

# New Definitions Driven by Equity; Informed by Science

## Transformative Learning & Development

Transformative Learning & Development is the optimization of a learner's ability to translate specific experiences and content into generalizable knowledge, competencies, and perspectives.

### **The term learning means more than schooling and academics.**

School systems are uniquely designed to support learning and development. At their best, they create stable learning communities to which children and youth bring their whole selves, work to become their best selves and realize their connections to their communities. Accountability for academic content knowledge acquisition has led to a focus on teaching over learning.

**Learning and development are uniquely intertwined human processes.** Physical development continues into the teen years. Brain development continues into the mid-twenties. Learning begins immediately and continues throughout the life span, with heightened opportunities to shape and develop social, emotional and cognitive skills occurring in early childhood and adolescence.

**Adolescent learning and development is critical to individual and collective thriving.** Adolescence is a time of remarkable opportunity. Adolescent brains are adapting to the developmental tasks of this stage of life. Adolescents are drawn to novel experiences. Adolescents are highly sensitive to respect. Adolescents are a force for good. Adolescence starts earlier than we think and lasts longer than it used to.

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## **An individual young person's sense of themselves as a learner is:**

**Shaped by their experiences of being asked to use the capacities and motivation they need to respond, adapt, and achieve in different situations.** Learning is activated by relationships and strengthened by application in everyday experiences.

**Anchored in the confidence that they have the ability to develop and a key role to play in it.** These enable young people to develop positive mindsets; self-awareness, perspective taking and compassion; build senses of identity and purpose; self-awareness and compassion, agency and hope; imagine a future self and community; experience spiritual and cultural grounding, connectedness, and civic engagement, awe and wonder along with aesthetic, kinesthetic; design, and expressive opportunities and to use creativity and critical thinking.

**Enhanced by their ability, as a part of belonging to an identified group, to make collective meaning of their experiences.** Meaning that helps them build portable

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## **Leaders of transformative learning acknowledge:**

**Transformative learning and development can occur in all environments if the adults in these environments are intentionally equipped to optimize experiences that address:** a) the potential all children and youth have to succeed and the inherent unevenness of learning, b) the role that social, emotional and cognitive needs play not only in supporting content learning but in developing complex skills needed to thrive, c) the importance of environments, experiences and cultures in shaping learning and development, and d) the transformative power of developmental relationships which the Search Institute defines as relationships that express care, challenge growth, provide supports, share power and expand possibilities.

**Transformative learning and development is youth-driven.** Youth learn with and from each other. They learn and develop best in environments that provide rich opportunities marked by physical, emotional, psychological, identity, and intellectual safety, support and connectedness, challenges and engagement, and support for developing transformative social and emotional skills and dispositions and includes spiritual, kinesthetic, and aesthetic dimensions.

**Transformative learning and development is culturally responsive.** It addresses the youth as a whole person, and as a member of a family and community that have histories. Context is crucial for learning and development. Context is affected by individual thriving, collective thriving and equity, and by the well-being and capacity of the adults who support youth.