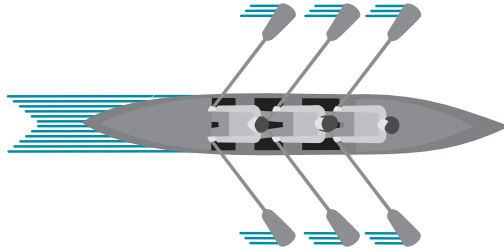# Chapter 1

THE ART OF SEEING

> Visioning is the art of seeing what is invisible to others.
>
> —*Jonathan Swift*

How Leaders of Learning Transition From Believing It to Seeing It

Our vision is the lens through which we see our world. To make quality systemic changes, we must step forward through what we know is right to what we know is good. Only if we truly believe in the possibility of making a difference will we actually have the tools to make change and empower movement. Vision is the tool by which we show our world what we believe. Our vision extends to the hearts and minds of our schools through the collective networks that share the same beliefs. Thus, many visions and voices become streamlined into a powerful shared vision. This path ultimately illuminates with promise, hope, and passion. This task of multiplexing presses forward with a force unmatched by singular thinking. Students achieve best when schools believe in the potential of their success. Learning is accelerated when there is collective efficacy leading the way (Donohoo, 2016).

If you had all of the resources and power to change something about your school, what would it be? Perhaps higher graduation rates, college enrollment, or attendance? Do you wish for your school to be abundant with learning opportunities for students and for your students to be as excited and inspired to learn as your teachers are to teach? These are powerful and possible visions for schools across the globe, and we are here to provide you with the tools and skills

necessary to develop your own vision and transform schools and districts into ideal learning environments where every individual may flourish. In *Visioning Onward*, we will take you on a journey to learn about and prepare for a unique and powerful way of visioning the future of education and the future of your school. We ask you to consider a visioning process that focuses on *the ideal* and an inclusive process of communication, researching options, and broadcasting intent and progress.

If you have ever had a dream for your own destiny, or perhaps even for a few things you want to accomplish in your lifetime, then perhaps you know something of visioning.

Visioning Onward: Preparing for Challenges

In Richard Gerver's provocative book *Creating Tomorrow's Schools Today* (2015), he writes of education as the "platform for our success or failure." Gerver, who Sir Kenneth Robinson (in the foreword to Gerver's book) describes as "one of the clearest and most passionate voices for radical change in education and business," asks whether our children will be prepared for the challenges the future holds. His book lays out a vision for education based on his belief that "classical formal education, based on passing exams, does not produce creative and innovative people prepared for the future . . . [but rather] people who are accustomed to being managed" and often fail "because they expect to be managed" (Gerver, 2013).

In *Creating Tomorrow's Schools*, Gerver (2015) describes how one primary school, Grange, evolved from the brink of failure into a school globally recognized for its success. In 2001, Grange was one of the first primary schools in England to have a wireless network. By 2002, Grange had its own TV station and radio studio. Here's Grange's vision statement:

> Grange Primary school is at the centre of the community, being a happy, inclusive and positive school where everyone (children, staff, parents and caregivers, governors, and the wider community) works together in an effective partnership.

> Our school community ethos is one of mutual respect, understanding and care for all. In everything we do we accept challenges with a positive attitude, always try our best and have the highest aspirations for ourselves and each other.

Children leave Grange as confident, independent individuals with clear dreams and aspirations and the skills, enthusiasm, and sense of self-worth to continue their journey to achieve these and to become responsible, respected, and valuable citizens in our community, our town, and the wider world with strong moral values and beliefs.

(Grange Primary School, n.d.)

Just as Gerver worked with his school community to develop a vision for Grange, your school can be one of hundreds of thousands of schools that can also delve into visioning. Right now, it is the outliers who are seriously engaged in visioning with their schools. Our dream is that more schools will engage their teachers and school communities to take on the exciting and challenging task of visioning as they set about the course corrections we believe are necessary for education in America and around the world.

Collective Visioning

As a school leader, you have the responsibility to always advocate on behalf of what's right for children.

By working with your school team to clarify their collective beliefs and base understandings about what's possible, you are building the capacity of the most powerful influencers in learning . . . teachers (Hattie, 2009).

School vision needs to be shared, directive, relevant, and heart centered. Focusing on the whole child will lead your team to the true power of the passion of teaching and learning.

When we see through the eyes of the learners, we allow them to see our vision of their success.

If they believe it, you'll see it.

What Is the Role of Schools Today?

Gerver's vision was amazing for its time. However, the growth of technology and business concerns since his second edition published in 2015 has been significant. Today, businesses are involved in almost instantaneous ascent or descent, sometimes based on rumors and viral online communications. So, one approach schools could

take to develop a vision is to consider Gerver's vision and redefine it within the context of major events and current concerns and capabilities. How could we reconsider "being a happy, inclusive, and positive" school under the context of major current events?

Today, the task of preparing our children to be successful in college, career(s), and as citizens differs greatly from the task before us in 2015, previous decades, or even previous centuries. As the US economy has become more globalized, internet based, and technology driven, many aspects of our lives have changed. Computers and robots now perform many routine and repetitive operations previously done by low-skilled workers. Demand continues to grow for highly skilled workers who can perform complex, nonroutine, analytical functions and transfer skills between jobs as needed (Levy & Murnane, 2005). All the while, artificial intelligence (AI), with intuitive natural interactions and readily available open source tools, grows increasingly more capable of performing complex tasks. AI continues to blur the lines between what humans and machines can do. This shift occurs not only in work environments but also in homes, communities, and schools.

With dramatic shifts in the very nature of work and life, schools face significant challenges to equip students with not only the knowledge but also the skills and dispositions to adapt to the changing economic landscape. Memorizing content and scoring well on tests is no longer a sufficient way of learning. Students need a deeper form of learning that helps them find their place in the world. It is no longer about what we know but what we can do with that knowledge (Fullan, Quinn, & McEachen, 2018). Envisioning this radically different future with the continuing evolution of artificial neural networks is difficult; preparing our students for it is equally challenging.

However, it is not only about preparing students for positive careers and lives as adults. Today, the task of providing positive foundational life experiences for children is growing in importance. More than 6 million young children a year are referred to child protective agencies for trauma due to neglect, physical abuse, or sexual abuse (US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2018). Conservatively, 4.5 million children experience trauma-related obstacles to learning. At the neurobiological level, trauma exposure interferes with the development of a child's stress coping system (Schore, 2001). As a result, development of higher-order cognitive functions is

> Our job is not to prepare students for something. Our job is to help students prepare themselves for anything.
> — J. Spencer & A. J. Juliani (2017)

disrupted (Perry, 2001, 2009), leading to considerable anxiety, fear, and obstacles that interfere with learning. Schools need to become a place where students can receive the love and support they may not be receiving at home. It should not only be about cognitive growth but social and emotional growth as well.

The Opportunity That Is Opening for Schools

With the repeal of No Child Left Behind and the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states, districts, and schools have more freedom to transform their schools into learning environments that meet today's students' needs. Although some federal requirements such as those around accountability and student achievement remain, an increased focus on developing the whole child and placing responsibility on local institutions has emerged. Schools now have opportunities to define and develop a holistic approach to education. Schools are now given options to measure more than content knowledge and to consider how they want to demonstrate improvements in critical thinking, collaboration, and socio-emotional learning. In this age of accountability, this is a rare opportunity that must be successful if schools are to reshape their educational systems to enable their students to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Rainbow Community School

Renee Owen, Executive Director
Rainbow School
Asheville, North Carolina

Renee Owen, executive director of Rainbow Community School, a private school in Asheville, North Carolina, summed up the priorities for her school this way: "We have a vision of schools as a place where there is co-creation, finding meaning and purpose. We aspire to live with a vision to be in harmony" (R. Owen, personal communication, September 2018).

According to Owen, after forty years, Rainbow has successfully met several of its early goals—the campus has doubled in size, parent engagement is high, and they have a dynamic government system with circles of visioning with students, parents, families, staff, and the community.

At this point, she and other leaders are working to expand the success Rainbow has enjoyed.

Why Visioning?

During the past two decades, external, nonlocal parties have dictated the vision for schools in the United States. For the most part, this has meant that rather than tuning into their inner wisdom, teachers and principals have spent endless hours crafting curriculum pacing guides, prepping students for standardized tests, and developing reports to document their progress. Although it might well be that the vision to raise Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) and Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores and thereby increase our worldwide competitiveness and develop a superior workforce was an excellent vision, what we argue is that when visions are handed to you, or when they come down from on high, an essential element of visioning is lost.

As Simon Sinek (2011) notes, schools are our modern tribes. In your learning community, you have traditions, symbols, and common languages or themes. As a leader, people depend on you to create rules of order and to build a collective vision, purpose, and plan for action. As a school leader, your tribe is depending on you and trusting you, and they will always be willing to work with you once that vision has been articulated through collective knowledge that keeps students' well-being at heart. If vision is handed to you from above, it is your role to take that tool and transform it into a positive, owned belief of how students can achieve in your school.

Imagine a time when you first considered teaching or becoming a school principal. You may have had a vision for your school, for your teams, and for your interactions with students. Now check with your day-to-day reality. Have you been able to realize and sustain your vision? If so, congratulations. How did you do it, and how have you sustained it over a period of time with outside pressures to adjust to changing expectations? There may be lessons you can teach us all. If you have not been able to achieve your vision, we invite you to pause and reconsider what you might do and how you might lead if you had an opportunity to return to a solid vision or to expand upon your current vision. What's possible? How do you trust those in your tribe to contribute to the shared vision? What do you need to let go? What do you believe is right? What more must you do?

The Powerful Impact of Visioning

- **A vision establishes purpose.** Stephen Covey (1989) said it best as the second of his seven habits, "Begin with the end in mind." He goes on to explain that all things are created twice, first as a vision and next as the action. You won't have a product unless you start with the vision. Covey challenges his audience to determine if they'd like to lead by design or by default. Most would choose intentional design as default is a way to ensure eventual failure.

- **Creating a collective vision contributes to a culture of learning**. Gabriel and Farmer (2009) describe a healthy culture "marked by integrity and a strong work ethic. In such a culture, people work across departments and professional roles toward common goals and manage to achieve and sustain success. Staff members are collaborative and reflective risk takers who seek to fix things that aren't working and try to enhance things that are. By flexing their educational muscles, they challenge themselves, their colleagues, and their students. In a healthy culture, educators engage in honest, professional dialogue on curriculum, assessments, data, interventions, and remediation. Participants leave meetings having learned something new, or at least feeling reinforced in what they are doing. They are comfortable with their vulnerability in meetings and view suggestions as constructive, not as put-downs or attacks. Without prompting, they turn to one another when facing a problem or seeking a better way to do something. Their practices are transparent and research-based" (p. 6).

- **Educators who challenge themselves start on a path to growth and improvement**. When working to create a collective vision, schools must challenge themselves to reflect on their own effectiveness, on the impact of the school culture, and on their willingness to grow. Through this work alone, beliefs are challenged, confirmed, and ultimately brought to reality. Frey, Fisher, and Hattie (2018) challenge visionary leaders to embrace mainframes that will maximize student learning. The authors point out that school teams use

collaborative dialogue to share their vision. Individuals own their contributions and never retreat to just "doing their best."

- **A shared vision leads directly to collective efficacy.** When a school team embraces the vision that they can move forward, overcome hurdles, and positively affect student achievement, what was once unattainable becomes probable. Fostering collective efficacy among your team should be your number one goal as a leader of learners. Hattie (2016) notes that this factor outranks every other in affecting a child's school success. This includes, but is not limited to, socioeconomic status, home environment, and parental involvement. Fullan and Quinn (2016) note that school leaders who work to create intentional collaborative beliefs about student potential with their teams will make the greatest impact on learning.

Bulldog Tech

Aaron Brengard
Principal, LaVay Tech Middle Schools
San Jose, California

Based on a collective vision shared across the instructional team, Aaron Brengard, former principal of Katherine Smith Elementary School in San Jose, California, described how his team implemented practices to increase student engagement through problem-based instruction and infusion of technology. You can watch a video of Principal Brengard talking about his school's project-based learning journey at **Online Resource 1.1**.

Brengard has recently moved on to be the principal of LeVey Middle School, also in San Jose. At LeVey, Brengard has helped establish Bulldog Tech, a school within a school. Check out the Bulldog Tech website, vision, and goal statement at **Online Resource 1.2.** The Bulldog Tech Vison and Goal statement reads:

Bulldog Tech is a middle school that puts students in the center of their learning. Traditionally, we see students as passive recipients of content in school settings. While this practice may temporarily help to take an annual exam, this type of learning does little to foster the skills or determination needed to make an impact in the world later in life. We believe that in order for students to develop life-long learning, a Constructivist approach, which includes collaboration,

critical thinking, social contexts, and real-life experiences, is essential. Combine this approach with rigorous and meaningful situations, guided by our state standards, and it results in learning that lasts longer and goes deeper. Students feel like what they are learning makes sense and they can explain why their learning makes sense.

We know that our students are only with us for two years at Bulldog Tech. And we also know that developmentally, these two years are the most important years in shaping skills and mindsets that will carry on for the rest of their lives. At twelve and thirteen years old, before they head off to high school, our goal is to instill a growth mindset (Agency) in our students that sets them on the path to finding their passion for learning.

Visioning—Permission to Thrive and Change

Michael Fullan, Joanne Quinn, and Joanne McEachen, in *Deep Learning* (2018), ask what we should do if "we want learners who can thrive in turbulent, complex times, apply thinking to new situations, and change the world" (p. 13). They answer that we must "reimagine learning: *what is important to be learned, how learning is fostered, where learning happens, and how do we measure success*?" (p. 13, italics added).

Although there are myriad factors that could contribute to each of these areas, we present a few key ideas:

- *What is important to be learned?*

Every educator has been faced with a student raising his/her hand during a lesson and asking, "Why do we need to learn this?" Educators can view this as a challenge or an element of disrespect, but the reality is that it is truly an excellent question. Learners do need to know why, and so do educators. As a curriculum is developed, school leaders must consider the following:

1. The knowledge and skills to be learned are relevant.
2. Content topics are of interest to learners and to members of their network.

3. The academic content has long-range value.
4. What is learned reflects the common values of the community to ensure success beyond school.

- *How is learning fostered?*

Learning can be considered a biological imperative. Human beings never stop learning. All learners attribute value to the knowledge they acquire—some is lost quickly and some is held for life. When content is valued, it becomes shared. Learners teach others and derive new meaning through application of their learnings.

The amount of individual effort placed in any learning situation is determined by that person's judgment of the value of that investment. Learners do best when academic work is selected, not just expected, to be acquired.

In their book *The New Commonwealth Schools*, Milne and Rhoades Earl (2010) note:

Students learn best when allowed to choose meaningful projects. Skills are best acquired in a holistic learning environment. Everyone is a genius at something. Everyone has something important to offer. It is impossible to guarantee that all students will learn all the same things. When left alone to explore in a stimulating environment young children are natural learners.

(p. 99)

Collective learning comes through collaborative activities and shared work experiences. Educators guide learners to grow and master understanding in groups.

- *Where is learning happening?*

Sheninger and Murray (2017) identify eight key factors to designing our schools to meet the needs of our future. These authors cry out for urgent attention as a moral imperative to get our schools and students future ready. We are no longer educating today's children for today's concerns. Instead, our work is geared to empower them to learn, to critique, and to apply their knowledge and skills in situations we have yet to understand. We are growing learners,

thinkers, and doers, knowing that there is no perfect answer as to how to design schools and learning opportunities. Nor is there one way to do the work. We need to build trusting relationships among those we lead and strive to keep our vision for growth confident yet flexible enough to allow for transformations unknown at this time. This is a most exciting time to be an educator and to be a learner. Opportunities to grow, learn, and contribute to our world are everywhere!

- *How do we measure success?*

During much of the past twenty years, success in schools in the United States was defined in terms of academic success and measured through scores on standardized assessments. Since the passage of ESSA, we are seeing some movement to broaden our definitions of success. Ben Gilpin, principal at Warner Elementary School in Spring Arbor, Michigan, describes how his school has transitioned from solely focusing on academic success to implementing programs that have drastically reduced the number of suspensions and detentions and increased the number of students receiving mental health services.

At the Center for Educational Improvement, we are concerned about school culture and climate, including factors such as student engagement and teacher and student knowledge of self and others. We have developed a tool, the *School—Compassionate Culture Analytic Tool for Educators (S-CCATE)*, which teachers can use to measure compassion and identify areas of needs, progress, and achievement (Mason et al., 2018). It was validated in a study conducted with more than 800 educators and provides a unique tool for examining factors such as equity, understanding of trauma, 21st century learning, neurobiology, metacognition, policy, and principal leadership.

How to measure success? This may be the most pertinent question of all. How do you define success as a school leader? Is it determined by you, by your team, by test scores? There are measures of student learning that are determined often by a collective agreement of skills and required knowledge. Our standards and assessments in formal schooling represent society's agreement of what students should learn, what values to have, and what interests are acceptable.

In the early childhood realm, some of the most important learning takes place during play, exploration, and inquiry (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

Where Does Learning Happen?

Mathew Swoveland (2013), who teaches high-risk students in Massachusetts, in an article on the Teaching Tolerance website, describes how he went out of his way to help a student who only occasionally showed up in his class. In reflecting on the challenges with this student, he concludes that for "some marginalized students, profound learning happens in the space between lessons." Dr. Sandra Rogers (2015), an instructional designer, arrived at a similar conclusion: "During the flow of a task, at the edge of our zone of proximal development (ZPD), via our selective attention, rehearsal, and metacognition is where learning happens."

What if we determined the level of success based on the individual learner's ambitions, goals, and passions?

What if we were able to measure success through a community of learners evaluating the contributions of a collaborative membership?

And, what if success was the outcome of a project, an effort, or an impact that changed a community or socially affected our world?

What if?

Key Learning 1.1

Four Questions From Fullan and Colleagues

Consider your school. At the present time, how would you address the four questions that Fullan et al. (2018) have asked?

What is important to be learned?

How is learning fostered?

Where is learning happening?

How do we measure success?

A New Purpose of Education

After they ask these basic questions, Fullan and his colleagues describe a learning process they call deep learning—and suggest that it must become "the new purpose of education." They ask what

an environment "where students truly flourish would look like and feel like?" (2018, p. 13). They urge educators to develop a new vision of education. (We will share more about their vision for deep learning in Chapter 3.)

Would you like to be part of a team that has the opportunity to create a new vision, a new purpose for education? Would your vision be for students to flourish? Would it be similar to the one suggested by Fullan and his colleagues? Would you enjoy having a few extra hours a month set aside for visioning? If you knew it was a priority, could you become excited by the prospects of developing a vision to truly revolutionize education?

Key Learning 1.2

Helping Students Flourish

Helping students to flourish—what would that look like? How would it feel? If you had endless funds at your disposal, what changes would you make? How would you proceed with some confidence that you are on the right path?

Visioning Can Be an Exhilarating Process. If you have ever been with a group that is pioneering a movement, then perhaps you can recall how visioning can help create a sense of purpose and a renewed energy and commitment to improving education. Perhaps for that reason alone it would make sense to bring visioning to schools. Under the right conditions, it can help build staff morale.

Some Additional Considerations—In the Long Term

Consider the "art of seeing." Sometimes we think of visioning as a stimulating, thought-provoking exercise—it certainly can be that. However, as Principal Aaron Brengard has explained, when you are right there in the thick of things, visioning and the implementation that comes after can be grueling. Aaron came on board as the principal at Katherine Smith after six years of declining test scores and enrollment. The vision was first articulated during a summer school

program, when Aaron noted a disproportionate number of students lacked engagement, were under-motivated, and needed remedial services. With a team of teachers, he developed a vison for programs that would lead to productive application of academic skills. He saw the potential in the midst of the disappointments, leading his school to adopt project-based learning. Almost like an artist, he crafted a way for the school to make its way forward in the midst of turbulence and trials. Today, the Katherine R. Smith Elementary School (n.d.) has a vision "to be a model of excellence for 21st century learning and community service" and a mission to "prepare each student to think, learn, work, communicate, collaborate, and contribute effectively now and throughout his or her life." Over the past three years, Brengard and a team of leaders have developed procedures to examine their vision and upgrade strategies to reach their goals. In 2017, Katherine Smith School was identified as an exemplary school in the New Tech network.

Staying with a vision in the face of teachers who walk away midstream or pressure from outside forces to go back to the way things were takes conviction and stamina. As Aaron says, "Our school vision keeps my school connected to our purpose—our why. It drives everything we do and helps put us back on our path in times of strain or turmoil" (A. Brengard, personal communication, August 2017).

Key Learning 1.3

Your Experience With Visioning

How would you best describe your experience to date with visioning?

- ☐ **A Walk in the Park**. It was engaging, fairly easy, straightforward, and helpful.
- ☐ **Stumbling Over a Rock.** We started out OK, but over time, it seems that we took some missteps. But we picked ourselves up and continued on the journey toward our vision.
- ☐ **Clearing the Way.** As we continued trying to implement our vision, we kept encountering hurdles to overcome.
- ☐ **Climbing a Mountain.** It was a difficult, uphill battle filled with differences in opinion and visions and took a great amount of effort.
- ☐ **Other.** Describe: _____

Conclusions—Visions and Our Day-to-Day Reality

Our visions affect our approach to not only our hopes for our future but also our day-to-day interactions, activities, and even reactions to stress and the disappointments we encounter along the way. When we find ourselves making progress toward our vision, we are likely to experience a sense of delight, and sometimes this even borders on euphoria. For example, with our work toward developing mindfulness and heart centered learning communities, when others are enthusiastic, my colleagues and I revel in a place of bliss, congratulating ourselves on the progress. However, when we hear that teachers and administrators don't have time and can't make this a priority, we find ourselves taking a few dozen deep breaths, reexamining our approach, and reviewing what else can be done. At times, we are even discouraged. Gerver (2013) speaks about helping children prepare for the challenges of the future. Frankly, we find ourselves also constantly priming each other to handle the challenges we face on a daily basis.

Sometimes we wonder about how we might handle the daily stress if we didn't have a vision—our vision helps us persevere. And the power and efficacy of our collective visioning and support is uplifting. One of the ways we keep on going is to examine our indicators of success. We have formal and informal ways of measuring our progress. For us, indicators include things such as the number of requests for more information, the number of adopters, the applause and smiles when we speak, and also the response we receive from experts—those who are informed and already working in our arena. So, whereas visions may provide a lens to the future, the shutter speed, so to speak, is important. We believe in the value of not only peering into the future but also of calculating whether we are staying on course and moving forward.

In Chapter 2, we will advance our argument that visioning has been and continues to be relevant to our lives, to schools, to our understanding of education, and to the future of our children. In Chapter 2 you will learn about the visions of some educational giants as well as the power of having a team and the joy of learning from and with inspirational leaders.

Practical Points to Ponder

- Why do we ask you to consider the "art of seeing?" What talents and skills do artists bring to their canvasses, and why might visioning be compared to the creative process of an artist?

- What are some of the reasons that faculty and staff might have a negative reaction to visioning?

- What additional ideas do you have for helping others set aside any prior negative experiences with visioning?

In this time of relative silence on the national educational front, local leaders have the opportunity to step into the leadership void that is apparent. It is a time when leaders can ask questions about deep learning, questions such as the ones Michael Fullan and colleagues (2018) pose regarding learning—where is learning happening? And measuring success—how should we approach this? How do these questions affect the visions you are already contemplating, even as you realize the value of moving forward at the right time and pace with sufficient support and encouragement from others you trust?

Ideas for Leading and Learning

- Visioning helps us prepare for challenges. What challenges are you facing?

- Do your visions address deep learning? If so, what is your vision for how this deep learning might be measured?

- How can the concept of collective efficacy be used in planning your school's visioning process?

Resources to Explore

online resources

Scan the QR Code or visit https://resources.corwin.com/visioningonward to access live links to the online resources referenced in this chapter.