

Q&A questions for NEW Summit 2022 written article

Instructions:

Please browse the questions below and answer some or all of the questions. Focus on whatever you'd like our readers and Summit attendees to know about you and your work. We'll edit responses for style, clarity and length. If you have any questions, please let me know at alex.loda@asu.edu. Thanks for participating!

- *What is your area of expertise? What are you most passionate about, professionally?*
I am a sociologist who has spent the past 50 years working to bring research on 1) how youth (teens and young adults) learn and develop and 2) how we (adults in systems) can support them, into policy and practice at the national, state and local levels. My passion stems directly from the changes I have witnessed when adults shift from system-centered to youth-centered thinking which means that they adopt a fundamental respect for the developmental imperatives of adolescence: the development of identity, agency, competencies, and connections.
- *What is one thing would you most like to tell readers about your work?*
Probably most relevant is that in February 2021, I stepped down as the CEO of the Forum for Youth Investment, which I co-founded with Merita Irby in 1998, to commit fully to the opportunities being presented now to bring these ideas about youth development and youth success to impact in all communities and systems, but most specifically in K-12 education systems that are doubling down on their commitments to equity *and* excellence and looking for deeper, more authentic ways to leverage the power of all learners, all adults, all settings, and all learning approaches. I'm doing this by activating a cluster of senior fellow and senior advisor roles with organizations and initiatives like NEW.
- *[The Next Education Workforce is a big idea](#). It's about teams of educators coming around students to deliver on the promise of deepening and personalizing learning for ALL students. What connections do you see between your work and the Next Education Workforce?*
I see many connections, but the most promising ones center around the opportunities to redefine the education workforce. Specifically, for me and my colleagues, that means NOT starting with calls for schools to partner with out-of-school/after-school time providers. Rather, it starts with the acknowledgement that if learning happens everywhere (which it does) and all learning is social and emotional (which it is) then schools and school districts have a responsibility to take a fresh look not just at teaching and policy-related structural shifts to classroom instructional time (e.g. advisories, looping, team teaching) but also to look at how to leverage the 50% of the K-12 workforce that is not in the classroom and the temporary staff (e.g., substitute teachers) who step into classrooms. These adults, and the settings that they manage, are often discounted because they cannot replicate academic classroom experiences. They should, instead, be leveraged for the possibilities they can create for broader, lower-

stakes experience-driven, relationship-based learning that can a) help students feel more connected to their schools, b) contribute insights to student success planning, and c) help assure academic teachers that young people are coming into their classrooms from experiences that reinforce their confidence as learners..

- *What have you seen in your life and your work that's convinced you we need a different model of schooling and learning?*

I will offer up a link to a recent blog on how to rethink the substitute teaching force rather than recount the full story, but my entire work trajectory stems from the fact that as a college student, I spent my summers creating rich, highly engaging voluntary learning communities with 12 to 18 year olds from very diverse backgrounds with David Weikart (founder of the High Scope Educational Research Foundation and PI of the Perry Preschool Project which demonstrated the value of high quality early childhood education focused on active learning engagement).

<https://www.collaborativeclassroom.org/blog/substantial-classrooms-redesigning-the-substitute-teaching-experience-book-review-karen-pittman/>

- *People frequently talk about equity in education, and sometimes it seems they are not talking about the same thing. What do you think we SHOULD mean when we talk about equity in education?*

This is a very complex topic to which I will give a very cursory answer. 1) The science of learning and development assures us that, whatever our learning goals for youth, youth success is enhanced when young people feel known, accepted, engaged, challenged, supported and guided (given honest feedback on progress and opportunities to fail forward). 2) The science also tells us that all relationships and contexts matter, and that young people carry positive and negative experiences with them across settings. 3) Equity in education, too often, becomes a math game focused on reducing between-group gaps in student outcomes or school resources. Rarely (in my experience) does it focus on improving quality and engagement levels as experienced by the students or on assessing differences in quality and engagement experiences by race, class, gender, etc. 4) Even more rare are examples of where the learning experiences outside of the classroom/school are taken into account.

- *What about the education policy landscape needs to happen — or stop happening — for the U.S. to achieve sustainable, equitable gains in learning outcomes?*

The points that I made about equity can be restated quickly in policy terms. The Forum's Weikart Center, uses what we call the QuEST model to support the development of "right-stakes" continuous improvement systems for community-based OST providers. From left to right, we argue that the **Quality** of the learning environment contributes to and is best measured by the level of youth **Engagement** which should result in concomitant **Skill** growth in (social, emotional, cognitive) that can then be **Transferred** into success in measured outcomes (e.g. academic content mastery). We have had incredible success over the past 15 years getting community programs to adopt and use this model because it moves from left to right. There is no reason to expect improvements in transfer outcomes (academic performance, job performance, pregnancy reduction) if efforts haven't been made upstream. It seems to me that

Education policy focuses on the outcomes but doesn't reinforce the theory of change, which means that schools and districts hop from one quick fix to the next.

- *Is there anything else you want the audience to know, think about or takeaway?* I do have anecdotes from schools and districts re success. And I've started a podcast series to dig into success stories to test out the underlying use of the QuEST model. But I'll save examples for next time when they are more baked.