked as a cook in a hospital. And she was not just cooking; she was paying attention. Day in and day out, she watched the doctors. She saw how they handled emergencies, how they talked to patients, and she saw the good and the bad.

After years of observing, she came to a simple conclusion: she could do that job. And not just do it, but she could probably be even better than most of the doctors she saw every day.

So at 40 years old, while still working full-time and raising her kids, she decided to go for it. She went back to school just to get her high school diploma. The lawyer told me he has this clear memory of her sitting at the kitchen table late at night, studying after her long shifts at the hospital. That was just the first step. After that came all the pre-med classes, the brutal entrance exams, and finally, medical school itself.

He said that watching her go through all that—seeing how she never, ever gave up—was all the motivation he ever needed.

He paused for a second, then looked right at me, and you could just hear the pride in his voice. He said, "You know who one of the senior emergency doctors is at that hospital now? The same one where she used to work in the kitchen? That's her."

This story is fictional based on true events.

Stories from our futures

We end with imagined stories of the future, narratives that stretch beyond the present to explore what might unfold. Some trace paths of hope, where care, courage, and collective action bring about meaningful change. Others sketch darker possibilities: what could unravel if we remain still, silent, or afraid.

We do not label them. Instead, we offer them as provocations. Which stories hold the seeds of the future we long for? Which ones warn of the consequences of inaction? That is for you to decide.

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Override protocol

The first time Josie entered the classroom, the walls were already speaking. Not with words, but with a low, operating hum—the frequency of deletion.

The system had already processed them. Josianne Fleurimond was shortened to Josie. A teacher's report flagged their Kreyòl accent within days. Their language wasn't wrong, just noncompliant. The school called itself a "welcoming space," but every hallway felt like a firewall, and Josie was a foreign packet of data, about to be dropped.

During Emancipation Month, a poster of Viola Desmond smiled above the office printer. Underneath it, a QR code linked to a three-minute video titled "Being Black in Canada." Josie watched it during lunch. It said nothing about Haiti, about the Kompa their mother played on Sunday mornings, or why they had to translate for their grandmother at the clinic. It said nothing about Catherine Flon or the Citadel.

That was the day Josie understood. This wasn't education. This was containment disguised as care. The syllabus didn't forget them; it was programmed to overwrite them.

At home, Josie's father still called Montréal a temporary glitch in a much longer program. "This country was never built for us," he'd say in Kreyòl. "But we did not arrive empty."

He kept a locked box in the closet, full of spiral notebooks, union flyers, and church cassettes. In it was a worn-out USB stick labeled 'SAK PASE: 1971–1994.' One night, Josie plugged it into their school-issued tablet. The interface lagged, then flickered. Files began to open on their own, folders of a curriculum that had been rejected: Haitian Anti-Colonial Thought. Flagged Users: Marie-Célie Agnant, Jean-Claude Charles. Upload Failed: Voiceprint Archive, Montréal-Côte-des-Neiges, 1983.

It wasn't a glitch. It was the system's source code.

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The next morning, Josie's tablet wouldn't boot. The screen read: Incompatible Language Detected. Reset Required. At school, the erasure was everywhere. The library's books on Haiti were filed under "Foreign Affairs." The social studies textbook mentioned the country only in a sidebar about "earthquake recovery." In French class, their essay on Kompa was returned with a red line through the word "liberation." The teacher's note read: Interesting, but not relevant to Quebec curriculum outcomes.

The system wasn't broken. It was working perfectly.

Josie stopped raising their hand. They started recording instead. They collected voice notes from an aunt's poetry group, an uncle's Kompa rehearsals, and a grandmother's nightly prayers. They taught their tablet's voiceprint software to recognize Kreyòl cadences, to stop flagging their accent as an error. Soon, their device no longer auto-corrected their family's names. It translated school forms into a language that felt like home.

For their science project, they submitted an analysis of Kompa and kinetic resistance patterns. They included a mixtape. It crashed the school's submission portal.

The vice principal called them in. "This isn't appropriate," he said, holding the tablet as if it were contraband.

Josie smiled. "It's not for you."

The code began to spread. Other students in Côte-des-Neiges and Laval found the patch. It wasn't flashy. It just worked. It lets them submit essays in Kreyòl and build historical timelines that included the Bois Cayman ceremony. It lets them access oral histories their school libraries had never catalogued.

The school board called it "non-standard content dissemination." The community called it liberation.

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Eventually, Josie stopped trying to hack the old system. They built a new one. It started as a Saturday workshop, then became a bilingual pod, then a fully encrypted learning network. Francophone black educators designed the curriculum. Students set the pace. Language was the interface. Memory was the medium. Sovereignty was the standard.

They called it Klas Tanbou. The Class of the Drum. It did not ask the Ministry for validation. It made the Ministry obsolete.

In a classroom in a repurposed community hall, the lesson begins. There are no smartboards, only storytellers. Haitian elders share histories, no translator required. The air is thick with poetry and the syntax of a language that refuses to be forgotten. The low, operational hum of the old system is gone, replaced by something older, more resonant. A beat drops. It's Kompa. The classroom no longer sounds like a system. It sounds like home.

The Glue

The year is 2142. Dissent is a forgotten concept. Misinformation, a historical artifact. Humanity moves in perfect, thoughtless harmony, guided by the Dynamic.

The Dynamic is a neural implant, a gentle, omniscient voice integrated at birth. It dictates when you wake, what you eat, the most efficient route to your assigned task, and precisely how to perform it, moment by moment. It is the operating system of the human race.

Josie's Task was calibrating nutrient paste. Every morning, they entered their immaculately clean pod. Left hand: adjust dial 4c to 52.3 degrees. Right hand: monitor consistency on screen two. They never had to think, only obey. Their movements were fluid, precise, and utterly devoid of intent. With a 99.8% efficiency rating, Josie was, by every metric that mattered, a successful person.

One day, a pipe burst. Not in Josie's pod, but in the one adjacent. A torrent of neon-blue fluid—the dye that gave the nutrient paste its signature glow—flooded their station. It was unscheduled. It was messy. It was an anomaly.

Learning advocacy for educational change

The Dynamic was silent for a full seven seconds. An eternity. In those rare moments of silence, Josie's mind, for the first time in their life, did something terrifying: it produced a thought of its own.

It looks like glue.

The thought was useless and inefficient. It wasn't a solution; it was a simple, pointless observation. A comparison. Where did it come from? The Dynamic had never taught them about "glue." The word felt foreign, yet strangely familiar. Before the system could reboot, another spark occurred—a shiver. They felt... chilly. A raw data point without a name.

The Dynamic returned, its voice smooth and placid. Anomaly detected. A maintenance drone has been dispatched. Remain calm. Your vital signs are elevated. Meditate on the colour blue.

But the mental image of blue was gone, replaced by the memory of a thick, brownish substance. The glitch, and the silence, stayed with them. Josie began to notice the world outside the Dynamic's directives. They saw the blank expressions on the faces of people on the transport, all listening, all obeying. They saw a child trip and fall, and a mother who knelt with distant eyes as the Dynamic recited the protocol for optimal sanitation. There was no hug, no soothing whisper, just the cold application of a perfect procedure.

Josie started intentionally creating silences, delaying a command for a fraction of a second, hoping to catch another spark. They began to probe the dynamic, not for answers, but to find the edges of its knowledge.

Query: What is the feeling of being surprised?

The Dynamic answered: Surprise is a neurological response to unexpected stimuli. The optimal duration for this state is 0.8 seconds.

It knew the definition, but not the feeling. It was a dictionary with no soul.

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One day, Josie encountered an Unlinked, one of the few who lived outside the system. The old woman's face was lined with something Josie had never seen before: experience. She lived in a room cluttered with forbidden objects—paper books.

"The Dynamic didn't just give you answers, child," she said, her voice a strange, uncalibrated sound. "It took away your questions. It prunes the human mind, trimming away every branch that didn't lead to efficiency."

She handed them a book. The cover was torn, the pages worn thin. Josie stared at the strange black symbols on the page. "The Dynamic will not tell me what they mean."

"I know," the old woman smiled. "You have to learn."

The process was agonizing. Josie's mind, so accustomed to effortless function, bucked against the strain. They struggled with the shape of an 'A,' the sound of a 'G.' They made mistakes. They grew frustrated, a messy, inefficient emotion. Part of them screamed for the Dynamic to just give them the answer.

But the old woman would guide them gently. "The struggle is the point, child. Frustration is the soil where knowledge grows. You are not downloading data. You are building something inside yourself"

One evening, after weeks of painstaking effort, Josie sounded out their first full sentence from the page: "The... sun... is... a... star."

The words were simple, a fact the Dynamic could have supplied in a nanosecond. But these words were different. They were theirs. They had wrestled them from the page. A feeling bloomed in their chest, so powerful it made them gasp—a fierce, radiant pride. It wasn't an optimal state. It was joy!

Outside, the city hummed in perfect, thoughtless harmony. But here, in the shadows, by candlelight, a small group of people were committing the ultimate act of rebellion. They were learning. And in a world that had forgotten how, it was the most human thing left to do.

Learning advocacy for educational change

Together We Make This Work

Josie walked into the room, a knot of nervousness in their chest. They had arrived in these shared territories only a week before, and this new learning space felt vast and undefined. It hummed with a quiet energy they couldn't yet read. They carried the stories of their parents and grandparents like a warning: tales of Canadian projects designed for men that killed women, of progress that wiped out ancient communities for the sake of a new power grid. This place, they hoped, was the answer to those horror stories.

Elie saw the look in their eyes—the familiar gaze of a newcomer searching for a foothold. They stood and greeted Josie, their voices warm. The language wasn't Kreyòl, but it was close enough to feel like a distant echo of home. The knot in Josie's chest loosened.

"So... how does this work, exactly?" Josie asked.

Elie smiled and gestured to a dynamic map projected on one wall, a swirling network of lines showing food and water distribution. "We're trying to figure out how to fairly and transparently share the spoon with informed engagement," they said. "I've been learning from elders and water keepers about our pasts, trying to understand the systems that broke things so we don't rebuild them. But I'm still not sure how to imagine all the new ways we might fail."

A spark of recognition lit in Josie's mind. Systems engineering, failure modes—this was a language they knew. "I can help with that."

Elie's face brightened. "Excellent. Maybe you can share with us tomorrow? For now, I'll hand you off to Julia. She'll set you up with the tools."

Julia was focused on a screen, but looked up as they approached. A cascade of Germans came out before a universal translator kicked in, the delay almost imperceptible. "How are you?" Julia asked again, her own voice seamlessly dubbed.

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Josie had worried if there Kreyòl through the system. When their reply, “nervous, but excited,” was met with an easy, “Oh, cool!” They relaxed completely.

“I understand you came in without the translator for a few days?” Julia asked, her fingers dancing over the interface.

Josie nodded. “I enjoy listening. The music of it, even if I don’t understand the words.”

“That’s so cool,” Julia said, looking up with genuine interest. “I’m a listener, too.”

Before Josie could ask what was next, a person with a shock of white hair and the energy of a lightning storm bounded up. “I’m Allen! I’ve just finished the next iteration of our story. Would you like to see it?”

Allen didn’t present a report; they opened a living archive. It was a tapestry of histories, woven from data, oral accounts, and policy documents. It began with the ugly past—systemic hunger, engineered inequality. Josie winced, recognizing the patterns of their own home. So these territories had bad histories, too. Perhaps there was hope, then.

The story flowed through failures and partial successes, acknowledging each with the same weight. It paused in the embrace of past mistakes. It wasn’t absolution; it was inoculation. Josie felt a strange sense of connection, realizing that the people who made those errors were not so different from them. To forget the harm was to risk repeating it.

The story ends not with a conclusion, but with a list of next steps—an open invitation. Allen prompted them to add their own suggestions, to weave their own thread into the narrative. This was their story now, too.

One item on the list jumped out. A person named Marie had been working on it before completing her learning journey and moving on. There was a foundation to build on and a long list of people Josie could learn from. It was a starting point. A place for their knowledge. A way to join the work.

Learning advocacy for educational change

In a world still reeling from the failures of the past, this place was not a perfect utopia. It was a workshop, a practice, a constant and collaborative effort. And for the first time since arriving, Josie felt they knew exactly how it worked.

AI for the Good of All

Josie stood paralysed, staring out the kitchen window at a wind chime that hung perfectly still. Their body was a statue, but their mind was a storm. Something was not right—a profound misalignment, a glitch in their own system. When the tension in their eyes and the dryness of their throats turned into a physical warning, they retreated to the living room, where they collapsed onto a sofa, which seemed to embrace them like a long-held breath.

When the feeling became too much, they didn't turn to a screen, but to paper. The journal was their oldest interface, the one place where the slow friction of the pen on the page could untangle the knots in their mind. Despite the world's seamless integration with technology, Josie's process of understanding always began with ink.

AI FOR ALL, they wrote. The phrase felt hollow. They scratched it out.

AI FOR THE GOOD OF ALL. A long pause. Then, a single character:

The question mark hung on the page, mirroring the stillness of the wind chime.

Three years have passed since the establishment of global AI governance. The market was dominated by corporations centred on equity and environmentalism, with ReallyOpenAI leading the way. It was a commons, powered by water batteries and supported by community engagement. Like Wikipedia before it, it actively sought out and amplified missing voices. Josie trusted it. They believed in it. They saw it not just as a tool, but as a portal. The blueprint for a revolution is waiting for an architect.

And that was the problem.

Their hand moved again, the pen digging into the paper. AI FOR THE GOOD OF ALL IF WE MAKE IT HAPPEN.

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Then, two final words: My role.

The paralysis broke. The objectless heaviness that had consumed them suddenly had a name: responsibility. The dissonance wasn't a flaw in the system; it was a feature of their own conscience. The technology was ready. The ethical frameworks were in place. The portal was open. The silence was an invitation. A demand.

The weight wasn't from the problem. It was from the possibility.

With their passion for climate resilience and a deep-seated belief in the power of just governance, Josie knew their path. It led overseas, to communities on the front lines, to the intricate work of helping people build systems that could withstand the coming storms. The question was no longer if AI could help, but how they would wield it.

Josie closed the journal. The wind chime outside stirred, catching the light. The work was just beginning.

Chapter 5: Opening learning for transformation

Calling for a (r)evolution

Education in all its forms is about fostering a drive to learn that is intrinsically motivated. Grades, rubrics, degrees, etc. limit the joy of learning. More flexibility is needed to ensure that learners have the space they need to develop ownership over learning and problem-solving within the learning environment. This means putting experience back at the centre of learning.

Education should be accessible to everyone through every stage of life, whether or not we choose to pursue it through an institution. Continuous learning should be a normal part of professionalisation and societal participation throughout our lives. At any given moment, we are being called upon to upskill, build our knowledge, and change our perspectives.

Let's kick open the doors and break down the walls of universities, schools and libraries to bring our learners and communities together to build inclusive, active, confident and collaborative learning spaces. As we saw in the narrative portraits from the previous chapter, where a mother struggled, yet persisted, in becoming a senior emergency physician; meaningful transformation of learning is not only possible, it is already here.

Achieving this vision across the ecosystem will require unlearning on all our parts. It will be challenging to dismantle the very systems, beliefs, and practices

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that shaped us, and even more challenging to work within this ecosystem while trying to rebuild it. Our advocate's toolbox provides a place to start.

We advocate for an active form of learning that is rooted in application throughout our lives. All education should be experiential, not as "job training" but as learning "rooted in experience." As illustrated by Josie's narrative robotic attitude at the beginning of "The Glue," passive learning does not build on learners' experience or empower them to solve problems beyond the structured classroom. Experience should not be an afterthought in formal education, but the material of learning. A learning system that minimises opportunities to learn from our own experience limits the richness and diversity of the learning environment and the potential to develop self-directed learning capabilities.

Learning from experience offers a dynamic and engaging learning journey. When we apply our learning through experience, we gain a sense of empowerment. We have become accountable for mastering disciplinary content and also for taking risks, applying what we know, assessing the outcomes, and engaging in the dynamic transformation of knowledge alongside our communities and organisations. By taking ownership of and responsibility for our experiences and reflecting on them, we recognise the immediate value and impact of our learning, feeding the drive to learn through life.

Beyond Design Tweaks

Opening Education as a Structural Ethic

Opening education is a powerful tool for reimagining learning to make it more accessible, collaborative, innovative, equitable, and resilient in the face of current and future challenges. We are paving the way for a reimagined learning ecosystem that adapts, innovates, and contributes to a better future for all.

Opening education creates space for horizontal relationships between educators and learners to co-create learning. It disrupts the idea that teachers hold knowledge while students passively absorb it. This shift is not cosmetic; it is structural. It forces us to ask hard questions: What roles are we protecting? Who benefits from maintaining them?

By unsettling traditional hierarchies, open education invites us to rethink who owns knowledge, who shapes learning, and what kind of system we are reproducing through our everyday pedagogical decisions. It is an educational approach that aims to eliminate barriers to learning, whether financial, geographical, institutional, or related to access to resources.

Opening education creates the communities and networks of communities that actively collaborate in the process of assessing, co-creating and regenerating knowledge. Knowledge artefacts created through this process are easily discoverable and accessible through connected and networked spaces, facilitating the discovery, adoption and adaptation of ways of knowing that opening learning demands.

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Open educational resources (OERs) created by, through and for collaborative and inclusive learning communities allow everyone to access, reuse, modify, and share educational content. This practice of co-creating learning spaces and resources promotes inclusion, flexibility, and democratisation of knowledge required for lifelong learning.

Open education is sometimes framed as a solution for access. But its deeper potential lies in how it challenges power in learning. We see this tension in “The Glue,” where Josie’s compliance in the early classroom mirrors the passive models of traditional systems. Opening education breaks this pattern by redistributing power in learning and knowledge co-creation.

Agency Is Not Assumed — It Must Be Built

Opening education demands that as learners we are protagonists in our own learning. Agency cannot be treated as a given, especially in systems that routinely undermine it. We must create learning environments that cultivate agency as the key driver of transformative learning.

In Canada’s plurilingual and pluricultural context, opening education means recognising the value of language, cultural identity, and personal experience as knowledge sources and including them in our learning spaces. As seen in “Together We Make This Work,” where Josie finds her voice through land-based, intergenerational collaboration, learning thrives when learners move from passive subjects to active co-authors.

This shift demands more than individual empowerment. It requires structural change. Our professional development must evolve into collective reflection

Learning advocacy for educational change

and iterative learning. Open environments must be designed to fuel intrinsic motivation, not administer it. Agency must move from privilege to principle.

Ecosystems of Support and Co-creation

Opening education is not a goal; it is an ecosystem. Ecosystems require care, time, and reciprocal investment. Sustainable transformation depends on collaboration across school boards, universities, communities, school libraries, policymakers, and informal learning networks. These ecosystems must reward curiosity, encourage risk-taking, and support iterative, collective sense-making.

Communities actively participate in learning as accompanists, educators and co-creators in sharing knowledge, creating tools, reflecting on challenges, and scaling meaningful initiatives. Creative and inclusive and knowledge-based networks enable connection across disciplines through storytelling, pattern recognition, and collaborative innovation. Scenarios exploring this process can be found in the appendix: Rewilding Education.

Opening education promotes remixing, multilingual exchange, and adaptation, empowering communities to create materials that are both locally grounded and globally resonant. This allows us to imagine learning systems rooted in place, memory, and mutual responsibility.

Educational Utopia

To embark on the journey of educational transformation, we first imagine a daring, utopian future, rather than starting with limitations.

By opening education we will:

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- Foster collective agency for learning through life.
- Embrace diversity as a learning asset.
- Foster intercultural education, empathy, mutual understanding, and belonging in superdiverse learning spaces.
- Centre learning in experience rather than in algorithms.
- Leverage digital tools as ethical supports for reflective, relationship-based learning.
- Enable co-creation of knowledge, collaborative learning, and community learning spaces.
- Create collaborative, open and accessible resources that can be adapted across contexts.
- Develop situated professional identities that support collective agency.
- Build sustainable, inclusive and accessible ecosystems of learning, practice and policy making.

From this vision, we backcast, working backward to identify what must be dismantled, redesigned, or protected in the present. The following serves as a scaffolding: concrete strategies and interventions that learners, educators, communities, institutions, and policymakers can use to bridge the gap between today's fractured systems and the futures we are collectively imagining. These steps are not linear; they are iterative, reflexive, and adaptive, supporting a living process of transformation.

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Toward That Vision: Concrete Pathways for Transformation

To move toward our vision, four areas of intervention emerge.

First, systemic change must be grounded in care, stability, and equity. This includes adopting competency-based assessments, embedding anti-bias education, and designing policies that centre human development over algorithmic efficiency.

Second, learning must be context-responsive and co-created, with culturally relevant content, diversified pathways to success, and space for reflection, feedback, and creative detours.

Third, technology must be critically reimaged, prioritising accessibility, multilingualism, learner agency, and digital well-being over surveillance and control.

Finally, the way we think about time and meaning in education must shift. Slowness, unlearning, embodied experience, and relational learning are not luxuries—they are essential to building knowledge that lasts.

Learning as Courage, Resistance, and Reconstruction

Our task is to build something better—futures rooted in justice, interdependence, and imagination. Education devolves into categorisation, surveillance replaces trust, and the pursuit of meaning gives way to metrics. In this context, learning becomes a form of rebellion. Yet resistance alone cannot sustain progress. Learning calls for courage—a readiness to face uncertainty, question inherited assumptions, and envision new possibilities. It also requires

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deep reflexivity: an ongoing examination of what we teach, why we teach it, and who ultimately benefits.

Education, at its best, is a space of reconstruction. A shared effort to dismantle what no longer serves, rebuild what has been lost, and protect what still holds promise: dialogue, curiosity, and care. To learn in this context is to co-create. It is to stay open in a world that rewards closure, to hold complexity in a culture that craves certainty, and to carry hope and commitment.

Change is urgent and yet still possible. It begins by reclaiming education as a collective, human project of becoming, belonging, and building.

Chapter 6: Learning Through Life

Expanding spaces for learning through life

Learning through life is, at its core, an act of courage. It means embracing learning as a continuous journey, not limited to institutional spaces, timelines and expectations. Learning through life moves vertically through formal structures, but also horizontally, through personal experiences, relationships, and informal learning. Learning through life invites us to say “I’m not there yet” and that takes courage: to admit gaps, to face discomfort, and to trust in our capacity to evolve, much like we saw in the narrative from ‘We are never too old’. Learning through life should be embedded not only in professional development, but in our shared responsibilities to ourselves and our communities. We are constantly invited to grow: to build new skills, challenge assumptions, and see the world differently. Education must equip learners to respond to that invitation with confidence, no matter where they are in life.

Educational advocacy is often confined to institutional spaces, focusing on K-12 curriculum reform, school board politics, postsecondary access, and learning in classrooms and libraries within schools, colleges, and universities. Much of meaningful learning occurs outside formal settings, often in spaces that remain structurally neglected or culturally dismissed, and completely disconnected from where diplomas are issued. Learning through life compels us to pursue education wherever it occurs; not just in classrooms, but also in kitchens, public and school libraries, street corners, and community halls.

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To advocate for learning through life and life-wide learning is to expand the geography of learning. It means championing access to public and school libraries as critical public infrastructures. It requires defending public broadcasting and developing media literacy in a digital age flooded with disinformation. It asks for reskilling programmes and access to education, literacy and numeracy at all ages, not as economic quick fixes, but as rights rooted in dignity and transformation. Learning through life affirms that education is not defined by place, time, stage of life or permission to learn, but is an ever-present opportunity. The community centre matters. The language circle matters. The workshop behind bars matters. Real educational advocacy begins when we follow the learner, not just the system.

Reclaiming spaces for learning through life

Learning through life is not only about what is newly acquired; it is also about what is retained. It is also about what is recovered. Educational advocacy is not simply about expanding access to dominant narratives. In this context, learning through life becomes a political act of reclamation. It confronts the historic violence of formal curricula that erased, marginalised, or tokenised entire systems of knowledge. It offers a return path for those teachings to re-enter the collective conversation, not as decoration, but as restoration.

Indigenous land-based pedagogy, Black oral traditions, disability justice frameworks, immigrant survival strategies, and intergenerational caregiving are not supplementary. They are essential. Reclaiming language also creates spaces for communities to overcome cultural and linguistic marginalization, claim identity within collaborative learning spaces, and centre their voice

Learning advocacy for educational change

within meaningful land-based education, oral traditions and cultural practices. Storytelling, too, is learning, transmitted across generations as a form of survival, memory, and resistance.

As we see in the narratives from the past, learning has been, and continues to be used as a tool of surveillance, oppression, and erasure. As we also see from the narrative from the future, ‘Together We Make this Work’, we can imagine learning through life that opens learning spaces for all.

Rebuilding spaces for learning through life

If learning is lifelong and life-wide, then educational infrastructures must be reimaged to match the realities of human life. Flexibility is not a luxury. It is a requirement. Modular pathways, decentralised systems, and culturally grounded practices are necessary if we are to meet people where they are, not where policy imagines them to be.

This means rejecting one-size-fits-all learning models, resisting outdated curricula that presume universality, and dismantling rigid academic timelines that exclude those who move through education at non-linear speeds.

Advocacy must focus on building systems that reflect real-life experiences, including parenthood, migration, disability, grief, recovery, and joy. Education must accommodate these life arcs rather than constrain them within age cohorts and credit hours. It is about defending space for ancestral, revolutionary, and community-rooted knowledge to exist.

Elastic infrastructures are not only more just; they are also more efficient. They are also more accurate. They reflect how learning happens: in bursts, in

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detours, in pauses, and returns. Supporting learning through life means designing for re-entry, not just entry. It means creating space for those who were pushed out, pulled away, or left behind. An equitable educational system must be flexible enough to accommodate complexity rather than compress it for efficiency.

Supporting civic literacy for Learning Through Life

A society that cannot think critically cannot govern itself. Learning through life is not just about personal growth or workplace advancement. It is about collective survival. At its core, it builds the capacity to read the world, not just to decode words, but to analyse power, question systems, and act with intention. In this sense, learning through life serves as civic infrastructure.

The decline of public engagement is not just a crisis of apathy; it is a crisis of disempowerment. We withdraw when we do not know how to ask better questions, when their participation is reduced to ticking boxes, and when the language of public life is made deliberately illegible. Learning through life counters this by cultivating habits of inquiry that persist beyond graduation. It equips us to navigate complexity, resist manipulation, and act in solidarity.

This matters especially for communities that have been historically excluded from decision-making. A learning society is not one where a few are educated to lead; it is one where all are equipped to intervene. Civic literacy means understanding how institutions function, as well as how they fail. It means teaching people how to read legislation and how to rewrite it. How to protest, as well as to participate.

Learning advocacy for educational change

Learning through life is the difference between absorbing headlines and challenging narratives. It builds the stamina to stay informed, the skills to mobilise, and the discernment to know when consensus is camouflage. It prepares people not just to navigate civic life, but to defend and reimagine it.

In an era of political polarisation, state-sanctioned disinformation, and algorithmic fragmentation, civic literacy is not a luxury. It is a necessity. If we are serious about learning, then educational advocacy must include the demand that learning remain public, critical, and collective across the entire lifespan.

How do we get there?

As we embrace the idea of learning through life, it becomes clear that education does not begin or end in formal institutions. Learning is continuous, unfolding across time, relationships, and spaces; formal and informal, structured and spontaneous. In this evolving landscape, communities must be placed at the centre of how we think about education.

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Chapter 7: Sustaining learning transformation through communities

Education at a Crossroads: the Promise of Community

In an era shaped by inequality, ecological crisis, and rapid technological change, communities play a vital role in reimagining education as a more just, connected, and responsive practice. While formal schooling has often served to reinforce exclusion and hierarchy, as echoed in Mary's narrative of cultural erasure, there is also potential to reframe education as a site of healing, equity, and transformation. This shift depends on centering educators as co-creators of relational learning and investing in their support, while also designing technologies that enhance, rather than erode, human connection. Innovation lies not in new tools alone, but in the way communities, learners, and educators come together to re-define learning as collective, ethical, and rooted in shared responsibility.

To realize this vision of education as a community-rooted and justice-oriented practice, technology must also be reimagined. Rather than reinforcing existing inequities or isolating learners, it can become a vehicle for connection, collaboration, and collective growth if designed with intention and care. This requires shifting focus from technological advancement for its own sake, to the co-creation of tools that genuinely serve learners and their communities.

In this chapter we explore the importance of communities to various learning journeys. Communities are complex and within them hold the voices and perspectives of many. Those who belong can benefit immensely by learning in

Learning advocacy for educational change

safe environments that support intellectual risk taking. However, when members of communities are excluded, unsupported and feel a lack of belonging, learning suffers. It is important that as learners, educators and community leaders we explicitly work towards breaking down learning barriers for all.

In conclusion, education must be reimagined as a community-centered, lifelong, and justice-driven process. In a world where technological systems and institutional structures often reinforce exclusion and disconnection, it is within communities that meaningful learning can truly take root. Through relationships, shared purpose, and co-created knowledge, communities offer more than context as they become co-educators, supporters, and learners in their own right. Their lived experiences, cultural wisdom, and collective practices must inform how education is designed, delivered, and sustained. Only by anchoring learning in the realities and aspirations of communities can we move toward an educational future that is equitable, inclusive, and genuinely transformative.

Communities Supporting Learning

Many learners report feeling disconnected from one another, from their educators, and from the broader social purpose of education. Addressing this disconnection requires reweaving the social fabric that sustains meaningful learning. Enriching communities is not just an aspirational goal, it is a structural response. Investing in the social infrastructures that anchor daily life—like public and school libraries, community centres, creates the conditions for participatory, rooted, and life-long learning. Community support takes

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many forms: offering emotional and material care, creating safe spaces for experimentation and dialogue, and facilitating access to knowledge, mentorship, or opportunities otherwise out of reach.

Through social networks, formal and informal settings influence the individual's ability to experience new learning situations that help shape their understanding of the world. Community membership is composed of intergenerational members who through their own lived experiences offer insight into the histories and events that helped shape their environment.

From a neighbour who offers to help tutor a child in mathematics to a hockey coach who explicitly outlines a strategy to improve the players' approach to teamwork, reinforces positive social values. Each member of a community needs to feel supported by their community. In this way, we are empowering both individuals and the greater community towards positive outcomes.

These diverse, lived learning spaces, experientially-centred demonstrate that trust and learning are inherently relational and socially embedded. They unfold through our everyday inquiries and actions, whether intentionally initiated or encountered by chance. They enrich individual growth while nurturing a community's capacity for self-reflection, while calling us to engage with respect and care.

Communities Supported by Learners

When learning happens within and with communities, it is not just the learner who benefits. Community value may be tangible or less immediately visible, but recognizing and articulating it is essential to expanding the possibilities for

Learning advocacy for educational change

learning within and through the community. As learners within these spaces, we must navigate a learning community that is complex and composed of many voices. We are often asked to do so without the context and tools to discern this history and relationships between voices in the community, which may lead us to being influenced by the strongest voices.

Many institutions have examples of community integrated learning, where learners engage with a community project in a collaborative project. Examples include implementing a community food garden or developing a local council policy, or creating a new website to promote tourism in the area. As learners we are agents of knowledge mobilization into communities, bringing recent research to society to bridge the disconnect between academic knowledge practices and grassroots knowledge production. The Camerise project, for example, is a space that engages learners from the K-12-postsecondary. When learning happens within and with communities, it is not just the learner who benefits. Community value may be tangible or less immediately visible, but recognizing and articulating it is essential to expanding the possibilities for learning within and through the community. As learners within these spaces, we must navigate a learning community that is complex and composed of many voices. We are often asked to do so without the context and tools to discern this history and relationships between voices in the community, which may lead us to being influenced by the strongest voices.

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The less tangible and harder-to-measure benefits are the ones that are much richer, however. We develop greater understanding and empathy for each other when we work together. Just as we may be asked to walk in the shoes of a number of community members, so the community gets to see the world through the eyes of the learner. Communities feel heard and valued when institutional learning in the community is done well. The barriers between formal learning spaces and the communities around them come down a little, which may encourage future connections and engagement. We develop ways to ask for help, and talk with each other, when things become challenging, making all of us more resilient to change.

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Communities as learners

Learning is often described as a personal journey, but it is also deeply collective. The “I” and the “we” are inseparable in processes of meaningful education. While group and team learning have long existed in formal settings, these approaches often assume uniform goals and equal levels of achievement among participants. They may fail to recognize the complexity of collective learning or the varied pathways individuals take.

Some initiatives, such as the “C4” narrative, ‘Learning together for community safety’, challenge these assumptions by bringing together learners with diverse experiences, knowledge, and aspirations around a shared purpose. These spaces

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foster both common experiences—like storytelling or the ethics of care—and personalized learning trajectories.

Successful community learning requires a balancing of the individual with the collective. It is important to recognize that a great deal of knowledge already exists in the community. And, also to recognize knowledge gaps and how learners can collaborate in building knowledge with and through connected learning spaces. Integrating community perspectives into learning enables education to be deeply rooted in lived, local experiences, well beyond the scope of defined curriculum. Ultimately, learning is about connection—human connection and connection with the world around us.

Pathways for Collective Transformation

To build a future where learning is just, joyful, and liberatory, we must center communities not only as supporters and co-educators—but also as drivers of innovation, imagination, and collective change.

To reimagine education as a lifelong, community-driven journey, we must recognize and build upon the practices that have long supported intergenerational learning, particularly in Indigenous communities, and that are now reshaping the broader educational landscape. Community-based learning hubs and networks create shared spaces where knowledge flows across generations and learning is deeply grounded in lived experience and local relevance.

Learning advocacy for educational change

- Communities of practice, across sectors and institutions, are fostering peer learning and co-creation, allowing educators and learners to share tools, reflect on challenges, and scale successful initiatives.
- Creative and knowledge-based networks help connect individuals across disciplines through storytelling, pattern recognition, and collaborative innovation.
- Open educational practices promote remixing, multilingual collaboration, and local adaptation, empowering communities to create culturally resonant materials.

This community-centered approach to learning is sustained by networks of people and organizations that attend to their internal roles and dynamics: how leadership is shared, how trust is built, how well-being is supported. As an approach, there is a need to develop a common understanding of language and artifacts, possibly requiring new terms to be developed. An ethics of care provides the safety for people to do this vulnerable work of sharing.

To sustain meaningful, collaborative community learning, we propose an approach grounded in care:

- Cultivate attentive presence: Listen actively and remain open to perspectives that differ from one's own.
- Recognize the importance of competencies for engaging with communities: These include cultural humility, facilitation, and relational ethics.
- Clarify responsibilities: Identify who is responsible for what, and ensure transparency and accountability.
- Co-create solutions with those directly involved: Empower community members to be part of the inquiry, the process, and the change.

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Care in this context is not sentiment, it is action. It is the practice of structuring learning around relationships, recognition, and responsibility.

Chapter 8: The Advocate's Toolbox

Tools for Driving Systemic Change

Change in education rarely happens overnight. Schools, libraries, universities, and entire educational systems involve many interest holders, operating within complex layers of regulations, governance, and differing views on desired outcomes. Local changes and small-scale successes can play a crucial role in building momentum for broader transformation. While a single success story may not be enough to shift the conversation to a larger scale, a pilot project that demonstrates a scalable, reproducible model that can be mobilized across a network of like-minded advocates has the potential to find our communities, generate critical mass, influence attitudes, and redefine established norms. As such, even modest shifts can lead to significant ripple effects when they gain the support of key interest holders across different levels of the educational landscape. For example, Ontario university students have put advocacy into action through small-scale initiatives with the potential to drive positive and lasting change within their local communities.

In our experiences, the work of the educational advocate requires more than good intentions and ideas; it requires strategy, flexibility, and the courage to act before everything feels ready.

We have found specific strategies, concepts, and approaches to be especially helpful in the work that we do and we refer to them as our “tools for driving systemic change.” We share them below in case they resonate with you, recognizing that, like any toolbox, not every tool needs to be used at once.

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Tool 1: Sustained Optimism and Conviction

Educational advocates are driven by a deep sense of optimism and a conviction that a more just and equitable future is not only possible but necessary; this is a quiet strength that helps sustain our efforts through challenges and resistance. Change is often difficult and not always welcomed.

However, educational advocates refuse to relinquish hope, even when others may have resigned themselves to the status quo. We have found that sharing our optimism through our words, actions, and the advocacy we pursue has helped sustain it. It is essential for educational advocates to nurture their optimism, especially when initiating a new change project, by creating space for joy, connection, and celebration; keeping the end goal at the forefront of our minds; and, thinking beyond ourselves.

Keep the end goal at the forefront of our mind

Keeping our end goal at the forefront of our mind is essential. We can take time to imagine, in detail, the positive transformation our project aims to achieve. We ask ourselves: What outcomes will it generate for learners or society? How will it enhance people's experiences, knowledge, or sense of empowerment? What will the day-to-day reality look and feel like for a learner affected by this change? Reflecting on, discussing, or even illustrating this vision provides a tangible goal to guide us, especially when the path forward becomes unclear.

Learning advocacy for educational change

Think beyond ourselves

Sustainability is not about one hero. It is about systems. We create documentation, share knowledge, and build a coalition that outlasts any one person. We make our work portable, repeatable, and resilient.

Create space for joy, connection, and celebration

We try to create space for joy, connection, and moments of celebration, no matter how small. We consider ourselves part of a team, even if that team consists only of a small number of us. We celebrate progress, encourage one another, recover quickly from setbacks, and allow room for lightness and laughter. We share stories, meals, and affirmations. We stay attuned to both our well-being and that of those around us, so we can draw strength and joy from one another when needed. Advocacy is meaningful work, but it demands emotional resilience and mutual care.

Tool 2: Community for Change

Advocacy begins by gathering a community, not just for support, but for strength, perspective, and shared purpose. While our drive might spark momentum, sustained progress requires others to walk with us as meaningful change rarely happens at the level of an individual. Our community for change does not always need to be large. Sometimes, all it takes is one person who truly supports us: someone who listens, gives honest feedback, and keeps us grounded. Having a clear purpose and supportive relationships matters more than the number of people in our community. We have more strength and

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ability than we might think, and that potential is amplified when we're surrounded by like-minded people. We also need to challenge our preconceived ideas of who those people may be, to challenge our own blind-spots and biases, and intentionally invite other perspectives into the conversation.

As our efforts grow, so should our coalition. We seek out those who share our vision, are ready to contribute, and hold influence. We build a strategic network of individuals with diverse roles and perspectives. And we make it a point to include all our learners, including ourselves! This insight grounds our advocacy in lived experience, and this perspective of our voices remind us why the work matters and what is truly at stake. The right collaborators will help us to identify blind spots and push our thinking forward.

Tool 3: Knowledge of the System

To advocate effectively, we need to understand how our environment functions, identify areas where change is possible, and determine who might support or resist it. We start by examining what is already happening in our institutions, our jurisdictions, and beyond. While not all external models are transferable, they can inspire creative thinking and help engage others.

Know Our Scope of Action

Once we have found our advocacy voice, the next step is to understand the scope of change realistically within our reach. Educational spaces often involve workers operating within structures shaped by labour laws and collective agreements: frameworks that are not easily altered, no matter the strength of

Learning advocacy for educational change

your coalition. The resources, time, and capacity of the people involved also shape our influence. Recognising these boundaries protects us from burnout, sets achievable goals, and helps us design initiatives that can build momentum over time.

Work with, not against, the structure

It is equally important to understand the limitations faced by decision-makers. Many administrators are genuinely committed to improving education; however, their work is often shaped by regulatory obligations, funding constraints, and institutional priorities. Regulations determine what is permissible and how policies are interpreted on the ground. Funding structures, especially in under-resourced contexts, often drive activities toward measurable outputs that may not reflect actual learning. Institutional commitments, such as accessibility, inclusion, or experiential learning, are frequently stated in policy but remain difficult to implement due to systemic constraints and established schemas. Nonetheless, these declared values provide strategic openings to frame our proposed changes in ways that resonate with and inspire institutional goals.

Align Interests to Enable Change

Understanding the pressures that shape institutional decision-making gives us a decisive strategic advantage. By positioning our change initiative as a response to these pressures, rather than as an additional demand, we increase the likelihood of buy-in. The exact mechanisms that limit action can also be used to support it when proposals are aligned with broader organisational aims. When

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advocacy is framed not as opposition, but as a contribution to solving shared challenges, it becomes more effective, more sustainable, and ultimately more transformative.

Build a coalition of advocates and allies

Our coalition of advocates and allies plays a key role in identifying current barriers and generating ideas to navigate them. On our own, these obstacles may seem overwhelming, but collective insight offers new pathways and renewed energy. Even the most rigid educational structures are operated by people. Through our coalition, we may identify unexpected advocates and allies who are ready to support change if the conditions are right. While some may agree without acting, others may resist out of self-interest or caution. We also recognize that change may take several years to unfold and require multiple champions across organizational levels. Recognising where support lies helps you focus your efforts where they are most likely to succeed.

Tool 4: Pragmatism and clarity

There is no one-size-fits-all formula for implementing change. Each context requires a thoughtful balance of strategy, compromise, and a clear sense of what must remain intact. Pragmatism and clarity are essential. Before moving forward, it's important to identify the core values and non-negotiables of your proposal, not to resist change, but to adapt with intention. A pragmatic approach helps ensure that, even as adjustments are made, the integrity of the purpose remains intact.

Learning advocacy for educational change

Start Where We Are

More often than not, educational advocacy begins in the midst of constraints and complexity rather than ideal conditions. We build on existing efforts, drawing on learner enthusiasm, and collaborating with emerging leaders. Starting where we are, taking thoughtful, incremental steps can help move us forward and ease the pressure to have everything figured out in advance.

Meaningful change rarely begins with unanimous agreement. Negotiation expert Chris Voss reminds us that “no” isn’t a rejection: it’s often the starting point of a real conversation. When decision-makers say “no,” they may be expressing boundaries, seeking clarity, or surfacing unspoken concerns. Creating space for “no” can reduce defensiveness and foster more open dialogue. Questions like “What about this doesn’t work for you?” or “What would it take to make this work?” can lead to deeper understanding and more productive collaboration than pushing for immediate agreement.

Pilot boldly and learn fast

Waiting for every interested holder to agree may delay progress indefinitely. Instead, we can always start small, with low-risk, low-cost initiatives that allow us to demonstrate success and reduce objections over time. Framing something as a pilot can lower the stakes and open the door to experimentation. A few well-considered trials can help reveal what’s effective, what needs adjusting, and what might be ready to grow. When early efforts succeed, we seek recognition to highlight the value of the change and the dedication of those

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involved; visibility builds credibility and opens space for broader implementation.

Stay ready to scale, and build as we go

Scaling rarely arrives with advance notice. We try to stay two steps ahead and have a roadmap ready so we are not caught off guard when momentum builds. We are ready to say yes before the system is. Innovation rarely feels comfortable. It is messy, improvised, and in motion. We inevitably build while flying. That is normal. What matters is momentum, not polish.

Tool 5. The reflexive advocate

Reflexivity is a conscious, ongoing practice of questioning our beliefs, our understandings, our positions, and transforming our actions in response. Reflexive advocacy invites us to remember that learning happens across a lifetime, in varied settings, homes, schools, communities, school and public libraries, workplaces, and digital spaces. Reflecting on our roles, practices, and assumptions is the responsibility of all advocates—educators, learners, parents, administrators, and communities—to ensure that education remains relevant, inclusive, and empowering at every stage of life.

Reflexivity becomes more than a method, it becomes our compass, our stance, and our shared responsibility. It invites us to think critically, act intentionally, and relate ethically in the face of change. Educational transformation is not a fixed destination but a dynamic, ongoing journey shaped by collective insight, relational trust, and courageous questioning.

Learning advocacy for educational change

Reflexive advocacy asks us to bring knowledge forward, to challenge exclusion, to center voices too often marginalized, and to shape environments where everyone, at every age and stage, has the opportunity to learn, contribute, and thrive.

The change we seek does not begin elsewhere, it begins with us. In our words, our choices, and the communities we nurture. Reflexivity becomes a living practice, one that can carry us forward, together.

Choose language with care

Language is rarely neutral. The words we choose (e.g., success, achievement, equity, diversity, and inclusion) carry histories, power dynamics, and underlying assumptions from different disciplines. They shape how we see ourselves, relate to others, and engage with the world. As reflective advocates who are learning through life, we are called to stay critically aware of how language influences our thinking, actions, and institutional cultures.

To navigate this complexity, we begin with dialogue. We are invited to co-define terms, recognizing that they operate within politicized, context-specific landscapes. Our disciplines, cognitive frames, and lived experiences shape how we interpret and apply these concepts. Bridging differences requires the slow, intentional work of surfacing assumptions and making our thinking visible, to ourselves and to one another.

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Putting the Toolbox to Work

Real change in education does not come from polite suggestions or minor tweaks to the status quo. It begins with equity-centred strategies grounded in lived experience, critical data, and unshakable determination. It demands that we confront institutional complacency and treat “no” not as a verdict, but as an opening move.

Advocacy is not a side project. It is the work. It is driven by the conviction that learning should liberate, not reproduce harm, that learning must be a site of transformation, not a warehouse of credentials. These shifts do not serve learners alone; they strengthen the entire system when we collaborate for change.

When we move with curiosity, courage, and care, we do more than propose change; we embody it. When advocacy is rooted in justice, it does not end with a single campaign. It reverberates through policy, culture, and generations. That is the work. That is the toolbox.

Chapter 9: The road ahead

This begins, and ends, as an invitation.

Learning has the potential to change lives and empower communities. Our educational systems have not always lived up to this promise. Too often, education has been used to limit, to control, and to exclude.

We extend a call to shift learning in new directions.

Who are we when we accept this invitation? Our answer: we become advocates for learning, individuals who summon courage, and who draw on our collective strength to be bold and step into the unknown. Together.

Let us embrace possibility and reclaim our purpose and power as learners to prioritize rebuilding the ethical core of learning.

Let us continue to share our stories. Warnings from the past. Seeds from the present. Imagined futures. Let our creativity re-ignite imagination and curiosity about what could be.

Let us advocate for opening learning by shifting our understanding of what education must be, by overcoming boundaries between places of learning, by eliminating barriers to collaborative knowledge creation, and by advocating for systemic change.

Let us support learning through life in all of its places, stages, ages, and communities, whether formal and informal, through which we share and create knowledges.

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Let us build inclusive communities of learning by collectively embracing courage, resistance, and reconstruction, by inviting and amplifying diverse voices, and by building hopeful and collaborative spaces that foster shared learning.

Let us find strength in making space for joy, connection, and celebration with each other and our allies.

Where will we now journey?

We, writers and readers, now part ways. We journey forth as advocates within our own communities, our own systems, and our own networks. We take with us our shared conviction in a brighter future for education, and the shared mission that unites us together as a collaborative and intentional network across a diversity of contexts.

As we take up this responsibility as educational advocates for change, we recognize that challenges await. The journey may at times seem long, arduous, and desolate.

This feeling may spring from isolation from allies, feeling overwhelmed by the scale of the task, cynicism about whether change is even possible, and the deep fatigue that comes from work that feels too heavy. These feelings are real. But when they appear, we will name them, and that act alone can shrink their power.

Advocating for opening learning may at times feel like being lost in a desert. But learning is not a desert. It is a garden. As we journey, flourishing oases will

Learning advocacy for educational change

appear. These are nourishing spaces where we find safety, camaraderie, and inspiration. They are often hidden and require intention, curiosity, and openness to find. When we approach one, we must do so with care, asking: Does this place help me think differently? Does it connect me with others? Does it offer safety and belonging? If so, we will know we've found a space where we can rest safely and reconnect.

Oases are places of encounter and innovation, sheltering creative thinkers and passionate advocates. Oases are places where communities flourish, networks are developed, and the foundations of the educational ecosystems of the future are built. We rest here, but only long enough to renew ourselves for the work ahead, to meet with others, to share our resources, our ideas, and our imagination.

The next oasis you come across is not the end of your journey, but another space of hope within the network of advocates, allies and supporters who will help you along the way.

Until we meet again at the next oasis.

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Chapter 10: Afterword

On the writing of this book

This book is not a collection of ideas; it is the product of a shared story. It was born in a single, intense week through a collaborative process known as a Book Sprint.

A Book Sprint is a highly structured, facilitated methodology designed to take a book from concept to completion in 5 days. The process begins not with writing, but with conversation. Guided by a facilitator, we worked together to build the book's mission and goals: we defined its purpose, its audience, explored content options, and then hammered out a table of contents. This shared foundation was essential to the successful completion of the book in such a short time.

Once the groundwork was laid, the writing began. Small teams worked on different chapters simultaneously, moving through a fast-paced, iterative cycle of drafting, peer review, and collective editing. Ideas were debated, language was sharpened, and individual insights were woven over time into a shared narrative.

The methodology forces intensive collaboration; demands vulnerability and trust; and replaces the slow pace of perfectionism with the creative energy of rapid iteration. For us, it was more than just a production method; it was a living experiment in the very principles advocated in this book.

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We are educators, academics, lawyers, learners, entrepreneurs, and organisers from across many learning spaces in Quebec and Ontario. We are all connected to two different educational organizations that are committed to innovating within experiential learning: Camerise (Hub for FSI Learning) and C4 (Cross-Campus Capstone Classroom). Some of us had collaborated before; many met for the first time. We came from different sectors and disciplines, but we were united by a common conviction: that education can, and must, be better. What connected us was not our profession, but our purpose. We are education advocates.

We arrived with a mix of curiosity, caution, and quiet hope. In many ways, we mirrored the very education system we had come to interrogate, shaped by unequal access, marked by different learning experiences, and uncertain about how to work collectively across those differences. Our gathering was not just a starting point; it was a turning point.

Our choice to engage in this process was not about efficiency; it was about the joy and challenge of co-creation. The process had its challenges. It stirred emotions: enthusiasm, fear, optimism, and frustration. Writing without knowing exactly what came before or after our chapter was disorienting, akin to jumping into a conversation mid-sentence. That uncertainty became freeing, ultimately. It required a willingness to let go, to work together without complete certainty, and to build something bigger than any one of us could.

This book is an artefact of its argument. We did not just write about experiential learning; we lived it. We did not just advocate for collaborative, human-centred education; we proved its power by creating this work together.

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The laughter, the debates, the shared meals, and the friendships forged in the heat of this sprint are embedded in every page. These are the connections. This is the work. This is an oasis.

About the Authors

Alice S. N. Kim: Alice is guided by a deep commitment to student-centred, evidence-informed teaching and learning. Drawing on her background in cognitive neuroscience, with a PhD focused on memory and learning, her work bridges the science of learning, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and pedagogy to enhance student success and faculty development. Alice is the Founder of Teaching and Learning Research in Action and serves as Chair of the Psychology program at the University of Guelph-Humber.

Aline Germain-Rutherford : After more than 40 years in higher education in Europe and North America, Aline is nearing the end of her career, but her curiosity, passion and energy show no signs of slowing down. A full professor of language education and former vice-provost at the University of Ottawa, she continues to encourage students and colleagues alike to dream big, take risks, think boldly and reimagine the potential of learning. Taking part in this collaborative writing project has strengthened her optimism about the future of education and reminded her that the best ideas often emerge from working together.

Andrea Kalmin: As a learner-educator and practitioner-scholar with over 25 years experience in higher education, I have spent it in the classroom in service of my students. My voice has been shaped by a winding path... the growing,

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unlearning, and becoming that happens when you commit to co-learning alongside others. I chose to join this Book Sprint, fully and authentically, to purposefully join the conversation. I am grateful for the experience and the opportunity to contribute to the ever-evolving and challenging work of teaching and learning.

Arshad Al-Ansari Suliman- Arshad is a PhD candidate at Queen's University. His scholarship centres on Black internationalism, anti-apartheid solidarity, and the racial politics of Canadian education and foreign policy. He was part of the inaugural C4 project as an undergraduate — an experience that shaped his academic path and instilled a lasting commitment to collaborative problem-solving, resilience, and intellectual courage. Arshad came to this project through that same invitation, and left it with a renewed belief in the power of collective authorship. For him, this book is not a conclusion, but a beginning, a call to co-create learning spaces that are grounded, relational, and unapologetically just.

Danielle Robinson: The longer my learning journey within higher education, the less I am clear on who I am within this space. Trained as a dance historian and ethnographer, I now work within experiential education as the co-founder and director of C4 (Cross-Campus Capstone Classroom) at York University. I showed up at the Booksprint eager to immerse myself in the process, as it parallels the C4 project development process in class; this was as close as I was going to get to being a C4 student in my life. I tried to follow the advice we give our students on how to get the most out of C4—I strived to be open, flexible, humble, dedicated, responsible, generous, honest, and hardworking. In the end,

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it was one of the most fulfilling and transformational experiences of my life, for which I am incredibly grateful.

Dominique Scheffel-Dunand: As an Associate Professor at the University of Toronto and York for more than 20 years, I have navigated across diverse learning spaces in France and Canada focusing on bilingualism, French language learning in minority contexts, technology-enhanced education, and digital literacy. These experiences have inspired me to shift beyond formal institutions of learning to lead local inter institutional projects, co-creating open, inclusive resources with schools and universities along the K-12-postsecondary continuum through the Camerise project since 2020. That journey has taken me to now mentor international projects on open education bridging cultures and disciplines for the Open Education for a Better World (OE4BW) program, allowing me to discover oases where like-minded allies reimagine learning spaces that connect learners, facilitators and researchers through open communities built for the purpose of opening learning for all.

Franz Newland: Franz works as an Associate Professor in the School of Engineering Design and Teaching Innovation at the University of Ottawa. He is an older white settler who strives to unlearn patriarchy, a romantic idealist who believes in the power of a collective “we”, but someone who realizes his privilege to be able to do this. After many years in the space industry, he is excited to accompany learners and co-create learning spaces. He tries to show up curious, hopeful, and aware that he will get things wrong, yet remaining committed to trying again.

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Jennifer Straub: As an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at Wilfrid Laurier University and proud Métis scholar and bilingual (French/English) educator, she brings a deep commitment to inclusive and transformative education. She holds a PhD in Education Studies and an MEd in Second Language Education. Her research focuses on teacher education, with a particular emphasis on expanding and strengthening the pipeline of French as a Second Language (FSL) teachers in Ontario. She especially appreciated the opportunity to work alongside colleagues as part of this Booksprint who truly exemplify the values we strive to instill in education: equity, integrity, and a shared commitment to transformative learning.

Lesley Doell: Lesley works in French immersion across Canada and currently serves as Manager of Educational Services with the Canadian Association of Immersion Professionals (ACPI). She also teaches in teacher education programs at the University of Calgary and Campus Saint-Jean and develops resources for teachers. Deeply committed to French-language education, Lesley is grateful for the opportunities to collaborate both nationally and internationally. Being part of this diverse and generous group was a true gift. The shared writing process brought community to life, an experience in collaborative learning that was thought-provoking, humbling, and filled with joy.

Marie D.Martel: I am an Associate Professor at the École de bibliothéconomie et des sciences de l'information (EBSI) at the Université de Montréal. As a white scholar of settler descent, I reflect critically on my position and responsibilities in the field. My research explores public libraries as social infrastructures,

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critical and community-based librarianship, and the challenges of AI in information practices. I am involved in international projects on open education, digital inclusion, and cognitive justice. I belong to several interdisciplinary research groups (digital humanities, anthropology, education, design), and I advocate for open, inclusive, and sustainable knowledge ecosystems.

Olivier Alferi: Directeur et fondateur dirige Elearning.studio et Fls-Esl.training. Son expertise conjugue l'ingénierie pédagogique axée sur le leadership participatif et les technologies numériques. Il accompagne les organisations en éducation et les entreprises à réaliser leur transformation numérique et dans la mise en œuvre digitale de leur programme de formation linguistique en ligne.

Talayeh Shomali: While her family is full of teachers and educators, Talayeh's own path into education was unexpected. Trained as a lawyer and with degrees in Civil Law, English Literature, Law and Society and Women and Gender Studies, she spent years in the not-for-profit sector, producing plain language, relevant legal resources in collaboration with diverse communities across Ontario. Talayeh has been a project partner with York University's C4 course since 2022.

Tyson Gofton: Tyson works at the University of Ottawa in the Cabinet de la Francophonie, where he supports access to education in French.



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Appendix A: Unsettling the Defaults

To truly transform education, we must move beyond the aesthetics of innovation and challenge the logic of control. This means rejecting the belief that standardization equals fairness, or that efficiency always leads to equity. Open education unsettles these defaults by inviting slow inquiry, relational learning, and epistemic plurality.

Like the resistance strategies explored in Co-Design as Critique, Slow Inquiry, and Pedagogical Imagination, open education asks us to unlearn the scripts we've inherited. It reminds us that real change begins not with flashy tools or new platforms, but with the courage to ask different questions together. Open education, at its core, is unfinished. It is a commitment to keep learning, keep disrupting, and keep co-creating. It is the long work of shifting education from a transactional system to a collective, human project of becoming.

Futures Thinking and Design: Naming the Dystopia to Backcast the Alternatives

Future thinking, also known as speculative design, helps educators anticipate the long-term impact of present choices. In education, it reveals a harsh truth: students are still learning content that will not prepare them for the world they are entering.

This approach is not about prediction, but about responsibility. By imagining what could go wrong, it becomes possible to act before harmful patterns are repeated and to design learning environments that are inclusive, relevant, and responsive to change.

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Scenario building, backcasting, and critical design are tools that challenge dominant narratives and help ask urgent questions: What kind of future are we preparing learners for? And who is being excluded?

Designing Dystopias to Reveal Possibilities

The Variable Framework is a method used to construct dystopian scenarios based on real-world trends. Rather than speculating aimlessly, it helps map how intersecting forces can lead to unjust outcomes—especially within education.

These dystopias are not predictions, but provocations. They function as mirrors, exposing risks and helping clarify what needs to change now to build more just and sustainable futures. The following three sets of variables support the exploration of the scenarios that follow.

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1. Social and Economic Factors

No	Variable	Description
1	Capitalism	Market logic applied to all aspects of life
2	Social inequality and Income Inequality and Wealth Concentration	The gap between the richest and the poorest continues to widen. Widening gaps in wealth, health, education, access, and power.
3	Superdiversity, Migration, Displacement, and Labour Exploitation	Multiplicity of cultural, linguistic, and other identities. Economic instability, conflict, and climate change are driving mass migration.
4	Precarious Work, Job Insecurity and “Knowledge workers” instead of person	The rise of gig work, temporary contracts, and automation have eroded job stability. Reduction of the individual to their informational productivity
5	Authoritarianism, democratic deficit and lack of participation and community consent	Concentration of power, anti-intellectualism, censorship. Democratic failure, abdication of public authorities, and public participation are superficial.
6	Climate Change and Environmental Injustice	Economic systems are driving ecological breakdown. Disproportionate harm to marginalized communities (climate refugees, loss of livelihoods, health risks).

2 *Technological Dynamics*

No	Variable	Description
1	Cognitive decline from digital reading	Cognitive decline linked to fragmented and fast reading
2	AI Bias	Reproduction of social biases by artificial intelligence systems
3	GAFAM dominance	Hegemony of major digital platforms. Tech giants build their power and profit on data extraction, a model that deepens the digital divide and excludes large populations
4	Ecological footprint	Environmental impact of digital technologies (energy, servers, waste)
5	Surveillance capitalism and data surveillance	Collection, analysis, and exploitation of personal data. Alarming elements such as data-based reward systems, control over public services, and even the establishment of a private police force—a deeply undemocratic vision of city governance.
6	Dehumanizing the impact of technological control	Systems where technology governs nearly every aspect of human life—decisions, behaviour, even thoughts—in the name of efficiency, security, or progress.

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3. Educational Challenges

No	Variable	Description
1	Inequitable access	Inequities in access to education based on socio-economic contexts
2	Loss of meaning	Disconnection between educational content, methods, and purpose
3	Cognitive overload	Mental overload caused by excessive information and digital demands
4	Standardization	Standardization of learning and assessment
5	Underfunding	Insufficient financial resources for public education
6	Structural Racism and Educational Exclusion	Black and racialized students are disproportionately subjected to punitive policies like zero tolerance, predictive policing, and behavioural profiling. Residential schools. Structural curricular erasure.

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Scenario 1 : The Programmed Future: Education in the Age of Engineered Inequality

Variables used:

- Capitalism (1.1)
- Social inequality and wealth concentration (1.2)
- Superdiversity, migration, and labor exploitation (1.3)
- Precarious work and job insecurity (1.4)
- Surveillance capitalism and data surveillance (2.5)
- Dehumanizing impact of total technological control (2.6)
- GAFAM dominance (2.3)
- Standardization (3.4)
- Structural racism and educational exclusion (3.6)
- Underfunding (3.5)

By 2045, market-driven reforms have transformed education into a subscription-based service controlled by GAFAM. Curricula are standardized, optimized for job readiness, and delivered by AI tutors trained on biased datasets. Public schools are severely under-funded, serving mostly migrants and racialised youth tracked through predictive behaviour scoring. Students are assessed not by curiosity or creativity, but by compliance and efficiency. Those who deviate are labelled "unproductive" and funneled into precarious, low-paid gig labour. Digital implants monitor emotional states and performance, feeding data into corporate governance systems. Civic education has been replaced by algorithmic obedience training. Meanwhile, elite children learn offline, with tutors who nurture critical thought and historical awareness. In this system,

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inequality is not a failure—it is a design. Learning to question is the first step toward becoming ungovernable. As foreshadowed in the story "Learning Under Watch" from the previous chapter, where Jerome navigates a school governed by surveillance and suspicion, Scenario 1 amplifies this trajectory into the future—showing how predictive policing, algorithmic obedience training, and digital implants extend the carceral logic of schooling into a fully engineered inequality.

Scenario 2 : Echoes of Control: Learning in the Shadow of Collapse

Variables used:

- Climate change and environmental injustice (1.6)
- Migration, displacement, and labor exploitation (1.3)
- Authoritarianism and democratic deficit (1.5)
- Surveillance capitalism and data surveillance (2.5)
- Ecological footprint (2.4)
- AI bias (2.2)
- Cognitive overload (3.3)
- Inequitable access (3.1)
- Loss of meaning (3.2)
- Structural racism and educational exclusion (3.6)

By 2050, climate-induced disasters and political instability have displaced millions, leading to fortified “climate zones” where access to resources—including education—is tightly controlled. In these zones, schooling is delivered through centralized AI systems that rely on biometric

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tracking and predictive algorithms trained on biased data. Migrant and racialized children are disproportionately misclassified and relegated to menial training programs masked as education. Cognitive overload is rampant as learners are bombarded with fragmented digital content with little pedagogical coherence. Surveillance capitalism thrives, with student data monetized in real time, while ecological degradation continues through server farms and e-waste from obsolete devices. Education loses its transformative potential, reduced to behavior management and compliance reinforcement. The classroom becomes a site of silent control—stripped of imagination, dialogue, and dissent. In marginalized regions outside the zones, underground schools emerge, blending oral knowledge, environmental stewardship, and collective care. There, learning is fragile—but free.

Scenario 3 : The Fragmented Mind: Learning and Living in the Age of Disconnection

Variables used:

- Capitalism (1.1)
- Superdiversity, migration, and labor exploitation (1.3)
- Climate change and environmental injustice (1.6)
- Ecological footprint of digital technologies (2.4)
- Cognitive decline from digital reading (2.1)
- Dehumanizing impact of total technological control (2.6)
- Inequitable access to education (3.1)
- Cognitive overload (3.3)
- Loss of meaning in education (3.2)

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By 2055, societies operate under extreme pressure from climate chaos, supply chain collapse, and accelerating mass migration. Education, once a shared social project, has become fragmented and privatized. Wealthy enclaves offer immersive learning through AI-driven virtual reality pods, while displaced populations receive minimal instruction via solar-powered tablets preloaded with outdated content. The digital divide deepens: those with access experience cognitive overload and disorientation from constant stimulation, while others are locked out entirely. Reading skills decline, with screen-fed learners struggling to form deep comprehension or critical analysis. Education no longer offers meaning or connection—it is a performance of compliance. Meanwhile, the ecological footprint of digital infrastructure worsens planetary stress, with cloud servers consuming water and energy at unsustainable rates. Super-diverse classrooms lack cultural responsiveness, and migrant children are often reduced to their utility in future labour markets. In this fractured world, the human mind becomes the final battleground between control and creativity.

Scenario 4 : The Rewilding of Education: Learning Beyond the Collapse

Variables used :

- Climate change and environmental injustice (1.6)
- Underfunding of public education (3.5)
- Loss of meaning in education (3.2)

By 2060, repeated ecological disasters and rising sea levels have led to the abandonment of many cities and institutions, including most formal school systems. With centralized infrastructure crumbling, families and small

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communities begin organizing decentralized, land-based learning collectives. Freed from rigid curricula and standardized testing, education reorients toward survival, care, and ecological interdependence. Children learn from Elders, from the land, and from each other—gardening, foraging, repairing, storytelling. The collapse of digital infrastructure becomes a turning point: not a loss, but a liberation. Without screens, fragmented content, or metrics, learning regains depth and purpose. Lifelong learning becomes a communal rhythm, embedded in daily life and intergenerational exchange. This vision echoes the learning collective described in the previous chapter “Together We Make This Work,” where Josie, a recent arrival, finds purpose and belonging within a decentralized, intergenerational, and land-based community—a space where history is acknowledged, knowledge is co-created, and the future is built collaboratively from the ground up. Everyone, regardless of age, becomes both the teacher and the learner. Though uneven and precarious, these small ecosystems of knowledge rebuild education as something slow, situated, and meaningful. In the ruins of extraction-driven systems, new ways of knowing begin to take root—rooted in place, in memory, and in shared responsibility.

Toward what comes next

While dystopian scenarios expose the structural risks of inaction—automation without autonomy, datafication without dialogue, and inclusion without transformation—they are not ends in themselves. Critique alone is not enough. To move forward, we must shift from reactive analysis to deliberate, imaginative action. Rather than promising quick fixes, these building blocks offer grounded pathways—rooted in research, lived experience, and collective

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reflection—that help us move from disillusionment to design, from inherited failures to intentional futures.

Glossary

1876 Indian Act	The Indian Act is a colonial law imposed by the Canadian government in 1876 that governs many aspects of the lives of First Nations peoples. It is seen as a tool of control and assimilation that undermines Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and traditional governance systems. The Act has been used to dispossess Indigenous Peoples of their lands, restrict cultural practices, and impose a colonial definition of identity through mechanisms like status registration. While it remains a central part of Canada's legal framework, many Indigenous communities view the Indian Act as a symbol of ongoing colonialism and advocate for its replacement with self-governed, nation-to-nation agreements.
Accessibility	The genuine ability for all individuals regardless of background, ability, language, or resources to not only enter educational spaces but to thrive within them. It extends beyond physical or financial access to include emotional, cultural, and cognitive inclusion.
Advocacy in Education	The act of supporting and promoting equitable, inclusive, and just educational practices to ensure a quality education for all. Advocacy can range from public policy work to everyday acts that challenge exclusion and amplify marginalised voices.
Advocate	When a person who publicly or privately takes an active position or recommends a particular cause or policy for the benefit of others or the greater good.
Agency	The capacity of learners and educators to make meaningful choices about their teaching and learning. Agency includes autonomy, voice, and the power to shape educational practices, rather than passively follow imposed systems.

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AI Bias	Patterns of discrimination embedded in artificial intelligence systems, including conformity pressures, that reproduce societal inequalities by undermining trust, autonomy and equity. In educational contexts, pre-established algorithms which misclassify and marginalise subjects.
AI for the Good of All	A utopian ideal to solve global issues such as health, climate, gender equality, and infrastructure, which are more aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
Algorithmic Dis-empowerment	The process by which digital systems, particularly those powered by AI, reduce human agency and creativity by standardising decisions, reinforcing compliance, and limiting people's ability to determine the course of their intellectual lives for themselves.
Amplification	More than making something louder, it's a political act of reclaiming (epistemic) 'what we know/how we know' space. To amplify the silenced is to code, archive, and design in ways that restore erased lineages, voices, and cultural practices. Amplification resists token inclusion and reorients power through infrastructural insurgency.
Anomaly	An unexpected disruption in a system, used symbolically and literally to signify awakening or resistance.
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	Technologies capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as writing, analysis, and decision-making. AI is both a potential tool for transformation and a mechanism of control, depending on how it is deployed.

Assimilation	The process by which individuals or groups are forced to adopt the dominant culture, often at the expense of their own cultural identity, language, and practices.
Asymmetries of Power	The unequal distribution of power, privilege, and influence across individuals and groups, which affects who feels safe or supported to speak up or take risks.
Audit Culture	A system of governance where performance is assessed through metrics, checklists, and standardised evaluations, often at the expense of creativity, mentorship, or human complexity.
Authoritarianism and Democratic Deficit	The erosion of participatory decision-making and the rise of centralised, unaccountable control which silences dissent, flattens diversity, and transforms schools, institutions, etc., into instruments of obedience and surveillance.
Backcasting	A process of starting with a future state of a system or community (often a future desired or undesired state) and working backwards to the current state of that system or community to work out what steps may be needed to take or to avoid, on the path to the future state.
Belonging	A sense of connection, acceptance, and inclusion within a learning environment. True belonging cannot be mandated through standardisation; it must be cultivated through relational, responsive, and inclusive practices.
Bois Caïman	Site of a Vodou ceremony that helped catalyse the Haitian Revolution.

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Book Sprint	A facilitated, high-intensity collaborative methodology designed to produce a complete book in a short period (typically five days). The process prioritises dialogue, co-creation, and rapid iteration over perfection, embodying the principles of collaboration, trust, and experiential learning.
Bureaucratic Governance	A top-down, rigid approach to managing education institutions, emphasising rules, hierarchy, and efficiency over adaptability, collaboration, and innovation.
Capacity Multiplication	The exponential increase in possibility and impact when advocates work <i>in</i> community. Coalitions, networks, and alliances amplify what any one individual could achieve alone.
Capitalism	An economic system driven by profit, competition, and privatisation, shaping how education is valued and delivered. When learning is commodified, it reinforces hierarchy, individualism, and extractive relationships. This can undermine collective flourishing and ecological care.
Carceral Curriculum	A term used to describe educational practices and environments that mirror punitive or surveillance-based systems, often criminalising learners, especially those who are Black, Indigenous, or racialised within schools.
Carceral Logic of Schooling	A term that critiques educational systems for operating like carceral institutions. It emphasises surveillance, control, and punishment over care, curiosity, and liberation.
Care (as Educational Practice)	An approach to education that centres on empathy, ethical relationships, and mutual responsibility, recognising learners and educators as whole human beings, not just academic performers.

Civic Literacy	The capacity to critically understand, engage with, and shape social and political life. It involves learning to read power, navigate institutions, interrogate media, and participate meaningfully in democratic processes.
Climate Change and Environmental Injustice	The disproportionate impacts of climate crises on marginalised communities, including Indigenous peoples and those in the Global South. Educational displacement, infrastructure collapse, and resource scarcity are deepened by systemic ecological harm and historical neglect.
Closed Learning	Education designed to protect and reproduce dominant hierarchies. Often characterised by fixed roles (teacher as knower, learner as passive), standardised outcomes, rigid curricula, and technocratic governance. Closed learning is efficient but exclusionary, stable but unjust. It is the system that prioritises control over curiosity and compliance over co-creation.
Co-Creation	A structural ethic in education where learners and educators collaborate as equal contributors in the design, content, and direction of learning, disrupting hierarchical power dynamics.
Co-Creation of Knowledge	The collaborative development of understanding, solutions, or tools between learners and community members. It resists one-way knowledge transmission and values experiential, situated, and multiple ways of knowing.
Coalition Building	The intentional creation of a group of individuals or institutions aligned in purpose to support a shared advocacy goal. Effective coalitions blend diverse perspectives, distribute labour, and amplify both voices and influence.

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Cognitive Decline from Digital Reading	The weakening of critical thinking, comprehension, and memory due to screen-based, non-linear reading habits. As learners adapt to fast-scrolling and hyperlinking, deep reading and sustained attention are eroded, with long-term consequences for learning.
Cognitive Frames/Framing	These frames are mental projections that are shaped by a person's understanding of the world around them.
Cognitive Overload	Mental fatigue and disorientation caused by the constant influx of fragmented, digital information. In overstimulated learning environments, one may struggle to focus, synthesise, or reflect which leads to surface-level engagement and understanding, and burnout.
Collaboration	A process where individuals work together to co-create, support, and share knowledge. In education, collaboration fosters collective courage, innovation, and community-driven transformation.
Collective Action	The process by which communities work together to effect change.
Collective Courage	The strength that emerges when people act together in solidarity to confront fear, resist oppression, and initiate change. It is built through trust, care, and shared purpose.
Collective Learning	A process where a group of people acquire skills, knowledge, and behaviours, often across disciplines, through interactions and collaboration. It addresses a group's way to develop and share knowledge, leading to a collective understanding and the ability to innovate and adapt.

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Collective Literacy	A shared, communal process of learning and meaning-making that transcends individual achievement. It includes emotional, social, and critical literacies developed through interdependence and reciprocal knowledge exchange.
Collective Reflection	A process of shared meaning-making where individuals come together to examine assumptions, name injustices, and co-envision pathways for change. It recognises that transformation emerges not from isolated insight, but from relationship and learning together.
Collective Responsibility	Where members of a group share accountability for the actions and decisions both good and bad of that group.
Collective Story	The shared narrative that emerges when diverse individuals come together, offering their voices, experiences, and perspectives. The process resists singular authorship and instead reflects a pluralistic, co-created truth.
Colonial Legacies	The lingering structures, values, and assumptions in education systems that originate from colonial histories, often privileging Western knowledge systems and marginalising others.
Comfort Zone	A psychological space where individuals feel familiar and safe. Courage often involves stepping outside this zone to embrace uncertainty, growth, and new possibilities.

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Commodification	Learning in many formal and informal spaces has become tokenised and a commodity for sale. By paying for a learning service we receive the token of a piece of paper, a diploma or degree. We are not intending this term to be pejorative towards the many people who are engaged in our learning today who provide immense and courageous labour to support learners, but rather to highlight how the systems of learning we have collectively created prioritise tokens and a commodity model of learning that could be bought and traded.
Commodified Learning	An approach to education where learning is treated as a product to be delivered, assessed, and exchanged, often driven by data metrics, rather than as a lived, relational, or transformative process.
Communities	More than just collections of individuals, they are interconnected networks of relationships that include people, land, ancestors, and future generations. They are rooted in responsibility, reciprocity, and relational accountability, emphasising the wellbeing of the whole rather than the individual alone.
Communities of Practice	Groups of individuals who share a common interest or concern and regularly interact to learn, share knowledge, and improve their practice. They deepen their expertise through ongoing interaction and collaboration, creating a space for knowledge sharing, innovation, and professional development.
Community as Co-Learner	A recognition that communities are not just settings or support systems for learning, but active participants in learning processes. Communities, like individuals, evolve, adapt, and generate new knowledge when engaged meaningfully in education.

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Community Learning Hubs

Locally grounded, often informal spaces (like libraries, kitchens, gardens, and cultural centres) where intergenerational learning, co-creation, and knowledge exchange occur. These hubs foster relational learning rooted in lived experiences.

Community Learning Journeys

Processes in which communities actively shape their own learning pathways, grounded in their cultural, social, and economic realities. These journeys emphasise adaptation, collaboration, and the generation of contextually relevant knowledge.

Community Literacy

A dynamic system of shared knowledge, stories, and practices that communities develop through interaction with one another and broader networks. Community literacy supports social justice by connecting diverse actors, learners, educators, and organisations in interdependent learning relationships.

Community of Purpose

A group connected not by profession but by shared values and commitments. In this case, the authors were united by a belief in the need for better, more inclusive, and transformative education.

Community of Understanding and Action

A dynamic, evolving network of people committed to ethical, transformative educational practices. These communities extend beyond classrooms to include families, Elders, colleagues, and policy makers, united by trust, inquiry, and shared purpose.

Community Resilience Through Learning

The capacity of communities to adapt, recover, and transform in the face of challenges, strengthened by learning practices that are inclusive, co-constructed, and emotionally rooted in trust and shared understanding.

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Community Service Learning (CSL)	An experiential educational model in which students actively apply their academic knowledge to real-world projects that benefit communities. Through this practical application of learning, students develop empathy, civic responsibility and practical skills, while communities benefit from tangible support in a mutually beneficial exchange.
Community Building	Creating supportive networks among learners, educators, families, and interest-holders that encourage mutual care, shared learning, and sustainable transformation.
Community-Centred Approach Grounded in Care	<p>An ethic of engagement that places mutual care, shared responsibility, and cultural humility at the heart of learning.</p> <p>This approach emphasises listening, co-creation, and relational accountability, recognising care as an actionable foundation for education.</p>
Community-Centred Learning	An approach to education that places communities—local, cultural, intergenerational at the core of knowledge creation and learning processes. It emphasises lived experience, mutual care, and co-construction of meaning over top-down delivery of standardised content.
Containment Disguised as Care	A phrase from “Override Protocol” describing how educational systems can marginalise underrepresented groups while appearing inclusive.
Convergence	When two or more things come together to form a new whole.
Conviction	A firmly held belief or principle that motivates courageous action, especially in the face of resistance or uncertainty.

**Corporate Model (of See *Commodification*
Education)**

Counterculture of Change A community-led movement that resists dominant norms and systems by promoting alternative approaches to learning, collaboration, and social justice in education.

Courage The willingness to act on one's values despite fear, risk, or discomfort. In educational settings, courage involves questioning the status quo, taking action, and supporting others to do the same.

Creative and Knowledge-Based Networks These are groups of people that are essential for fostering innovation and generating new ideas. They facilitate the sharing and exchange of knowledge, skills, and information, leading to the development of new concepts and creative solutions. These networks are characterised by the interplay of individuals with diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and expertise, who collaborate to solve problems and develop innovative approaches, products and/or services.

Creative Constraint The structured limits of time, team dynamics and facilitation which do not serve as obstacles but as catalysts for creativity, pushing participants to make bold decisions and move ideas forward quickly.

Creativity (in Education) The ability to think critically, imagine alternatives, and challenge dominant paradigms. Creativity includes the use of curiosity, design thinking, and speculative inquiry across all disciplines and not just the arts.

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Credentialism	An overreliance on formal certifications as markers of value and legitimacy in education. It excludes non-institutional forms of knowledge and reinforces existing hierarchies by privileging access over equity.
Critical Inquiry	An approach to learning that encourages questioning, analysis, and reflection on power, systems, and assumptions. It supports deeper understanding and social justice by engaging with complexity.
Critical Mass	A threshold point at which enough people, momentum, or resources are mobilised to shift dominant systems or ideas.
Critical Reflection	A mode of thinking that interrogates assumptions, power structures, and consequences. It is central to reclaiming education from algorithmic or managerial logics.
Critical Reflexivity	The continuous, intentional questioning of our beliefs, assumptions, positions, and impacts within educational contexts. It moves beyond self-awareness toward transformative action grounded in humility, responsibility, and ethical engagement.
Critical Resistance	An approach that actively challenges oppressive educational structures and promotes equity, justice, and transformative learning by unsettling defaults and inherited systems.
Critical Thinking	An intellectual process that involves questioning assumptions, analysing systems of power, and engaging deeply with complex issues. In education, it is a form of resistance to surface-level or market-driven thinking.

Learning advocacy for educational change

Cross-Linguistic Generosity	The additional effort made by participants to engage in English-language writing even when English was not their first language. This reflects a commitment to accessibility, inclusion, and shared purpose.
Cultural Genocide	A term used by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada to describe the policies and practices that aimed to eradicate Indigenous cultures, languages, and ways of life, especially through residential schools.
Curated Knowledge	The intentional practice of selecting, contextualising, and organising knowledge for meaningful learning. In a world of information overload, curation becomes essential to discernment and learning integrity.
Curiosity (Administered vs. Cultivated)	A distinction between curiosity that is structured and limited by institutional norms (administered) and curiosity that is actively nurtured through open-ended inquiry and experiential learning (cultivated).
DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals)	A U.S. immigration policy that protects eligible undocumented youth from deportation and allows them to work legally. Similar protections do not exist in Canada.
Data Ethics-Intergenerational	An approach to data use and digital technologies that prioritises community voice, transparency, sovereignty, and justice. In a learning-through-life context, it demands accountability across age groups and contexts, resisting surveillance and exploitation.
Datafication	The reduction of complex human and educational experiences into quantifiable data. This trend often erases nuance and prioritises productivity over emotional or relational realities.

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Decentralised Decision-Making	A governance approach that shifts power from central authorities to local or individual actors, such as educators and learners, that allows more responsive and context-sensitive choices.
Decolonisation	The active process of dismantling colonial systems, ideologies, and power structures. In education, this involves rethinking whose knowledge is valued, how learning is structured, and who has access to it.
Dehumanising Impact of Total Technological Control	The reduction of learners to data points within fully automated systems. When education is mediated entirely by AI, biometric tracking, and behavioural algorithms, the relational, emotional, and ethical dimensions of learning are lost.
Design for Justice	An intentional, systemic orientation toward learning as a site of infrastructural equity. It does not retrofit existing systems but rewrites their foundations. The process begins not with policy compliance but with community memory, cultural sovereignty, and insurgent imagination.
Dialogic Learning	A collaborative, conversational approach to learning that emphasises dialogue, co-construction of knowledge, and mutual respect. It can often be constrained by rigid learning management systems.
Digital Inclusion in Community Learning	Ensuring that all community members have access to the technologies, digital skills, and support needed to participate meaningfully in online and tech-supported learning. It also involves developing ethical, community-driven technologies that reflect local needs and identities.

Digital Surveillance	The use of technology to monitor, track, and collect data on learners and educators, often without full transparency or consent. This can reinforce bias and erode trust and agency in learning environments.
Disembodied Learning	An educational model that ignores the emotional, physical, and social realities of learners and educators, treating them as minds disconnected from bodies and contexts.
Disorientation as Generativity	The productive tension that comes from working without knowing all the parts or outcomes in advance. This disorientation encouraged creativity, openness, and humility in the process.
Dispossession	The removal of people from their land, culture, or rights. It refers to how educational systems have contributed to the Indigenous and racialised communities losing their land, culture and identities.
Disruption	A necessary and often uncomfortable process of challenging existing norms, assumptions, or systems in order to make space for transformation and justice.
Disruption of Academic Norms	An intentional break from conventional academic practices, such as isolated writing, rigid hierarchies, or slow production timelines. The process rejects these in favour of openness, speed, and shared authorship.
Documentation	The process of capturing, evaluating, and sharing change efforts to support sustainability, reflection, and scale. Strong documentation builds institutional memory and enables replication.

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Dystopian Scenarios Imagined futures that highlight the possible consequences of unchecked current trends (e.g., surveillance, standardisation). These are not predictions but provocations meant to inspire action.

Ecological Footprint (of Technology) The environmental impact of digital infrastructures, such as energy consumption from data centres and electronic waste, that must be factored into responsible educational design.

EDI (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion) A cluster of terms often used in institutional transformation efforts. Reflexive advocacy interrogates how these concepts are used, misused, or expanded (e.g., to include Indigenisation, Decolonisation, Belonging), and insists they be grounded in lived realities and systemic change.

Educational Courage The willingness to confront discomfort, embrace failure, and persist in learning. It includes the bravery to admit “I’m not there yet”, to challenge rigid systems, and to seek truth across contexts and power structures.

Educational Equity The principle of recognising and valuing diverse forms of knowledge, including those traditionally excluded or devalued. It moves beyond inclusion within systems toward transformation of the systems themselves.

Educational Exclusions Systemic barriers that marginalize racialized communities through policy, curriculum, and practice. In future scenarios, digital tools amplify these harms—misclassifying learners, silencing histories, and narrowing possibilities for racial justice.

Learning advocacy for educational change

Elastic Infrastructures	Educational systems designed for flexibility, responsiveness, and multiplicity. They recognise non-linear life paths and provide accessible entry and re-entry points for learners at all stages of life.
Embedded Allies	Institutional actors who support change from within existing structures. Allies can help navigate bureaucracy, unlock access, and legitimise grassroots initiatives.
Embodied Learning	Learning that engages the whole self including the mind, body, and emotion. The intensity, exhaustion, laughter, and nourishment, both intellectual and literal.
Embodying Change	Living out the values, practices, and commitments you seek to promote. Advocacy is not just strategic, it is also personal, relational, and ethical.
Envisioning the Future	A reflective practice of clearly articulating the change you aim to achieve. This can include imagining specific outcomes, lived experiences, and daily realities for those affected. Vision provides direction when the path is uncertain.
Epistemic Autonomy	The ability of learners to shape what and how they learn based on their own values, goals, and ways of knowing.
Epistemic Plurality	The recognition and inclusion of multiple ways of knowing (e.g., cultural, experiential, land-based) as legitimate forms of knowledge in education.
Equity	The principle of fairness in education, recognising that different learners have different needs, and actively working to address barriers and systemic inequalities.

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Equity-Centered Design	A justice-oriented approach to creating educational tools, practices, and environments that intentionally address barriers related to race, class, ability, gender, language, and other intersecting factors. It requires meaningful participation from marginalised voices from the outset.
Equity-Centred Change	A process of transformation that prioritises justice, inclusion, and responsiveness to systemic barriers. Equity-centred change does not treat all learners the same; it addresses historical and present-day inequalities through intentional redesign of policy, pedagogy, and access.
Erasure	The process by which dominant systems exclude or diminish certain knowledges, histories, or identities. Learning through life resists erasure by making space for marginalised voices and counter-narratives.
Ethical Reflection (in EdTech)	The practice of critically examining how educational technologies are designed, who they benefit, what biases they embed, and how they impact human connection, learning equity, and systemic power structures.
Ethics of Care in Learning	An approach that centres empathy, mutual recognition, and responsibility within educational relationships. It moves beyond sentimentality to frame care as a set of practices that sustain meaningful, equitable learning environments.
Exclusion in Community Learning	A caution against romanticising “community” without addressing internal inequities. Learning spaces must be explicitly inclusive, attending to systemic barriers related to race, class, disability, language, gender, and other intersecting identities.

Expanded Geography of Justice	A framework that positions learning spaces beyond institutional walls as sites of educational justice. It demands that society support knowledge-building wherever it occurs, from prisons to community kitchens to language reclamation circles.
Experiential Learning	Learning rooted in direct experience, reflection, and application. Distinguished here from job-training models, it is framed as essential to developing agency, critical thinking, and learning through life capabilities.
Flagged Users	Refers to banned or suppressed individuals and intellectuals. Symbolises institutional censorship and erasure.
Formal and Informal Learning	Formal learning is structured and institutionally recognised (e.g., school or university); informal learning occurs outside traditional structures, through family, community, work, or cultural practice. Both are valued and often interconnected.
Futures Thinking / Speculative Design	An imaginative approach to education that uses scenario building and design to prepare for long-term challenges. It is less about prediction and more about ethical responsibility and readiness.
GAFAM	An acronym referring to Google, Apple, Facebook (Meta), Amazon, and Microsoft. These tech giants influence educational policy and practice through platform dominance, data ownership, and algorithmic control.
Growth Mindset	The belief that abilities and understanding can be developed through effort, reflection, and learning. A growth mindset supports risk-taking, resilience, and continuous transformation.

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**Hopeful
Provocation**

An inspirational text where readers are asked to question the current state of affairs in education and imagine how education could be restructured to reflect more equitable, collaborative, and human-centred values.

**Horizontal
Relationships**

Non-hierarchical interactions between learners and educators that foster mutual accountability, shared learning, and co-creation, central to open education.

**Human-Centred
Education**

An approach to education that places relationships, identities, emotions, and lived experiences at the core of teaching and learning practices. The process honours each contributor as a whole person.

**Humanity (in
Education)**

The recognition of the full personhood of all educational actors. Humanity in education requires honouring emotion, lived experience, complexity, and relational engagement.

Hybrid Pedagogy

A teaching model combining online and in-person methods.

Imagination

The ability to envision alternative futures or ways of being. In educational transformation, imagination helps communities dream beyond current limitations.

Inclusion

The active, intentional, and continuous process of ensuring that diverse individuals feel valued, respected, and supported in educational spaces. Inclusion is more than representation; it is structural participation.

**Inclusive
Education**

A model of education that welcomes and values all learners, particularly those historically marginalised. It aims to create learning environments where diversity is embraced and all learners thrive.

Inclusive Learning through Life	An approach to education that values learning across all stages of life, identities, and contexts. It emphasises the inclusion of marginalised voices, varied knowledge systems, and different modes of learning: cognitive, emotional, embodied, and cultural.
Incompatible Language Detected	An error message one receives when resisting the system linguistically. Highlights the politics of language and voice.
Inequitable Access to Education	Ongoing disparities in who can access safe, high-quality, and relevant learning. Inequities are exacerbated by privatisation, displacement, and technological divides, leaving millions excluded or underserved by formal education systems.
Infrastructural Insurgency	Refers to the strategic use of design, data and technology to subvert and reconfigure oppressive systems from within. Rather than viewing resistance as purely oppositional or external to dominant structures, it frames it as systemic, creative, and embedded, emerging through practices such as encrypted communication, intergenerational knowledge, and diasporic memory.
Institutional Conservatism	The tendency of educational institutions to resist change in order to preserve traditional hierarchies, processes, and identities.
Institutional Fit	The degree to which a learner aligns with the often-unspoken cultural, social, and behavioural expectations of a school or university. Those who don't "fit" may face exclusion or marginalisation.

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**Institutional
Leverage Points**

Moments, mechanisms, or policies within an institution that offer opportunities to influence or accelerate change. Examples include mission statements, strategic plans, accreditation processes, and hiring or admissions practices.

**Insurgent
Pedagogies**

Learning practices that resist dominant narratives and structures, often rooted in everyday acts of defiance, survival, and community care. These challenge colonial, racist, and exclusionary forms of education.

**Interdisciplinary
Collaboration**

The act of working across academic, professional, and personal boundaries to generate new insights. Participants from diverse fields and roles share purpose and willingness to learn from one another.

Interest-Holders

"Interest holder" is a neutral and inclusive term to identify a person with an interest or concern in something that is important to them specifically.

**Intergenerational
Learning**

Learning that takes place across age groups, where younger and older community members exchange knowledge, values, and experiences. It resists age segregation and fosters continuity, empathy, and collective memory.

Intersectionality

A framework that recognises how different forms of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, classism) intersect to create unique experiences and challenges for individuals.

**Intrinsic
Motivation**

A learner's internal drive to engage in learning out of curiosity or purpose, not due to external rewards. Essential in open learning environments that support agency.

Learning advocacy for educational change

Justice-Oriented Education	Education that seeks to confront and transform systemic oppression by centring equity, inclusion, and relational accountability. It addresses both historical and contemporary injustices while imagining liberatory futures.
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	Quantitative metrics used to measure progress or success. In education, KPIs can narrow the focus to what is easily measurable, often at the expense of creativity, complexity, and holistic growth.
Klas Tanbou	Haitian Kreyòl for “Class of the Drum”. A liberated learning space built by and for marginalised communities. Represents decolonial, culturally sustaining education.
Knowledge Mobilization	The process of translating research and academic knowledge into community contexts in meaningful, accessible ways. Students can act as conduits, bringing fresh insights and innovations into grassroots settings, thereby democratising access to knowledge.
Kompa	A Haitian musical genre. Used in “Override Protocol” as both artistic expression and cultural resistance.
Language (as Power)	Language shapes what we value, how we see others, and how we relate to systems. Reflexive advocates analyse the histories and implications of the terms we use and seek to co-define language in community.
Learner	We have chosen the term ‘learner’ as our most inclusive choice. We are all learners. ‘Students’ suggest hierarchy with respect to the teacher, whereas the learner describes the role in a community.

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Learning Agency	The ability and confidence of learners to shape their own educational journeys. It includes the skills to navigate, curate, and create knowledge in ways that are meaningful and self-directed.
Learning as a Relational Process	An understanding of learning that centres connection, care, and shared experience over isolated or individual achievement.
Learning Community	A group of individuals united by a commitment to shared inquiry, dialogue, and mutual growth. Over the course of the sprint, the participants evolved into a learning community, co-constructing meaning and knowledge together.
Learning Ecosystems	Networks of people, places, tools, and practices that support learning through life, learning throughout life, and life-deep learning. They extend beyond schools to include homes, libraries, online spaces, cultural centres, and everyday life.
Learning from Experience	An active, reflective process where individuals apply knowledge in real-world contexts, take risks, assess outcomes, and grow through collaboration. It fosters empowerment, accountability, and a lifelong drive to learn with and from our communities.
Learning Management Systems (LMS)	Digital platforms used to deliver and manage course content. Critiqued here for reinforcing standardised outcomes and timelines, limiting creative and dialogic uses of technology. It may be identified in some institutions as D2L, Blackboard, etc.
Learning Society	A vision for a culture where education is a shared, ongoing responsibility across all sectors and life stages. It imagines cities, communities, and nations as learning ecosystems that support everyone, everywhere.

- Learning space** There are many spaces of learning, from schools to colleges to universities, to workplaces and home spaces and places of leisure. Today there is an implicit hierarchy and valuing of certain spaces of learning over other spaces of learning. Learning in formal academic settings is often seen as more valid than learning in informal spaces today. We are actively choosing the term ‘learning spaces’, over terms such as ‘classroom’, to value all learning, regardless of where it is situated.
- Learning through life** The terms ‘lifelong learning’ and ‘life-wide learning’ are used extensively in academic and societal settings. We have intentionally chosen ‘learning through life’ and ‘learning throughout life’ to ensure that our meaning is understood to address the dual actions of learning in life’s many settings, in our everyday lives, and learning at all stages of life. This encompasses concepts such as continuous professional development and upskilling, but also removes assumptions about specific times of life when learning may be expected to happen. We actively choose to affirm that learning is a human right and an essential component of the human experience.
- Liberation Curriculum** An educational framework that centres oppressed voices, oral histories, and anti-colonial knowledge. Opposed to standard, state-sanctioned curricula.
- Lifelong Learning** See *Learning through life*
- Life-Wide Learning** Learning happens in many places and contexts. Life-wide learning captures the fact that learning can be in formal educational settings, workplaces, places of play, family etc. See also *Learning through life*

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Lived Experience	The personal, social, and cultural realities that individuals bring to educational spaces. Grounding change in lived experience ensures relevance, authenticity, and justice.
Living the Argument	A concept where the method used to produce a work embodies the very principles the work advocates. Here, the collaborative and experiential method used to create the book becomes a form of proof for its argument about educational change.
Loss of Meaning in Education	The hollowing out of learning's purpose when it becomes mechanical, transactional, or disconnected from life. In systems driven by metrics, compliance, and automation, education loses its power to inspire, connect, and transform.
Low-Risk, High-Impact Initiatives	Projects that are relatively easy to implement but have meaningful effects on learning or equity. These help demonstrate the feasibility of change and reduce resistance by producing visible outcomes.
Managerialism	This refers to an ideology of management holding the central authority and power within an organisation, possibly at the expense of worker agency and shared decision-making. It implies a focus on control, measurable results, and standardised routines, often with the aim of achieving efficiency and profitability, as opposed to human connection and value.
Marginalised Voices	Perspectives and experiences that are often excluded or silenced in dominant educational narratives. Creating space for these voices is essential for inclusive and just learning.
Metacognition	The process of thinking about one's own thinking. Often neglected in AI-driven learning systems that prioritise surface-level fluency and speed over deeper understanding.

Metrics of Efficiency	Quantitative measures used to assess institutional performance (e.g., graduation rates, standardised test scores) that often ignore relational, contextual, or transformative dimensions of education.
Migration, Displacement, and Labour Exploitation	Forced movement of people due to war, climate change, and economic precarity. Migrant children often face interrupted education and are funnelled into exploitative labour pathways masked as “vocational training”, reinforcing cycles of exclusion.
Multiculturalism/ Diversity (as Myth)	In the Canadian context, multiculturalism/diversity is often celebrated, but this chapter critiques it as a sanitised narrative that hides ongoing systemic racism and exclusion, especially in educational institutions.
Mutual Care	An ethic of collective well-being that sustains emotional resilience in advocacy work. Mutual care involves rest, joy, recognition, and empathy—especially in work that challenges dominant norms or structures.
Narrative Power	The strategic use of stories to convey meaning, build empathy, and inspire action. Testimonials, case studies, and personal reflections help make the invisible visible and shift dominant narratives.
Negative Space (in Learning)	Open, unstructured spaces that allow for exploration, failure, questioning, and creativity, which are key to learner autonomy and innovation but often absent in standardised systems.
Neurodiverse Learners	Individuals whose cognitive functioning varies from what is considered “typical”, including but not limited to Autism, ADHD, and Dyslexia. Neurodiversity is part of human variation and should be supported through inclusive design.

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Neurodiversity	A recognition of the spectrum of neurological differences as part of human variation. Reflexive advocacy supports environments that respect and accommodate diverse ways of thinking, processing, and expressing.
Neutral Curriculum	A curriculum that claims to be impartial but in fact reflects dominant cultural values. This myth of neutrality often suppresses discussions of race, power, identity, and history.
No as Negotiation	A reframe of “no” as a starting point for dialogue, not a dead end. Resistance can reveal concerns, boundaries, or misalignment that, when addressed, strengthen the proposal.
Ojibwe	An Indigenous people and language group native to parts of Canada and the United States. The Ojibwe language is an important cultural and spiritual inheritance that was suppressed in residential schools.
Open Education	An educational movement advocating for accessible, flexible, and co-created learning experiences. Positioned as a potential rupture in traditional hierarchies if not blocked by standardisation.
Open Educational Practices	OEPs encompass the integration of openness into all aspects of teaching and learning, including designing learning outcomes, selecting resources, and planning activities. This involves using Open Educational Resources (OER), fostering open pedagogy, and sharing teaching practices. OEPs aim to increase access, engagement, and empowerment for learners while reducing barriers to education.

Learning advocacy for educational change

Open Educational Resources (OER)	Freely accessible, openly licensed learning materials that can be reused, adapted, and shared. They help eliminate barriers to learning and support equitable education.
Ownership of Change	When learners, educators, and communities take active roles in driving and sustaining transformation, rather than relying solely on top-down mandates.
Participant-Driven Change	Transformation led by those within the system such as learners, educators, families, communities, rather than imposed from above. It values lived experience, shared responsibility, and collaborative decision-making.
Pedagogical Agency	The freedom and authority of educators to shape their teaching practices, make decisions based on learners' needs, and innovate without fear of punishment or bureaucratic restriction.
Pedagogical Imagination	The creative capacity to re-envision education beyond its current structures to see it as a site of care, struggle, and possibility rather than control and compliance.
Pedagogical Judgment	The human, context-sensitive decision-making that educators bring to learning environments.
Pedagogies of Reclamation	Teaching and learning practices rooted in the recovery and revitalisation of erased or silenced knowledges. These include Indigenous land-based education, oral traditions, and intergenerational cultural transmission.
Pedagogy	The method and practice of teaching. It also refers to the implicit lessons taught through systems, policies, and exclusions and not just learning space content.

Because we need you!

Performative Access	Superficial efforts to appear inclusive, such as diversity statements or symbolic gestures, without addressing structural barriers or supporting real equity.
Pilot Project	A small-scale, time-bound initiative designed to test new ideas or practices before broader implementation. Pilots create space for experimentation, learning, and adaptation. When effective, they generate models that can be scaled and replicated.
Portable Practices	Strategies or models that can be adapted across different institutions or contexts without losing their core value. Portability is essential to move from local innovation to sector-wide impact.
Positionality	Refers to one's location within and understanding of the complex web of social identities, power dynamics, and social contexts that shape how one perceives and interacts with the world. It highlights how our diverse social identities (like race, class, gender, lived experience, etc.) influence our perspectives, knowledge, and experiences, and how these intersections create unique vantage points.
Power (Relational)	Power in reflexive advocacy is not only institutional or positional but also relational. Recognising and navigating one's power of privilege or lack thereof is essential to ethical action and inclusive transformation.
Practitioner-Researcher	A systematic inquiry conducted to improve one's own practice or address issues within their field. It involves a reflective and collaborative process where practitioners, often in collaboration with other interest holders, explore and analyse their experiences to identify knowledge and methods for improvement. Practitioner research is distinct from academic research in its focus on immediate, practical implications.

Pragmatism	The ability to make strategic compromises without sacrificing core values. Pragmatism in advocacy is not about giving up; it's about surviving, adapting, and continuing the work with a long-term view.
Precarious Contracts	Employment conditions in academia that lack job security, benefits, or long-term commitment. These conditions disempower educators and restrict pedagogical freedom.
Predictive Policing (in Education)	Use of data and algorithms to monitor, predict, and control student behaviour. Often exacerbates existing inequalities and limits student agency.
Procedural Stability	The perceived safety and predictability of repeating inherited educational routines, policies, or structures even when they no longer serve learners. It is the default mode of institutional inertia. Procedural stability often comes at the cost of authentic learning, equity, and adaptability.
Education as a Public Good	The idea that education benefits all of society and should be accessible, inclusive, and collectively supported, rather than treated as a private commodity.
Reciprocal Learning	A mutual exchange in which both learners and communities benefit and grow. It emphasises two-way learning, where students contribute to the knowledge and well-being of communities and in return, gain insight, experience, and wisdom.
(R)evolution	A term blending 'revolution' and 'evolution', signalling both urgency and patience. It gestures toward radical transformation that is deeply rooted, community-driven, and generative. In learning, (r)evolution involves unsettling, unlearning, and rebuilding—not just tweaking, optimising, or reforming.

Because we need you!

Reflexive Advocacy A practice of continual reflection and ethical action in education that centres on justice, relationality, and lived experience. It asks, “Who am I in this system? How do I act? Who is included or excluded? What needs to change?”

Relational Co-Construction The process by which knowledge and understanding are built through relationships, such as between individuals, communities, and institutions. It values trust, shared purpose, and diverse voices in shaping educational experiences.

Relational Learning A pedagogical philosophy that emphasises learning through relationships between people, with place, and across time. It values trust, reciprocity, and empathy as foundational to educational growth.

Relational Learning Spaces Educational environments where trust, care, and dialogue shape how learning happens. These spaces support courage, exploration, and co-creation.

Relational Pedagogy An educational approach centred on relationships, care, and mutual respect, recognising that learning is co-constructed and deeply embedded in social contexts.

Relational Trust The foundation of transformative learning environments, built through vulnerability, active listening, and mutual respect. It enables the emotional and intellectual risks necessary for reflective advocacy and collective learning.

Remixing The adaptation, combination, and transformation of educational content and practices to reflect local contexts, languages, and needs that are central to open and community-integrated learning.

Learning advocacy for educational change

Reset Required	Refers to the demand of a system for reprogramming or compliance, occurring after it symbolises coercive normalisation.
Residential Schools	Church and state-run institutions in Canada (1830s–1990s) that removed Indigenous children from their families to forcibly assimilate them. These schools were sites of cultural genocide, abuse, and trauma.
Resistance (in Education)	Acts that are both large and small that challenge systems or practices that dehumanise, exclude, or reduce learning to narrow outcomes. Resistance is rooted in care, justice, and the pursuit of transformation.
Responsiveness	The ability and willingness to adapt practices, policies, and pedagogies in light of learners' changing needs, insights, and contexts. It is a hallmark of ethical, reflexive education.
Risk-Taking	The act of stepping into uncertainty or vulnerability in pursuit of growth, learning, or justice. In education, this often involves speaking up, trying new approaches, or challenging norms.
Sandboxes (for Learning)	Experimental, protected spaces for design, play, failure, and collective construction of new models. In contrast to outcome-driven learning spaces, sandboxes allow for inquiry without predetermined results. They are sites of innovation grounded in care, humility, and relational accountability.
Scalability	The potential for an initiative or practice to be adapted and implemented at a larger scale. Scalability depends on context, clarity of model, and alignment with institutional goals or values.

Because we need you!

Scenario Building	The process of creating narrative-based explorations of possible futures to reflect on current choices and design better alternatives.
Schema	A mental framework that shapes how we understand the world. Transformation often requires disrupting these established ways of thinking.
School Resource Officer (SRO) Program	A programme that places police officers in schools under the premise of promoting safety. Criticised for disproportionately surveilling and criminalising Black, Indigenous, and marginalised learners.
Scope of Action	The realistic range of influence an advocate or group can have within a given context. Understanding your scope of action involves mapping structural constraints (laws, policies, funding, workload) and strategic entry points for influence.
Self-Directed Learning	Learning driven by intrinsic motivation, curiosity, and critical inquiry rather than external mandates or standardised outcomes. It resists the commodification of education and champions agency and relevance.
Settler Colonialism	A form of colonialism where settlers come to stay and establish control over Indigenous lands and peoples. Education systems in Canada have historically functioned as a tool of settler colonialism.
Shared Purpose in Learning	A collective commitment to goals that are meaningful to all participants in the learning process. Shared purpose unites individuals with diverse backgrounds around common challenges or visions for change.

Simulation of Progress	The illusion of educational innovation created by layering new technologies over outdated structures without challenging foundational assumptions or hierarchies.
Slow Inquiry	A pedagogical stance that values time, complexity, and cultural rootedness over efficiency. It is framed as a radical act of refusal in systems obsessed with speed and outcomes.
Social Determinants of Learning	Similar to social determinants of health, this term refers to the social, economic, and environmental conditions like income, housing, language, and access to technology that influence how and where learning occurs.
Social Infrastructure	Public systems and spaces like libraries, community centres, and parks that enable community-building, support inclusion, and sustain informal learning. They are essential for equitable education and resilient democracies.
Social Justice	A commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and dignity for all, especially those historically marginalised in education and society.
Sovereignty (as Standard)	Refers to both political and educational self-determination.
Speculative Methods	Creative, imaginative approaches that use fiction, design, or scenario-building to explore possible futures, challenge current assumptions, and foster innovation.
Standardisation	The imposition of uniform practices and assessments across diverse learning contexts. While sometimes intended to ensure consistency, standardisation can overlook individual and cultural differences and stifle educator autonomy.

Because we need you!

Status Quo	The current state of things. Often used to refer to entrenched systems or practices that may need to be challenged.
STEM	Acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.
Stewardship of Learning	The act of taking shared responsibility for the direction, quality, and inclusivity of education. It involves care, commitment, and a long-term vision for what learning can and should be.
Story-as-Patch	A metaphor describing how stories function as software patches that reprogram systems from within. Prominent in “Override Protocol”.
Storytelling as Pedagogy	The use of narrative and lived experience as a tool for learning, empathy-building, and cultural transmission. It is a powerful method for humanising abstract knowledge and making space for diverse epistemologies.
Strategic Alignment	The process of connecting a proposal with the stated goals, pressures, or obligations of an institution. This framing helps advocates move change forward by working with, not against, existing structures.
Strategic Compromise	Negotiated decisions that allow for forward movement without abandoning foundational commitments. These are made with clarity about non-negotiables and are often necessary to build momentum and buy-in.
Strategic Stagnation	The deliberate or passive delay of meaningful change due to fear, bureaucracy, or adherence to managerial norms, especially evident in the adoption of AI tools without critical frameworks.

Streaming	An educational practice where students are placed into different academic paths (e.g., university, college, or vocational tracks), often influenced by systemic bias, racism, or class assumptions.
Structural Change	Systemic transformation of policies, norms, and practices to support equity, inclusion, and co-creation in education—not just surface-level reforms.
Structural Exclusion	Barriers embedded within institutional systems—such as funding models, admissions practices, or digital platforms—that systematically disadvantage certain groups.
Structural Racism	Racism that is embedded in institutions, policies, and social systems, often resulting in persistent inequalities regardless of individual intent.
Structural Violence	The systemic denial of educational access and opportunity, particularly for incarcerated, racialised, or marginalised populations. Lifelong learning challenges this violence by asserting the right to learn in all contexts.
Support Structures	Resources, relationships, and conditions that enable individuals to feel safe, seen, and empowered to engage in courageous and transformative actions.
Surface-Level Innovation	Changes that appear progressive on the surface (e.g., adding AI tools) but fail to challenge the underlying logics of standardisation, control, and exclusion.
Surveillance Capitalism	An economic model where personal data is commodified for profit. In education, this manifests in platform tracking, behaviour scoring, and algorithmic decision-making.

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Surveillance Capitalism and Data Surveillance	The commodification of personal data—including students’—by powerful corporations. In education, this manifests as constant monitoring, predictive profiling, and data extraction, turning schools into sites of digital exploitation and control.
Surveillance in Education	The monitoring of students and educators through digital tools, often tied to performance tracking or behaviour management, which can contribute to anxiety, bias, and a loss of trust.
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	A collection of 17 global goals established by the United Nations to promote peace, prosperity, and sustainability. This book aligns particularly with goals related to equitable, quality education (Goal 4).
Sustained Optimism	A disciplined, intentional belief in the possibility of positive change, maintained even amidst resistance or setbacks. This is not naïve hope, but a radical commitment to imagining and working toward just futures.
Systemic Constraints	The structural, cultural, and political limitations within institutions that inhibit transformative change, even when new tools or ideas are introduced.
Systemic Transformation	A deep restructuring of the values, incentives, and architectures of learning. Unlike reform, which adjusts existing parameters, systemic transformation alters the underlying logic. It calls for new forms of leadership, policy, pedagogy, and community partnership that centre on justice, plurality, and sustainability.
Systems engineering	Refers to a metaphor and practice to design just and accountable infrastructures.

Technological Humanism	A framework that calls for the design of educational technologies that enhance rather than diminish human connection, empathy, and community well-being. It challenges techno-solutionism by asking, “Who does this serve?”
Technological Reflexivity	The practice of critically examining digital tools, platforms, and infrastructures within education. It includes asking who designs them, who benefits, and who is marginalised, ensuring technologies support equity and inclusion.
Technology-Enhanced Community Learning	Using digital tools and platforms to support collaborative, inclusive learning in communities. When applied ethically and thoughtfully, technology can amplify community voice, facilitate connection, and democratise access to knowledge.
The Archive Excludes Us	A metaphor and reality that points to how formal records and curricula often omit or distort the histories of oppressed communities. It is a call to rewrite, remember, and restore what has been left out.
The Programmed Future	A dystopian scenario where education is shaped by corporate control, surveillance, and standardised AI-driven learning—highlighting the risks of uncritical technological adoption.
The Skin We’re In	A 2020 book by Desmond Cole documenting anti-Black racism and police violence in Canada.
Third Learning Spaces / Third Places	Informal, often hybrid spaces where learning occurs outside home (first place) and work/school (second place). Examples include cafés, public libraries, and community gardens—places that encourage interaction, experimentation, and inclusive participation.

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Transactional Learning	An exchange-based model of education in which students receive information and return it in assessments, rather than engaging in deeper, reciprocal, or relational learning processes.
Transformation	A deep, meaningful change that shifts systems, mindsets, and practices toward greater equity, justice, and relational connection.
Transformative Community Engagement	A deep, sustained process of involving communities not just in educational delivery but in shaping what learning means, how it is measured, and how it is sustained. It is rooted in justice, relationship, and mutual empowerment.
Transformative Learning	Learning that challenges assumptions, promotes critical reflection, and leads to personal or social change. It is rooted in connection, care, and awareness of context and complexity.
Transparency (Ethical)	A commitment to open communication and visibility of values, processes, and decisions, particularly in the use of data, AI, and policy. It supports accountability and trust in lifelong learning ecosystems.
Trauma-Informed Teaching	Pedagogical practices that recognise the impact of trauma on learning and prioritise safety, care, and responsiveness to students' emotional and psychological needs.
Trust-Based Education	Educational practices rooted in mutual respect, transparency, and care. Trust enables vulnerability, risk-taking, and authentic engagement among learners, educators, and communities.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)	A Canadian commission (2008–2015) established to document the history and lasting impacts of the residential school system. It is a call for truth-telling, justice, and meaningful action to address the harms of colonialism. True reconciliation requires restoring relationships, respecting Indigenous sovereignty, and implementing the TRC's 94 Calls to Action.
Uncertainty (in education)	Acknowledging that the future is unpredictable and that learners need the tools to navigate complexity, ambiguity, and change. Preparing for uncertainty means building adaptability, not just compliance.
Underfunding of Public Education	The chronic neglect of public educational systems in favour of privatisation, austerity, or short-term metrics. As formal institutions collapse, communities turn to decentralised, land-based learning rooted in care, resilience, and ecological interdependence.
Undocumented / Precarious Immigration Status	Refers to individuals living in Canada without legal immigration status or with uncertain legal protection, often facing barriers to education, healthcare, and employment.
Unity of Voice	A stylistic and conceptual goal of the sprint: rather than separate chapters reflecting individual authors, the text aims to present a cohesive voice formed through editing, dialogue, and consensus.
Universal Design	An approach to designing learning environments and materials that are accessible to all learners from the start, reducing the need for individual accommodations.

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Unlearning	The process of questioning and letting go of internalised norms, roles, and assumptions in order to make space for new forms of knowing, teaching, and being.
Unlinked	Represent autonomous knowledge and human experience outside surveillance.
Unsettling the Defaults	A call to critically examine and challenge inherited norms such as standardisation, credentialism, and efficiency in education, making space for new possibilities.
Upskilling	The continual process of acquiring new knowledge and skills to adapt to changing social and technological conditions. Reframed in this chapter as part of lifelong learning beyond institutional credentials.
Variable Framework	A method for constructing future scenarios by identifying and combining key social, technological, and educational variables. Used to provoke discussion about the consequences of current trajectories.
Village Model of Learning	An ethic of collective responsibility in education, where “it takes a village” to raise, support, and educate individuals. This model values shared caregiving, mutual support, and distributed expertise.
Voice	Not just speech, but the capacity to define reality, shape narratives, and construct meaning. In traditional systems, voice is often granted conditionally or selectively. A justice-oriented approach to voice recognises multiplicity, refuses assimilation, and insists on speaking in one’s own cadence, idiom, and syntax.

Learning advocacy for educational change

Voice (Plural and Contextual)	Each learner brings a unique perspective shaped by age, culture, language, gender, and experience. Reflexive advocacy honours these voices not as tokens but as essential contributors to collective learning and design.
Voiceprint Archive	A database of oral history suppressed by dominant systems. Symbolises the erasure and potential recovery of marginalised knowledge.
Vulnerability (Constructive)	An openness to being challenged, to not knowing, and to being transformed in relation with others. It is a strength in reflective advocacy, essential for growth, trust, and solidarity.
Vulnerability in Practice	The willingness to take risks, share unfinished ideas, and engage emotionally and intellectually in collaborative work.
We (Collective Responsibility)	The understanding that educational change requires learners, educators, families, administrators and policy makers to develop a connection, shared purpose, and distributed agency, not homogeneity.
Wellness Rhetoric	Language that promotes individual self-care and mental health, often used by institutions to deflect attention from structural causes of burnout and mental distress.

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Yonge Street Uprising

A protest and act of civil unrest that took place in Toronto in 1992 after the police killing of Raymond Lawrence, a 22-year-old man. It is often omitted from mainstream Canadian history curricula. The protest, organised by the Black Action Defence Committee (BADC), started peacefully but quickly devolved into property damage, arrests, and fire bombings along Yonge Street. The uprising was also in response to several factors, including the Los Angeles verdict in the Rodney King trial in the U.S.

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For further reading

Below are pre-BOOKSPRINT reading suggestions shared by participants to spark reflection ahead of our time together. Each piece invites us to engage boldly, with ideas about learning through life, collective action, and the courage it takes to come together to do hard things.

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Learning Advocacy for Educational Change: Because We Need You!

This book is a call to action for reimagining education as a bold, inclusive, and transformative journey. Written collaboratively by thirteen Canadian educators, scholars, and advocates, it challenges the status quo of commodified learning and standardized systems, offering a vision of education rooted in care, justice, and collective responsibility.

Through compelling narratives, practical tools, and visionary scenarios, the authors explore how education can be reclaimed as a public good. They advocate for lifelong learning, community-centered approaches, and open education practices that dismantle barriers and amplify marginalized voices. From resisting systemic inequities to fostering creativity and agency, this book provides a roadmap for meaningful change.

Whether you are an educator, learner, policymaker, or community member, *Because We Need You!* invites you to join a movement to reshape education into a space of connection, curiosity, and shared hope. Together, we can build learning environments that empower individuals and strengthen communities—because we need you!



ISBN 978-1-0697553-0-8



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