

# Thrive

---

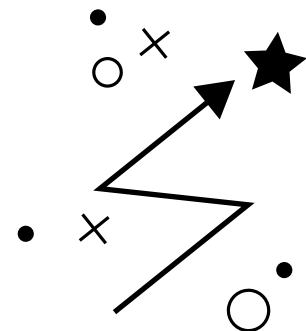
SCHOOLS REINVENTED  
FOR THE REAL  
CHALLENGES WE FACE

---

Valerie Hannon  
with Amelia Peterson

*"Thrive offers a compelling analysis that should inspire and deepen the public conversation about education for all our children, here and now, and for the future."*

SIR KEN ROBINSON



# *Thrive*

---

SCHOOLS REINVENTED  
FOR THE REAL  
CHALLENGES WE FACE

---

Valerie Hannon  
with Amelia Peterson

“We are in danger of educating a generation of children to become not very good at jobs that robots will do better. Thrive is a brilliant exposé of the failure of mainstream, conventional systems and a persuasive account of why education needs a new sense of purpose: to make us more fully human, creative and empathetic and so together able to shape our rapidly changing world.”

*Charles Leadbeater*

“H G Wells famously said that civilization is a race between education and catastrophe. Thrive argues with clarity and concision that this is not an empty aphorism. On the contrary, humanity faces existential challenges and radically transforming our dominant systems of education is essential to meet them. That transformation has to begin with reframing the fundamental purposes of mass education and that’s what Thrive sets out to do. In the process, it does more than set out the problems. It presents powerful examples of innovation from around the world that show how education can and must change everywhere. A compelling analysis that should inspire and deepen the public conversation about education for all our children, here and now and for the future they will shape.”

*Sir Ken Robinson*

“Valerie Hannon never disappoints. What she offers in this book is an honest, affectionate, if sometimes critical analysis of what we need to do if we’re to bring the very best out of the next generation of young people - to generously and imaginatively optimise their potential.”

*Lord David Puttnam*

“There has never been a more important time than now to debate the purpose and direction for education systems. Clarity of purpose and the courage to take action – both are required. In addition to presenting a solid case for why systems need to change, Thrive also offers pictures of possibilities – real schools in diverse settings that are making the kinds of changes necessary for their learners to thrive in an uncertain world. Each person in our networks will be debating these ideas and learning from the pathfinders.”

*Judy Halbert & Linda Kaser*

Copyright © 2017 Valerie Hannon.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author.

ISBN 978-0-9955962-0-7

Published by Innovation Unit Press, an imprint of The Innovation Unit Ltd. Innovation Unit is a not for profit social enterprise. We create new solutions that enable more people to belong and contribute to thriving societies.

Innovation Unit  
CAN Mezzanine  
49-51 East Road  
London  
N1 6AH

[www.innovationunit.org](http://www.innovationunit.org)

Cover design: Lindsay Noble Design  
Graphics: Jack Minchella

Citation: Hannon, V with Peterson, A (2017) *Thrive: Schools Reinvented for the Real Challenges We Face* Innovation Unit Press.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**Valerie Hannon's** career spans leadership of education systems, research, teaching, and capacity building. She is now an established thought leader in the field of education innovation.

Valerie co-founded Innovation Unit (UK and Australia) and has supported education change programs in numerous systems, including the UK, Europe, USA, Australia and Africa. She is a founding member and Co-Chair of the Global Education Leaders' Partnership (GELP) supporting jurisdictions globally to scale their innovation and transform their systems.

Valerie is an expert adviser on education to the OECD, and a frequent contributor to the World Summit on Innovation in Education (WISE). She is a regular keynote speaker and facilitator at international conferences and workshops. Earlier co-authored books include *Learning A Living: radical innovation in education for work* (Bloomsbury, 2012); and *Redesigning Education: shaping learning systems around the globe* (Booktrope, 2013).

**Amelia Peterson** is a PhD candidate in Education at Harvard University and a fellow in the university's Inequality and Social Policy program. She is also an Associate with Innovation Unit where for several years she has worked as a researcher for the Global Education Leaders' Partnership. Her academic work focuses on qualification systems and transitions out of secondary school.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, thanks go to all the interviewees who gave up time to contribute to this book and the school leaders, teachers and students who have shared their insights over the years. A number of colleagues have shared their wisdom with particular generosity, including Julie Temperley, David Jackson, Louise Thomas, Sarah Gillinson, Caireen Goddard, Matthew Horne, Lorna Earl, Tony Mackay, Mark Blundell, Tom Beresford, Paul Clarke, Linda Kaser, Judy Halbert, Rod Allen, Tim Sully, and Jo Carrington. To the many friends who were willing to bear with obsessive behaviour over this book, talk about it, but also require us to think about other things – thank you.

*For Laura and Celia*

## CONTENTS

	Preface	11
CHAPTER 1	Why we have to ask 'why?'	15
CHAPTER 2	Disruption? What disruption?	28
CHAPTER 3	What does it mean to 'thrive' – globally?	42
CHAPTER 4	Pathfinders: towards a thriving planet	55
CHAPTER 5	Stronger together: learning how to thrive as communities	66
CHAPTER 6	Pathfinders for thriving societies	81
CHAPTER 7	The inter-personal purpose: growing strong bonds	92
CHAPTER 8	Pathfinders: towards thriving relationships	103
CHAPTER 9	Me, myself, I: towards the thriving self	115
CHAPTER 10	Pathfinders: towards the thriving self	124
CHAPTER 11	Getting purposeful	136
	Notes	142
	Bibliography	154

## PREFACE

.....

This book arises from discussions with educators, parents, students and employers around the world about new guiding purposes for public education systems. Assumptions about our purpose in education are currently under-examined and out of date.

The concepts of ‘school reform’ put forth by politicians have focused – for understandable reasons – on the ‘how’ (and to some degree the ‘what’) of teaching and learning. For the most part, they have remained within the old paradigm of schooling. This is in part because the perceived risks of change – notwithstanding the strong evidence for the failure and inadequacy of the old industrial model of schooling – still appear to outweigh the perceived benefits. Furthermore, the changes needed to replace this model still appear vague, and lack the necessary rigour and evidence base. Where purpose is re-examined, the answer is usually framed in terms of ‘acquiring the skills to succeed’. But this begs the question: What does it mean ‘to succeed’?

There is no clear narrative or unifying ambition for public education today that both:

- connects with the realities people are experiencing; and
- faces up to what can confidently be said to be on our horizon.

This book sets out the features of the future of our world around which there is strong consensus from scientists and analysts worldwide. These features include environmental, technological, demographic, socio-political, and economic shifts. Taken together, they show that the scale of disruption our species and planet face is so profound that changes are

needed so future generations are prepared to deal with them. From the evidence, we extrapolate a set of three key shifts, or ‘pivots’, that are likely to occur in the lifetime of today’s learners.

In short, we have been so preoccupied with asking the ‘how?’ of education that we have forgotten to ask the question of ‘what for?’ National narratives around ‘economic competitiveness’ or ‘preparing for the knowledge society/digital economy’ can now be seen to be woefully inadequate in relation to the enormous challenges our species faces – some of them existential. All of these will impact our children’s lifetimes, let alone our grandchildren. Reflecting on the scale and direction of these shifts, the book proposes the following:

Today, education has to be about learning to thrive in  
a transforming world.

When we examine what it means to thrive, we see that thriving must happen at four interdependent levels, none of which can be ignored:

- global – our place in the planet;
- societal – place, communities, economies;
- interpersonal – our relationships;
- intrapersonal – the self.

When the evidence about the likely trends across these four domains is reviewed, a series of learning goals begin to emerge. Being ‘college and career ready’ is nowhere near good enough. Previous goals for education – where they are enunciated – tend to be at the individual level and/or are predicated on competition for rationed goods (access to HE or to high-paying jobs; or the society’s success in economic competition).

But the evidence suggests that we cannot thrive with these restricted purposes. We need new goals. Designing learning to achieve them will be challenging for educators. But it turns out that this is already being attempted by a number of fabulous educators around the world; if they can do it, so can others – and it would be a lot easier if others joined in.

Moreover, we believe that schools are needed for this task. ‘Techno-solutionists’ argue that ‘schools are dead’; that learning will become ‘disintermediated’ and individuals, armed with Big Data learning analytics and a plethora of digital offerings, will no longer need institutions. They are

wrong. But schools do need to be reinvented as a key part of learning eco-systems; webs of civil society institutions powerful enough to enable humanity to address the problems which both threaten it and offer spectacular opportunities. Schools in diverse settings and conditions are already innovating their foci and their methods to help their learners – not just pass tests, or even get a job – but to thrive.

This book offers no panacea, recipe or ‘programme’. Rather it is a catalyst for serious debate about the purpose of our public education systems. To facilitate such a debate, we must update our analysis of the future our young people face, as well as our collective knowledge of the new educational models already emerging. With this new basis, the work of ‘education reform’ will take on an authentic energy and depth. However, without seriously re-examining the purpose, the needed changes at scale will not materialise.

This new purpose is about how we learn to thrive in a transforming world.

The transformation of our world becomes apparent when we look at analyses and trends about the future. The book is intended to confront educators, and perhaps more particularly, system and political leaders, with the contours of a set of profound shifts, about which environmentalists, business leaders, scientists and technologists are becoming increasingly clear. Education systems have scarcely begun to acknowledge them, let alone begun to respond. Moreover, the year 2016 saw a sea-change across Europe and the US (with global implications) of political culture: the rise of successful populist demagoguery, relying on ‘post-truth’ campaigns, signalling the howl of exclusion and impotence that large sections of those populations experience.

Education continues with the old prospectus: the promise of ‘succeeding’ (gaining better competitive access to the shrinking pool of good jobs) if the right knowledge and skills are acquired. Most writing about the ‘future of education’ ends up with lists – of what students need to learn in order to ‘succeed’ in the future. These get shoehorned in as new outcomes under old efficiency-oriented models of education.

Thrive shifts the focus to what children and young people need to be allowed to experience and do now as part of their experience of school – not to develop a set of abstract skills, but to learn to live in new and better ways, taking charge of the future so they can shape it and deal with its



challenges. Thinking about the future and how the world has already changed, and will change exponentially faster, should direct us towards new purposes for education. Some of these new purposes will be collective, rather than just individual or national.

Children and young people are already facing some of these challenges in their daily lives, but the pressures are set to increase. What is the role of schools in helping them handle these challenges? What do schools look like when they have re-oriented to address them?

This book aims to:

- Set out the evidence about some major disruptions affecting humanity
- Propose a new purpose for education, based on the facts and best predictions about the impact of these disruptions
- Illustrate what is already being done to respond to the challenges these disruptions present, and further actions which can be taken.

The examples we profile in the ‘pathfinder’ chapters are not intended as cookie-cutter recipes. They are deliberately diverse, and we have refrained from over-conceptualising their approaches. We offer them as stimuli for further enquiry, debate and reflection.

Of course, the proposal about fundamental purpose we suggest, and the goals we consider it gives rise to are based on our own perspectives and values in the face of these shifts. They are grounded in the contexts of liberal democracies, which are now more fragile and at risk than in the last 80 years. Not everyone will accept them. They are up for debate and further improvement. But rejection of that purpose should not be intertwined with rejection of the facts about the future and what is possible in education. Because what leaders and the public think education should do is based, whether consciously or not, on what they believe about the world young people will enter. The aim of this book is to update the basis of those beliefs.

You have to have a reason to change. This book provides it.

## CHAPTER 1

.....

### Why we have to ask ‘why?’

A year or so ago, I was asked to write a piece addressing the question: ‘*What is learning for?*’ My immediate reaction was that it was a very silly question: surely, the answer was obvious?

As I started to reflect, however, I realised that it was anything but obvious. To paraphrase Neil Postman,<sup>1</sup> educators were once known for providing reasons for learning, however, now they become famous by inventing a method. Public debates about education – some of which are hot and polarised – have chiefly revolved around a set of second-order questions:

- what should be taught;
- how it should be taught;
- to whom (who gets access to what?);
- how it should be structured;
- how it should be paid for.

These are all important questions. Perhaps in times of stability and continuity they are the ones to focus on. However, those are not our times.

Our current education system, which emerged in the middle of the 19th century and was designed to serve the needs of the Industrial Revolution, is under intense strain. This is true of most services in which the state plays a key role in providing. In the case of education, the pressure is now acute. There is an increasing perception that the mass education system is failing the public. This perception has given rise to a rash of ‘school reform’ movements<sup>2</sup> across the world.

The school reform movements are diverse. They range from the view that the existing model of schooling is essentially sound, but can be enhanced by a mix of better trained teachers and greater use of technology; basically, this view argues that ‘school improvement’ needs to be done better. At the other end of the continuum is the view that ‘schooling’ needs to