Review

Evidence use in Community-led Learning Ecosystems

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About this review

Since 2018, the Jacobs Foundation has partnered with organisations in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Colombia, and Switzerland to enhance the use of evidence in education policy and practice. The goal has been to ensure that programs aimed at improving children's learning are firmly grounded in evidence.

The Jacobs Foundation Communities of Change initiative, champions and empowers community-led transformation processes. The initiative places strong emphasis on strengthening evidence-informed teaching and learning practices, particularly at the school district level. Central to this work is the idea of Community-led learning ecosystems (CLLEs) as an integral part of this approach. CLLEs are rooted in the active involvement of teachers, parents, and the wider community in which a school operates, reflecting a growing and well-evidenced consensus that community engagement is central to achieving systemic, long-term changes in education policy and practice.

However, there is no single way of designing and implementing a CLLE. In fact, by their very nature, CLLEs oppose fixed and linear notions of what they should be. This reflects both a broad and evolving understanding of the concept, combined with the fluid, contextual and evolving nature of CLLEs in practice.

This review comes at a time when there is significant interest in understanding and supporting CLLEs. However, there is a need for further exploration and articulation of the role evidence plays in CLLEs. This includes how evidence is generated, understood, and used to inform policy and practice - particularly at the community level.

This report, based on a desk review of existing evidence, frameworks, and interviews with key informants and experts, provides an overview of the current discussions surrounding these ecosystems. It highlights both the opportunities and challenges related to evidence use in supporting these ecosystems and seeks to address the growing demand for consolidated knowledge and practical insights.

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Acronyms

AfL	Assessment for Learning
CBOs	community-based organisations
CEVs	Community Education Volunteers
CLLEs	Community-led learning ecosystems
CoC	Communities of Change
CUE	Center for Universal Education
ECD	early childhood development
ECE	early childhood education
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation
EIPM	Evidence-informed policy-making
EMIS	education management information systems
FCSE	Family, School and Community Engagement in Education Initiative
FEEN	Global Family Engagement in Education Network
HPST	High Performing Systems for Tomorrow
LCA	Learning Creates Australia
NGOs	non-governmental organisations
RCTs	randomised controlled trials
SEL	social-emotional learning
SWAPs	Sector Wide Approaches
TaRL	Teaching at the Right Level
TES	Transforming Education Summit
TIE	Talent and Innovation Ecosystem

Introduction

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1. Introduction

Recent global disruptions — including the Covid-19 pandemic, escalating violence within and around schools, and the accelerating impacts of climate change — have exposed the fragility of current education systems. These upheavals have not only caused unprecedented interruptions in learning but have also magnified long-standing disparities between countries and among different groups of learners. Marginalised communities, especially girls and young women, face a heightened risk of never returning to formal education, with potentially severe consequences for their own futures and the generations that follow.

In this context, it is increasingly evident that conventional, top-down models of education — often characterised by rigid curricula, hierarchical decision-making, and limited community involvement — remain inadequate. Instead, there is a pressing need for education systems, particularly at the primary and secondary levels, that are more resilient, inclusive, and responsive to diverse and evolving needs.

This urgency was recently underscored at the 2022 Transforming Education Summit (TES), where global leaders and stakeholders recognised the depth of the education crisis. They called for renewed commitments aligned with SDG 4. The Summit emphasised not only the importance of recovering from pandemic-related learning losses but also the need to tackle persistent inequities, enhance the relevance of educational content, and foster lifelong learning opportunities. Such aspirations are set against a backdrop of interconnected challenges:

- foundational learning crises leave many learners without basic skills;
- constrained financing and limited early childhood education impede adaptation;
- education in emergencies intensifies pressures on already fragile systems; and
- approximately 260 million children remain out of school worldwide.

Confronting these challenges requires more than incremental adjustments. It calls for approaches that embrace complexity, prioritise inclusivity, and evolve in tandem with the communities they serve.

Community-Led Learning Ecosystems (CLLEs) have gained attention as one such approach. These ecosystems integrate global insights with local knowledge, encourage active collaboration among teachers, parents, students, and community organisations, and place local actors at the heart of educational decision-making. In doing so, they

Box 1: The importance of the right measures

The Jacobs Foundation's Communities of Change (CoC) Initiative is situated within this broader effort to create more responsive and inclusive education systems.

It aims to improve learning outcomes by strengthening collaboration among key stakeholders — educators, researchers, policy-makers, and local communities — and embedding evidence-informed practices into the fabric of education.

The CoC Initiative works to ensure that decisions about teaching and learning draw on robust, contextually relevant evidence. The Initiative supports community-driven transformation processes, such as Ghana's Communities of Excellence program, to promote evidence-based teaching and learning practices at the district level.

Source: Jacobs Foundation

respond dynamically to changing circumstances and community needs.

While the idea of CLLEs captures the importance of inclusivity, multi-stakeholder participation, and contextually relevant solutions, it remains an evolving concept rather than a fully established framework. By examining how evidence is generated, understood, and used within CLLEs, the review aims to move beyond general principles towards a more systematic understanding of what it takes to create and maintain these ecosystems in practice.

Drawing on broader literature on evidence-informed policy and practice in education, as well as illustrative cases from the Global North and the Global South, the review seeks to deepen understanding of how CLLEs operate on the ground. These real-life examples provide concrete insights into the diverse ways evidence informs decision-making across various socio-cultural contexts.

This review considers the existing discourse from two perspectives:

1. **What evidence exists:** This section focuses on research that maps, defines, and explores the concept and functions of CCLEs. It includes both conceptual and theoretical evidence, as well as case studies that illustrate how these ecosystems operate within educational environments globally.

2. **How is existing evidence used:** This section looks at how actors within these ecosystems — schools, community organisations, NGOs, and local governments — use evidence to shape their actions and interventions. It highlights the types of evidence being used and the ways in which evidence informs decision-making processes within diverse settings. This section also provides an overview on the effectiveness of these ecosystems.

By integrating these findings, the review offers recommendations on how evidence use within CLLEs can be strengthened.

1.1 Terminology

This review focuses on two central concepts: **community-led learning ecosystems (CLLEs)** and **evidence use**.

Community-led Learning Ecosystems
In existing literature, definitions of learning ecosystems diverge in emphasis. For instance, the OECD (2017) describes them as "*interdependent combinations of different types of providers and organisations*," while the Aspen Institute (2014) focuses on "*connected learning*" environments that are socially embedded and oriented towards broader opportunities. The term "*learning ecosystem*" itself often appears interchangeably with phrases such as "*education ecosystems*" or "*innovation ecosystems,*" each reflecting distinct perspectives and applications (Economist Impact, 2022a). Some definitions underline community engagement and the blending of both formal and non-traditional knowledge sources, whereas others highlight multi-stakeholder collaboration or the importance of system-level thinking. These varied interpretations underscore the fluidity and adaptability inherent in learning ecosystems.

This review integrates these different definitions to accommodate the diverse ways in which learning ecosystems are conceptualised and realised in practice. Throughout the paper, CLLEs is used to describe a shift away from narrowly defined schooling models towards more adaptive configurations that recognise multiple sources of knowledge, encourage community engagement, and are responsive to local contexts.

The concept of CLLEs adds a specific dimension by drawing attention to local actors who play a formative role in shaping these ecosystems. "*Local*" in this context may include not only those who reside within a given community (students, teachers, parents) but also organisations and institutions that have a sustained and meaningful presence in the community. These can include locally based NGOs, INGOs operating at the district or municipal level, and state actors engaged in local policy implementation (Clayton & Shafique, 2023; Díaz-Gibson et al., 2020; Economist Impact, 2022a).

Evidence use
Evidence-informed policy-making (EIPM) is generally understood as an area that involves a wide range of stakeholders—such as researchers, practitioners, policy-makers, and knowledge-brokering organisations—who collectively shape and use evidence to inform policy decisions and practice. In CLLEs, these roles become intertwined. Actors who engage in a CLLE often serve as both producers and users of evidence; they not only generate new insights from local experiences but also draw on them to inform teaching, learning, and policy adaptation.

From this perspective, evidence use is neither strictly demand- nor supply-driven, nor does it follow a simple, linear path. Instead, evidence use unfolds organically as a collective, iterative process involving teachers, parents, students, community leaders, and other local participants. Together, they contribute to a shared pool of knowledge that emerges from evaluation studies, administrative data, community feedback, and both qualitative and quantitative research. This inclusive approach recognises that valuable expertise can come from everyday lived experiences as well as more formal academic inquiry.

In CLLEs, evidence use is fluid and contextually grounded. As challenges arise, stakeholders consult, interpret, and refine evidence, adapting strategies in real time to improve educational outcomes. Rather than treating evidence users and producers as distinct groups, CLLEs emphasise that all actors can

generate, understand, and apply evidence to varying degrees. This approach aligns with broader shifts in global education discourse, which increasingly acknowledge that "evidence" may take multiple forms (Hayter & Broadbent, 2024; Hayter & Morales, 2023; Srivastava, 2022; UNESCO, 2024), and that who counts as an "expert" should be similarly expanded.

This review uses a broad definition of evidence, including grey literature and other forms of locally generated knowledge. This inclusivity resonates with the principles of CLLEs, where practitioners (e.g., teachers), the public (e.g., parents, families, and students), and other local actors (e.g. local authorities and businesses) actively contribute to, and benefit from, the shared evidence base. By taking this holistic approach, the review recognises that evidence is a collective resource that evolves continuously, supporting more responsive and community-focused educational improvements.

1.2 Methodology

This review combines a desk review with 25 semi-structured expert interviews to synthesise existing knowledge on CLLEs and generate insights into how evidence is used within these systems.

Desk review

This review draws on academic, institutional, and grey literature from both the Global South and the Global North to explore diverse understandings and applications of learning ecosystems across various regions and contexts. Rather than attempting a comprehensive overview of the substantial literature on CLLEs, it focuses on prominent themes, debates, and practical lessons from recent years.

Expert interviews

To complement the desk review, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts and practitioners in the field. These conversations provided firsthand perspectives on the challenges and opportunities related to how evidence is generated, interpreted, and put into practice at community and institutional levels.

A list of interviewed experts is provided in Annex 2.

Review of initiatives and actors

Recognising the breadth of CLLEs, the review does not encompass every actor or initiative in this space. Instead, 17 illustrative cases were selected, each demonstrating different approaches to evidence use. These examples were drawn from Africa, Latin America, Europe, and North America, providing a broad geographical scope. By examining these cases, the review highlights the extent to which evidence informs decision-making in varied contexts and at multiple levels.

A full list of the initiatives reviewed is presented in Annex 3.

Why CLLEs?

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2. Why CLLEs?

The challenges of the 21st century—from climate change to technological disruption—reveal the inadequacy of conventional education systems to meet the needs of all learners. Despite decades of reforms and innovations, conventional models remain largely rooted in standardised testing and uniform curricula. These approaches often fail to engage students, empower educators, or address the broader societal challenges we face, such as inequality and social fragmentation.

This has fuelled interest in complementary approaches, with CLLEs emerging as particularly promising. These ecosystems centre educational transformation on local actors—students, teachers, families, and communities—prioritising their needs, experiences, and capabilities. So why are CLLEs so critical to the future of education?

2.1 The inadequacies of conventional education

The shortcomings of traditional education are well-documented. Global disparities in access and quality persist, particularly in developing nations, where literacy rates and school enrolment lag (Economist Impact, 2022a; Hannon et al., 2019; OECD, 2018). Even in well-resourced systems, the reliance on standardised metrics to measure learner progress narrows the conception of success. This approach often overlooks critical developmental needs, leaving many students feeling disengaged and unprepared for modern challenges (Big Change, Innovation Unit, 2019; World Bank, 2018).

Educators, burdened by high accountability demands, systemic inequities and limited capacity for meaningful change, also express disillusionment. Consequently, a widening gap exists between what traditional education delivers and what learners and societies need in this era of rapid change.

2.2 Systemic failures amplified by global crises

The COVID-19 pandemic starkly exposed the vulnerabilities of conventional education models, as education systems worldwide struggled to adapt to remote learning (Lake & Young, 2022). Beyond logistical challenges, the pandemic highlighted deeper systemic issues: rising rates of violence, depression, and adolescent suicide signal a failure of education systems to foster a sense of belonging, well-being, and engagement among students.

These failures are exacerbated by societal divisions and growing alienation between learners and their educational environments. The need for a more inclusive, adaptive, and community-centred approach to education has never been clearer.

2.3 The promise of CLLEs

In light of these challenges, the concept of CLLEs has gained momentum, reflecting a paradigm shift in how education is conceived and delivered. Moving beyond the conventional, school-centric model, learning ecosystems integrate diverse community resources — schools, families,

businesses, and cultural organisations — into dynamic networks that prioritise the holistic development of learners and their communities (Economist Impact, 2022b; Education Reimagined, 2021).

Central to the CLLE approach is a reimagining of education in relation to:

1. **Purpose**: Redefining educational goals to address future challenges, by focusing not just on basic skills and exam success but also on fostering well-rounded, adaptable individuals.

2. **Power**: Empowering learners, educators, and communities to take active roles in shaping educational experiences, ensuring diverse voices are included in decision-making.

3. **Practice**: Promoting innovative, learner-centred approaches that challenge standardisation and address systemic inequities.

What sets CLLEs apart is their emphasis on local autonomy and learner agency. By anchoring education within the community, these ecosystems elevate local knowledge and lived experience as valuable forms of evidence, ensuring that solutions are context-specific and relevant (Clayton & Shafique, 2023; Firelight, 2022). This participatory process reframes education as an adaptive, collaborative effort.

By bridging the gap between policy, research, and practice, CLLEs offer a compelling vision for the future of education — one that is flexible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of learners and societies alike.

2.4 A shift in education reform

Discussions around education reform are increasingly embracing the concept of ecosystems, reflecting a shift from linear, technocratic, and inflexible approaches towards more adaptive and interconnected frameworks for learning. This aligns with the broader adoption of "systems thinking" across policy and practice, as seen in the rise of Sector Wide Approaches (SWAPs), which address interrelated problems under a common goal (Ndarahutse et al., 2018).

While the terms "ecosystems" and "systems" often appear interchangeably, both allow reformers to consider the nuanced relationships among diverse actors, processes, and structures that shape a supportive, evolving learning environment. An ecosystem can be understood as a community of interdependent organisms interacting with their environment (Hannon et al., 2019; Hecht & Crowley, 2019), while systems focus on problem-solving by recognising the complex interplay of multiple components (Ndarahutse et al., 2018).

Faul and Savage (2023) identify key elements in systems thinking:

- **System elements**: Material (e.g., teachers, schools) and intangible (e.g., beliefs, information) components.
- **Relationships and structures:** Connections between these elements and the subsystems they form.
- **System functions:** Both formal (e.g., curriculum delivery) and informal (e.g., peer interactions) activities shaping outcomes.
- **Feedback loops:** Positive and negative feedback that influence the system's evolution over time.

Box 2: Sociocultural theories and ecological frameworks

Ecosystems in nature evolve through the interaction of diverse, constantly adapting elements. Similarly, educational ecosystems are seen as dynamic systems requiring intentional design and continuous evolution to meet the needs of learners in a rapidly changing world. However, unlike natural ecosystems, educational ecosystems must be purposefully crafted to achieve desirable outcomes, as emphasised by key thinkers in educational futures (Hecht & Crowley, 2019; Hannon et al., 2019).

Ecological frameworks in education help describe the context of learning as dynamic and interconnected, and where human development must be understood within the diverse environmental influences that shape it, including family, peers, culture, and community (Economist Impact, 2022a; Education Reimagined, The History Co:Lab, 2023; Wheaton et al, 2024; Hecht and Crowley, 2024).

Understanding CLLEs

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3. Understanding CLLEs

This section delves into the evidence on CLLEs, outlining the main discussions in the literature related to their objectives, actors, and functions. It captures how education is increasingly being reimagined to support collective thriving, where individual well-being, social cohesion, and the health of the planet are seen as interconnected goals.

For more than two decades, global conversations on education have emphasised the need for a transformation that extends beyond equipping individuals with academic or professional skills. This rethinking increasingly situates education as not only a pathway to economic participation but also as a means for personal, social, and planetary well-being. In other words, the focus is shifting towards holistic development that acknowledges learners' present lives and contributions, rather than viewing education merely as preparation for adulthood.

Frameworks such as the OECD Learning Compass 2030[1] and projects like the High Performing Systems for Tomorrow (HPST)[2] illustrate this expanded vision. They emphasise that "learning" should foster a wide range of competencies—cognitive, emotional, social, and ethical—so that learners can thrive in an era characterised by rapid technological shifts and complex global challenges. Here, human thriving is understood to involve multidimensional well-being, reflecting physical, emotional, psychological, relational, spiritual, societal, cultural, and economic dimensions.

While foundational academic skills (e.g., literacy and numeracy) remain vital, the limitations of industrial-era education models are becoming more pronounced. International assessments like Programme for International Student Assessment or PISA reveal a growing gap between existing curricula and the broader competencies needed for the complexities of modern life (Stevenson, 2022). As societies grapple with pressing social and environmental issues, many argue that education systems must adapt accordingly — emphasising collaborative problem-solving, ethical reasoning, and a sense of universal well-being that ties individual empowerment to collective progress.

3.1 Dynamic and context-driven

CLLEs do not follow a fixed blueprint. Instead, they evolve in response to shifting local needs, available resources, and the changing priorities of community actors. This constant flux is one of their defining strengths: CLLEs can rapidly adapt to emerging opportunities and challenges, making them particularly relevant in an era of rapid social and technological change. However, their flexibility also poses significant hurdles for evaluation,

1 This OECD Initiative aims to build a common understanding of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values students need in the 21st century. It also supports countries in sharing and creating new knowledge on future curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation.

2 The OECD's HPST project aims to establish a comprehensive international framework for the future development of education systems, enabling countries to reorient their education systems towards new purposes, policies and practices, while considering the implications of artificial intelligence for the purposes of education.

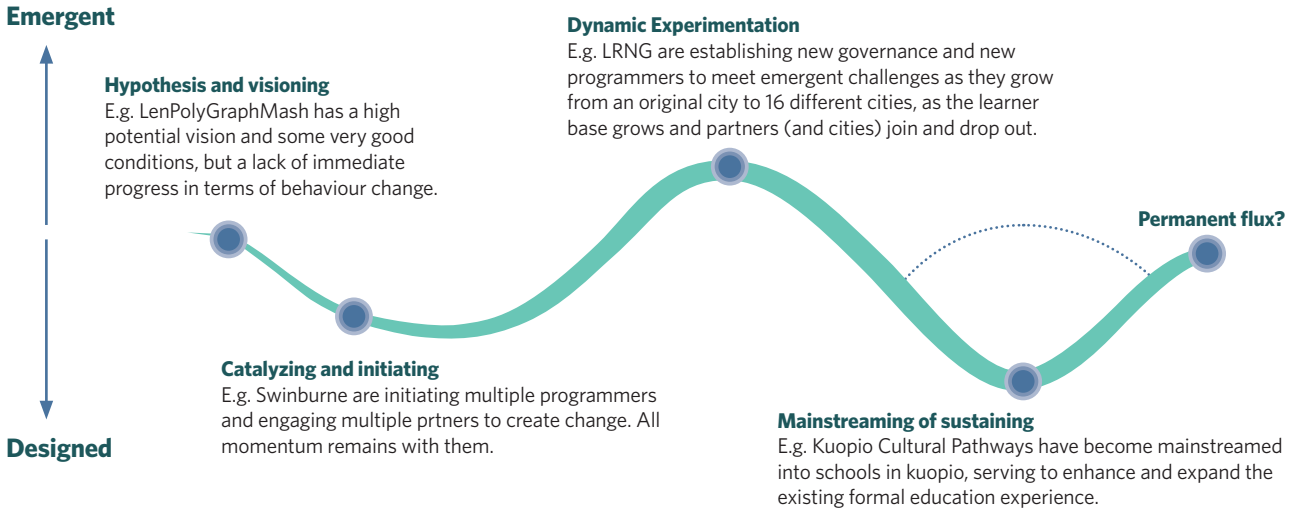
long-term planning, and comparative analysis. Decentralised structures can make consistent data gathering difficult, and local contexts vary so widely that what succeeds in one place may be less applicable elsewhere.

Despite growing interest in CLLEs, the literature on their long-term viability remains limited. Most studies focus on early-stage formation, with fewer insights on how these ecosystems achieve sustainability, "mainstream" integration, or large-scale impact. Additionally, because many CLLEs develop organically rather than through intentional, top-down design, their evolution often lacks clear milestones or uniform measures of progress. This underscores the need for adaptive evaluation frameworks—approaches that can track locally tailored goals without reducing complex, community-based processes to narrow metrics.

To offer a broad perspective, Hannon et al. (2019) propose four stages of ecosystem development: 1) Hypothesis and visioning, 2) catalysing and initiating, 3) dynamic experimentation, and 4) mainstreaming or sustaining (Figure 1). In practice, these phases rarely unfold in a linear manner and can overlap or repeat, depending on local circumstances. Early stages often emphasise imagination, exploratory partnerships, and tolerance for uncertainty. Middle stages are marked by experimentation and iteration, where setbacks may slow momentum but also spur innovative refinements. In the later stages, ecosystems seek sustainability by establishing durable structures and revenue streams. Maintaining flexibility while pursuing long-term stability remains a persistent challenge.

Taken together, these insights reinforce a core message: CLLEs are inherently fluid. They are characterised by dynamic, community-driven evolution, variable structures, and ever-shifting roles. Their decentralised nature complicates the gathering of standard indicators, yet it also enables them to remain agile, participatory, and aligned with the unique realities of local contexts. Therefore, understanding these ecosystems requires recognising that their strength lies in continuous adaptation, not a static design.

Figure 1: Four stages of learning ecosystems as they develop and grow



Source: Hannon et al. (2019)

3.2 Diverse and collaborative communities

CLLEs thrive on diversity and collaboration. They rely on trusting relationships among a wide array of actors, including learners, families, teachers, and local authorities. Such ecosystems extend beyond traditional academic structures, integrating formal education with social-emotional development and real-life applications. Researchers like Hannon et al. (2023) note that cross-sector alliances, public policy support, and close community engagement are essential for building and sustaining these ecosystems. However, it is crucial to clarify what is meant by "community," as understandings of key actors can vary significantly across different contexts.

A recurring theme in both the literature and expert interviews is that all stakeholders—students, peers, families, teachers, and community leaders—are active contributors to learning processes. Rather than being passive "beneficiaries" or "service providers," they possess unique expertise, insights, and resources that shape local education. This collaborative dynamic, grounded in mutual respect and shared objectives, distinguishes a true community from a mere network.

Although CLLEs look beyond the school to involve other spaces for learning, the school itself frequently serves as a central anchor. In many frameworks, such as those proposed by The Economist Impact (2022a), Education Reimagined (2021), and Godfrey and Brown (2019), the school is often depicted as a primary site where learning activities converge. However, ecosystem actors also operate in broader domains, offering complementary experiences and ensuring that learning is not confined to classroom walls.

Building on the various models in the literature (see Box 3), it can be helpful to envision a flexible typology that categorises actors according to their primary sphere of involvement. This typology is neither exhaustive nor rigid, as actors may shift roles or occupy multiple spheres over time. Knowledge brokering and evidence use occur across categories, underscoring the fluidity of ecosystem roles.

- **Core sphere - schools, students, families, and teachers:** These actors form the immediate circle of day-to-day learning engagement (Morris & Nora, 2024). Students, once viewed as passive recipients, are now recognised as essential participants. Families co-create school practices, offering critical local insights and support. Teachers occupy a unique position, bridging the school with the wider community and using their expertise to refine classroom strategies in dialogue with parents and students.

- **Extended sphere - community organisations, cultural institutions, and supplementary programs:** This encompasses NGOs running after-school activities, museums that offer hands-on experiences, and libraries providing shared resources, among others. Their initiatives complement the school's academic offerings and broaden student learning pathways. In a CLLE, these actors are not seen as peripheral but rather as integral collaborators that enrich and extend the learning process. In many cases, these organisations also facilitate knowledge transfer by bringing new ideas or specialised expertise into the school environment. While these actors may not identify formally as "brokers," their collaboration often leads to the dissemination and adaptation of new evidence and practices.

Box 3: Different approaches to classifying actors in CLLEs

Spaces and locations: The Economist Impact (2022a) framework approaches the classification of actors through the lens of structural components. It divides the ecosystem into three key spaces: the home learning environment, the formal education environment, and the community learning environment. In this model, the actors are closely tied to the physical or institutional spaces where learning occurs. For example, families and caregivers play a pivotal role in the home environment, teachers and school administrators dominate the formal setting, and community mentors and organisations become central in community spaces.

Relationships and interactions: The Education Reimagined (2021) model offers a more relationship-based understanding of learning ecosystems. Rather than focusing on the physical spaces, this framework emphasises the roles and interactions between various actors in the ecosystem. Here, learners are supported through flexible spaces, such as home bases, learning hubs, and field sites. In home bases, learning advisors, peers, and families collaborate, while learning hubs bring in facilitators and specialists to provide academic and personal support. Field sites extend the learning ecosystem into the broader community, connecting learners with professionals in real-world contexts like businesses and nonprofits.

Proximity to learners: Applying Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory*, the Godfrey and Brown (2019) model focuses on layers of influence that shape an individual's development. Actors are classified based on their proximity to the learner. The macrosystem includes societal factors like cultural values and policies, the exosystem covers external organisations and government agencies, the mesosystem focuses on local interactions, and the microsystem is concerned with direct relationships between learners, teachers, and families. The chronosystem adds a temporal dimension, showing how these influences change over time.

** Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory posits that an individual's development is influenced by a series of interconnected environmental systems, ranging from the immediate surroundings (e.g., family) to broad societal structures (e.g., culture).*

- **Connectors and knowledge brokers - networks, and intermediaries:** Some individuals or organisations are explicitly tasked with linking various stakeholders and promoting evidence-informed approaches across different layers of the ecosystem. Dedicated "connectors" might staff a local network hub or coordinate capacity-building efforts. However, it is important to acknowledge that all actors in the ecosystem can serve as knowledge brokers to some degree. A school leader who shares a promising practice with district officials or a district administrator who circulates research findings among multiple schools is effectively functioning as a connector. This reflects the ecosystem's central feature: roles often overlap, and brokering knowledge is as much a function as it is a distinct actor category.
- **Institutional and policy actors - local governments, district education offices, national bodies, donors:** These actors shape the broader educational framework and can significantly influence the sustainability of CLLEs. Local decision-makers (e.g., municipalities, school boards) often manage resources, develop supportive policies, and forge partnerships with NGOs and communities. Their direct involvement helps sustain ecosystem activities over the long term. Meanwhile, national governments provide funding, policy guidelines, and data infrastructures that can either enable or constrain local initiatives. While national bodies might be perceived to be uninterested in local ecosystems, many influence local practice via budgets, regulations, and mandated evaluations—though the degree of alignment varies across contexts.

Donors also play a central role, providing resources and cross-sector linkages. Yet, reliance on external funding can provoke tensions around local ownership and measurement preferences (Pritchett, 2015; Honig, 2018).

NGOs and INGOs sometimes straddle this category and the extended sphere, depending on their operational scale and mandate. Some may focus on grassroots implementation, whereas others engage more heavily in policy advocacy or capacity-building. Despite these differences, all can adopt knowledge-brokering roles when bridging evidence and practice—for instance, by translating research into practical tools or harmonising donor requirements with local needs.

3.3 Varied and overlapping functions

CLLEs often intersect with formal education structures but are not necessarily "alternative" systems operating in isolation. Instead, they function as integral—though sometimes informal or less visibly recognised—components of a wider learning landscape. By engaging a diverse range of actors, these ecosystems address the complexities of both formal schooling and broader lifelong learning opportunities. While some CLLEs exist without explicit institutional acknowledgment, others are closely integrated with official policies or curricula.

Regardless of their level of formal recognition, CLLEs fulfill a variety of functions. The literature consistently notes their capacity to broaden access to learning in formal and informal contexts, foster innovation, enhance equity, and encourage adaptability in educational practice. Studies by Economist Impact (2021), Education Reimagined (2023), and Hannon et al. (2023) underscore how different stakeholders—students, teachers, families, and community organisations—collaborate to realise these functions in fluid, overlapping ways.

However, it is important to acknowledge that critiques of CLLEs exist. Some authors warn that CLLEs can risk duplicating the efforts of formal education or establishing parallel structures that inadvertently reinforce existing inequities. Conversely, proponents argue that these ecosystems embed learning more deeply within communities, enabling holistic growth and personal agency that may be difficult to achieve through formal education alone. Understanding these varied perspectives is crucial to appreciating how CLLEs function both within and alongside structured education systems. Drawing on frameworks such as those by Hannon et al. (2019, 2023), the core functions identified in the literature, case studies, and expert interviews generally converge around five key themes.

Enhancing the learning process and improving outcomes in formal education

A key function of CLLEs is to strengthen formal education by improving classroom practices and ensuring that teaching and learning are responsive to local needs. This includes efforts to enhance teacher professional development, incorporate multiple forms of evidence into pedagogical innovation, and encourage the participation of parents and other community members.

By making formal schooling more adaptive and inclusive, CLLEs can help align education with broader community aspirations and improve overall learning outcomes. Evidence in this context can be diverse. Parents or family members may share insights about learners' study habits, home life, or health needs, while community organisations bring evidence-informed resources related to topics such as child-centred teaching methods or special educational needs. Teachers and school leaders may incorporate data from classroom observations,

learner feedback, or small-scale action research projects. Additionally, local or regional NGOs often provide professional development informed by global best practices, adapting these approaches to local realities.

The examples in Case Study 1 highlight how CLLEs engage communities to enhance both the process and outcomes of formal education. By weaving locally relevant insights into professional development, curriculum adaptations, and collaborative decision-making, these initiatives demonstrate the potential of community-driven strategies to foster deeper learner engagement, stronger academic results, and a more vibrant connection between schools and the communities they serve.

Broadening the range of learning opportunities

An important function of CLLEs is to expand and diversify the range of learning experiences available to all learners, whether inside or outside the formal education system. These may include after-school programs, community-led workshops, outdoor or nature-based learning, and various cultural, sports, or vocational experiences that complement or go beyond the standard curriculum.

In some cases, CLLEs collaborate closely with schools to integrate additional subjects, cultural experiences, or extracurricular activities into the formal curriculum. Elsewhere, they may provide out-of-school programs that operate independently, emphasising hands-on, experiential learning and social-emotional development in non-academic settings. Both approaches aim to ensure that all learners—including those who are out of school or have special educational needs—have access to rich, holistic learning environments.

When CLLEs work in partnership with formal education, they can help broaden the curriculum's scope or deepen its relevance to local contexts

Case Study 1: The importance of community collaboration to improve learning

Fundación Luker in Manizales, Colombia

In the coffee-growing region of Caldas, Fundación Luker partners with local schools, teachers, and government bodies to address foundational learning gaps in reading comprehension and mathematics. Drawing on evidence from classroom observations, student assessments, and parental insights, they adapt evidence-informed pedagogies to the rural context. Teacher training programs emphasise the practical application of new techniques, and parents contribute by highlighting home-based factors affecting children's learning. This collaboration has yielded improved learner engagement and outcomes, showcasing how integrating local context into professional development can enhance the relevance and impact of formal education.

Comunidades de Aprendizaje in Argentina

Spanning various urban and semi-rural locations, Comunidades de Aprendizaje unites teachers, students, families, and community actors to co-design school improvement strategies. Initiatives like Mixed Commissions, where stakeholders jointly plan interventions, and Interactive Math Groups, inviting families into the classroom to observe and contribute, demonstrate how grassroots collaboration can enrich the learning process. These activities draw on local data—such as attendance patterns, teacher feedback, and community surveys—to tailor lessons and address social or economic barriers that impede learning. As a result, formal education becomes more inclusive and context-sensitive, improving not only learners' academic achievements but also their sense of connection and purpose in school.

(see Case Study 2). Schools may collaborate with cultural institutions, NGOs, or businesses to offer supplementary coursework in art, technology, sports, or community service. This integration can spark greater engagement among students who might otherwise feel disconnected from standard academic subjects, simultaneously encouraging the participation of families and other community members.

Other models place greater emphasis on community-based or out-of-school initiatives (see Case Study 3). By tapping into local organisations, youth clubs, libraries, sports teams, and cultural centres, these ecosystems create year-round opportunities for students to learn outside regular school hours. These activities can attract out-of-school youth or offer specialised programs for learners with special educational needs, ensuring that each young person's unique circumstances are recognised and addressed.

Whether embedded in the school day or functioning independently, these broad-ranging learning experiences are often designed to serve a variety of learners, including those who may face barriers in formal education. Some initiatives help out-of-school youth re-enter the system or pursue alternative qualifications, while others adapt learning environments for individuals with special

Case Study 2: Broadening the range of learning - The Kuopio Cultural Pathways, Finland

The municipality of Kuopio in Finland has effectively integrated museums, arts organisations, and other cultural institutions into its formal education system, thereby expanding the range of learning opportunities available to students. Through the **Kuopio Cultural Pathways initiative**, schools collaborate with local partners to create hands-on workshops and community-led events, exposing learners to regional heritage, folk traditions, and creative practices. This approach ensures that children from diverse backgrounds can discover new interests, develop socio-emotional skills, and build a stronger connection to their local environment. By bridging formal and informal learning spaces, Kuopio demonstrates how a municipality can enrich the educational ecosystem in ways that resonate with local realities.

Case Study 3: Broadening learning horizons through the Educació360 passport (Catalonia, Spain)

The **Educació360 Alliance** in Catalonia is a cross-sector coalition comprising local government entities, philanthropic organisations, and civil society groups. Its mission is to expand children's learning opportunities beyond school walls by linking families to cultural, recreational, and educational programs in their communities.

Through the Children's Passport initiative, students gain access to diverse cultural, recreational, and educational programs in their local areas, from museum exhibits to sports clinics and community service projects. By removing barriers related to cost or location, and by involving families directly, Educació360 aims to make these experiences universally accessible. This approach helps children and youth develop new interests and social-emotional skills, reinforcing the idea that learning is ongoing and not limited to what happens within school walls.

needs. By offering multiple entry points and flexible schedules, community-led approaches can accommodate unique life circumstances—such as work commitments, family responsibilities, or language barriers—thus promoting equity across diverse groups of learners. In all these scenarios, CLLEs prioritise learner agency and community involvement, reflecting a broader vision of education as a communal enterprise.

Responding to specific local workforce needs

CLLEs can be instrumental in aligning learning experiences with local economic demands. Instead of merely offering broad, generalised curricula, these ecosystems co-design targeted pathways that equip learners with the skills and competencies most valued in specific industries or sectors. This function extends beyond formal education by directly involving employers and community organisations in upskilling or reskilling programs that reflect local labour market realities (see Case Study 4).

In many regions, the formal education system has limited flexibility to adapt curricula quickly in response to evolving labour markets. CLLEs address this gap by involving local employers in the co-creation of learning programs, ensuring that young people and adult learners alike gain hands-on experiences and credentials that enhance their employability. This results in a more dynamic, community-informed approach to workforce readiness, which can also support broader economic resilience by expecting and responding to shifts in local industries.

Connecting actors in the ecosystem and facilitate learning and sharing

Another critical function of CLLEs is to bring together diverse stakeholders—from practitioners and policy-makers to researchers and community leaders—into shared spaces for dialogue, partnership, and collective learning. As these ecosystems evolve, they encourage a deeper understanding of each actor's role, contributions, and evidence-informed practices, thereby strengthening the ecosystem as a whole (see Case Study 5).

Networks or organisations with convening power often spearhead this function by hosting forums,

Case Study 4: Building a learning city through the Talent & Innovation Ecosystem in Doncaster, UK

Doncaster, located in South Yorkshire, England, has developed a **Talent and Innovation Ecosystem (TIE)** led by the City of Doncaster Council in partnership with local businesses, educational institutions, and civil society. This initiative is a core component of Doncaster's Education & Skills 2030 Strategy, which envisions equitable and inclusive lifelong learning opportunities for all residents.

While the TIE does seek to match local workforce needs—such as logistics, advanced manufacturing, and creative industries—with relevant learning experiences, its scope is broader than vocational training. It aims to create a learning city model where schools, community partners, and employers co-create holistic pathways for all age groups, from school-aged children to adults looking to upskill or re-enter the job market. In doing so, Doncaster emphasises both economic development and personal growth, fostering a culture where lifelong learning is integrated into the social and economic fabric of the city.

Source: City of Doncaster (2021)

workshops, and peer-learning sessions. These gatherings not only allow actors to exchange experiences and innovations but also help them co-develop new ideas, tools, or research agendas. Practitioners consistently highlighted the need for such connections in interviews, particularly as many learning ecosystems are in a period of growth and transformation.

This function was frequently highlighted as crucial for the current momentum of the learning ecosystem movement in interviews with practitioners. Many noted that they are in a period of change and evolution, where connection and collaboration with others is critical—not only to learn from each other's experiences but also to think collectively about the next steps, including shared research and learning agendas.

Synthesising evidence for practical use

A further essential function involves translating academic research and data into actionable insights that can inform and improve the learning experiences of children, youth, and communities (see Case Study 6). While scholars, think tanks, and other institutions generate valuable research on topics ranging from systems thinking to co-production in education, practitioners on the ground often require accessible, context-tailored guidance to put these findings into practice.

Evidence transformation does not always mean creating "tools" in a strict sense; it can also involve developing briefs, guidelines, professional development modules, or capacity-building strategies focused on specific questions or challenges. For instance, a research team might synthesise studies on early literacy interventions and co-design practical workshops for teachers and families in a community-led reading campaign.

In CLLEs, synthesising evidence in this way can support a wide range of actors—from classroom teachers and grassroots organisers to district officials and NGO staff—by offering practical, locally relevant approaches to enhancing learning. This crucial function bridges the often-cited gap between research and implementation, ensuring that robust academic insights are transformed into everyday strategies that benefit learners in diverse contexts.

Case Study 5: Fostering connections and shared learning: Education Reimagined & Remake Learning

Education Reimagined (USA): A Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that convenes educators, learners, and communities to rethink education systems around a learner-centred paradigm. Through conferences, collaborative design sessions, and virtual panels, Education Reimagined creates a shared space where participants exchange successful practices, reflect on challenges, and shape new strategies for adaptable, responsive learning environments.

Remake Learning (USA): Originating in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Remake Learning operates as a peer network linking schools, museums, libraries, makerspaces, and community centres committed to equitable, learner-centred experiences. Through annual summits and ongoing working groups, Remake Learning encourages knowledge-sharing across different sectors, highlighting scalable models and effective practices. By connecting stakeholders from rural districts, urban neighbourhoods, and industry, Remake Learning ensures that expertise flows in multiple directions and fosters a sense of collective purpose.

In CLLEs, synthesising evidence in this way can support a wide range of actors—from classroom teachers and grassroots organisers to district officials and NGO staff—by offering practical, locally relevant approaches to enhancing learning. This crucial function bridges the often-cited gap between research and implementation, ensuring that robust academic insights are transformed into everyday strategies that benefit learners in diverse contexts.

Case Study 6: Bridging research and practice through EEF's Research Schools (UK)

The **Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)** operates a network of Research Schools across England, exemplifying how academic evidence can be translated into practical guidance for educators. Rather than simply publishing findings, these schools work with local teachers and school leaders to adapt proven strategies—such as peer tutoring or feedback models—to the specific demographics and constraints of each setting. EEF's Teaching and Learning Toolkit, for example, is periodically updated with new evidence and integrated into professional development sessions, ensuring that practitioners benefit from the latest research. By tailoring evidence to local contexts, the Research Schools initiative fosters a culture of continuous improvement and evidence-informed learning.

Evidence use in CLLEs

4

4. Evidence use in CLLEs

In CLLEs, evidence is integral to decision-making, program design, and continuous improvement. These ecosystems bring together schools, NGOs, local governments, and community members who rely on multiple sources of evidence—from research studies to local insights. Yet, significant gaps persist in how evidence is gathered and applied at community levels, partly due to weak feedback loops and insufficient data-collection mechanisms (Hayter & Broadbent, 2024). This section examines the types of evidence used in CLLEs, the overlapping roles of evidence producers and users, and the challenges and opportunities for strengthening evidence use.

4.1 The concept of "evidence"

The concept of "*evidence*" in education often raises questions about what qualifies as legitimate evidence and whose voices or perspectives are included in defining it. When discussing "*the evidence*" in education policy contexts, this is largely taken to mean research-based evidence generated through what are understood to be scientific modes of inquiry. This is also true in CLLEs.

There has been a persistent criticism of what is perceived as an overly scientistic approach to inform education policy questions at both national and global levels, including the limits of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and the privileging of Global North research actors in shaping the evidence agenda (Hayter & Broadbent, 2024; Hayter & Morales, 2023; UNESCO, 2024;).

There is a widening acknowledgement from within the global education community that a narrow reliance on "*technicist*" approaches to education decision-making is limiting. As Prachi Srivastava argued in an influential UNESCO paper on the role of evidence in the context of the global pandemic: "*while education is often approached in a technicist manner in high-level policy and planning fora, it is, in fact, deeply cultural, social, economic, and political. This requires deep conceptual engagement with the institutions and the institutional processes underlying education systems.*" (Srivastava, 2022).

There is a perceptible shift within the evidence in education discourse towards what Srivastava calls an "*epistemic humility*", which acknowledges the limits of research-based evidence and accepts that no single form of evidence is definitive. This is supportive of localised actors - including research actors - who are able to bring to bear their lived experiences and contextual understanding to the policy process (Supplee et al., 2023).

This shift also highlights *whose* evidence is considered legitimate, reflecting discussions over broader power dynamics, particularly between the Global North and South, where dominant knowledge systems can marginalise local perspectives (Hayter & Morales, 2023; Siregar et al., 2023).

4.2 Multiple sources of evidence

Despite ongoing debates, there is broad consensus that education systems benefit from multiple sources of evidence. Figure 2 illustrates how the following four categories often overlap in

CLLEs: research evidence, sector-generated data, pedagogic evidence and practice-informed advice (Hayter & Broadbent, 2024).

Research evidence

This type of evidence includes academic studies, systematic reviews, and synthesised reports that guide decision-making based on rigorous research (see Case Study 7). It typically comes from academic institutions or research organisations, which produce research on key topics, evaluations to measure the effectiveness of programs, analyse trends, or provide guidance for intervention design (Hayter & Broadbent, 2024).

The vast majority of initiatives included in this review are rooted in research evidence, although it is acknowledged that an existing evidence base does not always speak directly to a particular initiative's context or model, and "the (research) evidence" does not offer a definitive, unambiguous path forward.

Figure 2: Types of evidence in education

Source: Own elaboration based on Hayter & Broadbent (2024) and others.

Sector-generated data

Sector-generated data includes information collected from school-based assessments, surveys, and national education management information systems (EMIS) (see Case Study 8). It can also include demographic data relating to school communities, as well as education workforce data.

This data provides essential insights across education domains, including student performance, attendance, teacher recruitment and deployment, the status of school hardware, and other critical metrics. However, the management of this data is notoriously challenging: it exists in several places (e.g., at schools, at local education offices, at ministries and other adjacent agencies), access by different actors in the system presents problems, the data often contains gaps, and systems to facilitate its use are often weak.

Despite these challenges, this type of data can be usefully analysed - and even collected - by non-governmental agencies.

Case Study 7: The Strategy Finder and Playbook tool

The **Brookings Family-School-Community Engagement initiative** has collected a broad range of pedagogical evidence from over 60 countries, which is made available through their interactive Strategy Finder and Playbook. These tools help educators access a diverse set of practices and strategies, offering evidence-backed insights into how schools and communities can engage families more effectively. The pedagogical evidence gathered highlights various successful approaches, including family engagement techniques that improve student attendance and learning outcomes.

Case Study 8: Using sector-generated data for strategic decision-making

Building Tomorrow leverages sector-generated data by analyzing national surveys and census outputs to identify regions with low school enrollment rates, enabling them to strategically target districts. Fellows and Community Education Volunteers (CEVs) routinely monitor progress using registers that track student attendance and academic outcomes, ensuring data-driven decision-making at the local level.

Sector-generated data can also include official policies, guidelines, internal reviews, and planning documents. South Africa's **SmartStart programme** exemplifies this approach by working closely with the South African government to align its early learning centers with national standards. Additionally, SmartStart utilizes demographic data to better understand the communities it serves, ensuring its early childhood interventions are tailored to local needs.

Practice-informed evidence

Practice-informed evidence draws on the knowledge, skills, and experience of trusted professionals with expertise in a particular field (see Case Study 9). This kind of evidence is typically influential in capacity-building initiatives, peer-learning networks, mentoring schemes, advisory groups, and programme evaluations, among other examples. This form of evidence is thought to be particularly influential, with studies by Candelaria (2013) and Finnigan (2021) finding that educators tend to trust information that is sourced from known and respected peers.

In community contexts, where access to other forms of evidence may be limited, the expertise of trusted professionals is particularly important. For example, Education Reimagined developed co-created learner-centred practices informed by teachers and community members, to better understand how to operationalise learning in broader community ecosystems.

Pedagogical evidence

Pedagogical evidence is often classified as a distinct category of evidence, focusing specifically on school and classroom practice and how this interacts with learners. This type of evidence is typically generated through classroom observations, reflective practice, learner performance and feedback, leading to iterative improvements in teaching strategies.

Although collection of this evidence is continuous, real-time, and sometimes overlooked. It plays a crucial role in teaching models like Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) or learning through play, which are

Case Study 9: Incorporating practice-based insights

Building Tomorrow's community-centered approach integrates the experience of local leaders, who provide practical advice and help mobilize communities. Their on-the-ground knowledge ensures that interventions are responsive to local needs and realities. Similarly, the **Lively Minds** program relies on local practitioners to offer practice-based insights on engaging with communities and government bodies to monitor and strengthen their early childhood development program. In both cases, practice-informed evidence plays a crucial role in shaping initiatives that are contextually appropriate and sustainable.

continuously adapted based on learner assessment and teacher reflections. It is also the basis for well-accepted strategies such as differentiated learning, adaptive learning, and personalised learning - where each emphasise the capacity of teachers to adapt teaching strategies based on the needs of individual learners (Culatta, 2016).

Table 1 highlights the variety of evidence used by initiatives and actors analysed in this review.

Case Study 10: From RCTs to context-specific design

Building Tomorrow's Roots to Rise programme employs RCTs to assess the impact of the initiative's use of the TaRL adaptive teaching model in Uganda. According to Whitney Warren, the programme partnered with Notre Dame University on the study, which reportedly "*showed that schools receiving support from BT fellows achieved significant improvements in numeracy—approximately 50% higher than those that did not receive any interventions.*" The evidence was not just used for validation but for refining program strategies. Building Tomorrow is one of several partners across Africa to adopt TaRL, an initiative developed by Pratham and J-PAL in 2019 now hosted by Empower Africa. Its core principles of responsiveness, child-centredness, and focused on securing foundational learning before moving to more advanced topics. By employing regular formative assessment methods to identify learning levels, the approach is designed to respond to different learning levels within classrooms, while empowering teachers to make evidence-informed decisions. As with all iterations of the model, Building Tomorrow's programme was refined to fit the Ugandan context and ensure it met both local needs and global standards for literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Table 1: Type of evidence used by selected initiatives and actors

Organisation/Initiative	Type of Evidence	Evidence Use
Luminos Fund	Research evidence, sector-generated data, pedagogical evidence	Instrumental use (real-time data adjustment), embedded use (ongoing adaptation)
Building Tomorrow	Research evidence, sector-generated data, pedagogical evidence	Instrumental use (RCT data informs teaching models), embedded use (continuous adaptation)
Smart Start	Research evidence, sector-generated data, practice-informed advice, pedagogical evidence	Instrumental use (adapting curriculum), embedded use (coaching and feedback system)
Dream a Dream	Research evidence, sector-generated data	Transparent use (raising awareness on life skills), embedded use (tailoring interventions based on state feedback)
Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)	Research evidence, practice-informed advice	Transparent use (toolkit for awareness), instrumental use (guiding policy and program adaptations)
Firelight Foundation	Practice-informed advice, sector-generated data	Embedded use (long-term systemic change, community-driven data collection)
Lively Minds	Practice-informed advice, sector-generated data	Embedded use (community input), instrumental use (adjusting ecd programs)

The variety of evidence used by the CLLEs initiatives and actors analysed in this review is outlined in Annex 2. It reflects both the variety of evidence type being used, and the standard practice across CLLEs of combining evidence types to inform an initiative. This approach balances context-specific insights, such as community or classroom-based experiences, with broader evidence that may be less context-dependent but still valuable for decision-making.

4.3 Forms of evidence use

In CLLEs, evidence use is diverse and complex. Unlike traditional education systems, where decision-making often relies on top-down research or national-level data, community-led ecosystems are decentralised. This means that local actors—such as teachers, community volunteers, parents, and NGOs—not only use evidence but also generate it. This decentralised structure requires a broader understanding of how evidence informs day-to-day decisions, long-term planning, and adaptive practices within these systems.

One key insight from the literature is that evidence use does not always lead to immediate decision-making. It can influence broader conversations, gradually result in incremental changes, or become embedded in an organisation's culture over time (Hayter & Broadbent, 2024). This dynamic highlights the multiple ways evidence operates in CLLEs, where actors like teachers, NGOs, or local leaders engage with evidence in distinct ways based on their roles and contexts.

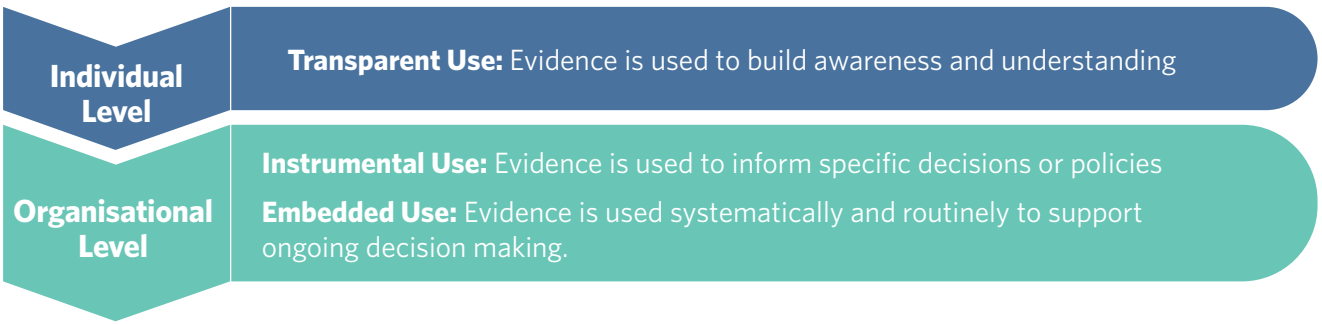
As shown in Figure 3, evidence use in these ecosystems can therefore be classified into three main categories: 1) **transparent use**, 2) **instrumental use**, and 3) **embedded use**.

Transparent (conceptual) use

Transparent use of evidence focuses on raising awareness, framing issues, and deepening understanding without necessarily prompting immediate action. Hayter and Broadbent (2024) describe this as conceptual use, where evidence indirectly influences thinking or long-term policies, informing dialogue rather than driving direct changes. This type of evidence use is prevalent in educational and policy discussions where building insight is a key goal.

In the Smart Start initiative, Mpho Tshweneyame explained how evidence from the Child Outcome Study and Early Learning Outcomes Measure (ELOM) tools is used not only to refine curriculum but also to highlight the importance of early

Figure 3: Forms of evidence use



Source: Own elaboration based on Hayter & Broadbent (2024) and others.

childhood education. Many parents in disadvantaged areas were unaware of how critical early learning is for child development. By sharing research findings, Smart Start raised awareness and reframed the conversation around the value of early interventions. As Tshweneyame noted: "*We realised that many parents in disadvantaged communities prioritise higher education over early learning. By sharing findings from our studies, we raise awareness and shift how they perceive the importance of early years education.*"

Similarly, Fundación Luker in Colombia used evidence from an experimental evaluation to increase understanding of student challenges like reading comprehension and absenteeism. Although their tutoring program initially targeted struggling readers, evaluation results showed no significant difference in outcomes between tutored and non-tutored students. Instead of making immediate program changes, the evidence was used to contextualise the problem and raise awareness of the need for a broader re-evaluation of the program's focus. This highlights the role of transparent evidence use in framing challenges and guiding future efforts.

Instrumental use

Instrumental use of evidence involves directly applying research or data to guide decisions, inform policies, or address specific challenges. This action-oriented approach leads to tangible outcomes and is particularly effective in CLLEs, where evidence helps refine programs based on local needs (Goldman & Pabari, 2021).

The Luminos Fund demonstrates this approach by using evidence to make real-time curriculum adjustments. In Liberia, data revealed that children struggled with unfamiliar words, prompting a curriculum revision to emphasise phonetic skills. Dr. Kirsty Newman explained: "*Data revealed that children could read familiar words but struggled with unfamiliar ones. We used this insight to adjust the curriculum, focusing on phonetics to improve decoding skills.*" This immediate application ensured their accelerated education program remained impactful.

Similarly, the Firelight Foundation applies evidence to address systemic challenges. In Tanzania, data highlighted gender disparities in education access, prompting collaboration with community leaders to design interventions that increased girls' participation. Sadaf Shallwani noted: "*The evidence revealed that while our programs were benefiting the community as a whole, we needed to address gender disparities more directly. Based on this, we co-designed interventions with community leaders to ensure girls' enrollment and participation increased.*" These examples showcase how instrumental evidence use drives targeted, effective changes.

Embedded or process use

Embedded use refers to the systematic integration of evidence into ongoing processes and decision-making frameworks. Unlike one-time evidence use, it involves the continuous application of evidence within organisational routines and practices. Rinnert & Brower (2017) describe embedded use as the institutionalisation of evidence in decision-making, where it is used regularly to monitor, adapt, and refine programs or policies. Goldman & Pabari (2021) highlight that in embedded contexts, such as schools or educational ministries, evidence is systematically applied to support ongoing decision-making and continuous improvement.

An example of embedded use is SmartStart's coaching system. Early learning practitioners work with coaches who provide ongoing support informed by both qualitative feedback from the field and data from the Child Outcome Study. This feedback loop ensures that evidence is not only generated but also used continuously to maintain and improve the quality of early learning centres.

Mpho Tshweneyame explained: "*Our coaching system ensures that feedback is continuously collected and integrated into our program design. This evidence-based support is crucial for maintaining quality.*"

While diverse actors in CLLEs systematically use evidence to inform their policies, identifying examples of embedded use at a systemic level (e.g., ministries of education) can be more challenging. This type of use operates within complex, multi-stakeholder environments where evidence must pass through many layers before it is integrated into long-term practices. Achieving ecosystem-wide transformation requires institutionalising evidence use at multiple levels, ensuring that evidence not only informs individual actions (e.g., teachers or NGOs) but also guides decisions across organisations and institutions. This involves coherence and synchronisation between stakeholders with different priorities and evidence-use practices, making embedding evidence throughout the ecosystem complex yet essential for long-term, large-scale change.

4.4 Evidence use at various levels

The use of different types of evidence in CLLEs reflects the complexity of evidence ecosystems, where actors operate with varying goals, capabilities, interests, and incentives (Tseng, 2012). This "*demand side*" of evidence has become increasingly central to evidence-informed policy and practice, supporting broader definitions of what constitutes legitimate evidence (Hayter & Morales, 2023).

In CLLEs, evidence use occurs at three interlinked levels: individuals, organisations, and systems (Box 4). Actors at these levels are not merely consumers of evidence but also play active roles in generating and applying it to inform decisions about education programs, policies, and practices.

Understanding evidence use across these levels reveals the diverse and interconnected ways actors contribute to and shape learning ecosystems. By examining how individuals, organisations, and systems engage with evidence, we gain insights

Box 4: Individual, organisation and system-level evidence use

At the individual (micro) level, evidence informs attitudes and behaviours of actors such as government officials, teachers, school leaders, parents, and learners. For example, formative assessment approaches—like Fundación Luker's tutoring program, TaRL Africa, and the broader Assessment for Learning (AfL) framework—enable teachers to adapt classroom practices to meet learners' needs. Initiatives such as Smart Start and Comunidades de Aprendizaje (Argentina) engage parents as decision-makers, facilitating two-way communication to provide feedback on learner progress and evidence of program effectiveness.

At the organisational (meso) level, evidence is used collectively in a more structured way to inform decision-making, including funding, program design, strategies, and pedagogical approaches. Organisations blend research evidence, sector-generated data, and practitioner feedback to refine their interventions. For instance, the EEF's Teaching and Learning Toolkit supports organisations in collecting, analysing, and adapting evidence to improve effectiveness.

At the system (macro) level, evidence use reflects the processes, norms, and values that shape how individuals and organisations interact. While CLLEs function as discrete systems, they also operate within the broader education system. Evidence influences system-level change through individuals and organisations over time, while system-level factors, in turn, shape how evidence is generated and used.

into the dynamic interplay between actors in the generation, application, and evolution of evidence.

4.5 Strengthening CLLEs through co-creation of evidence

The emergence of CLLEs reflects the shift towards taking a more systems-based approach to evidence use, i.e., one that recognises both the importance of supply-and-demand-side orientations and their inter-relations. As part of this, CLLEs have become synonymous with the co-creation of evidence, which is rooted in two key ideas: 1) that the process of generating research is as important as the resulting evidence itself; 2) involving the identified users of evidence in the research process is facilitative of its use.

Co-creation of evidence is considered impactful by its proponents, particularly in developing transformative relationships with frontline education practitioners. While there is a burgeoning recognition that co-creation can be time-consuming, lengthy, and subject to "capture," it is praised for supporting the empowerment of localised evidence actors, and ensuring interventions are both responsive and sustainable.

For example, organisations like Firelight Foundation, Smart Start and Luminos Fund emphasise the use of local knowledge and iterative feedback from communities to inform programme design and adapt to changing needs.

Box 5: On the importance of local evidence and co-creation in CLLEs

Local evidence and co-creation as mechanisms for contextualised solutions: Local evidence and co-creation are vital for developing contextualised solutions in CLLEs. Sadaf Shallwani (Firelight Foundation) highlighted that evidence arising from co-created, community-driven processes is more meaningful for decision-making and systemic change: "*Our approach centres around the communities themselves defining their own indicators of success, using evidence that they've generated to steer their interventions.*" This ensures that interventions are deeply rooted in local priorities and realities.

From global to local: evidence impact starts at the grassroots: Global education research often first impacts practice at the local level before influencing broader systems. For example, programs like Smart Start operate within national frameworks but demonstrate their most immediate effects through community-level adaptations. Mpho Tshweneyame (Smart Start) explained how qualitative feedback from parents and early learning facilitators drives real-time curriculum adjustments, ensuring responsiveness to local needs.

Closing the feedback loop between local practice and broader policies: Classroom-generated evidence is crucial for informing policy and scaling effective interventions. Dr. Kirsty Newman (Luminos Fund) emphasised the importance of this feedback loop, citing an instance where evidence of children struggling with unfamiliar words led to curriculum adjustments: "*This local evidence didn't just help our program—it also informed conversations with the Ministry of Education about phonics integration.*" Similarly, Emily Liebtag (Education Reimagined) stressed that teacher-led research can challenge traditional top-down policy flows, fostering a more inclusive dialogue between practice and policy.

Source: Informant interviews.

4.6 Using evidence to assess effectiveness

Assessing how well CLLEs achieve their goals is inherently complex. Unlike traditional education, which often relies on standardised metrics such as test scores, CLLEs seek deeper, long-term transformations at individual, community, and systemic levels. This raises two central challenges: determining which metrics can capture these multidimensional goals, and understanding how diverse forms of evidence—both quantitative and qualitative—can be applied to track progress and guide decision-making.

Measuring transformation beyond outcomes

In conventional educational systems, success is often gauged by standardised metrics such as academic achievement—usually measured through tests and exams in reading, math, and other core subjects. However, this type of evidence is inadequate for evaluating the broader goals of CLLEs. These ecosystems are fundamentally about transformation—of individuals, communities, and systems. Therefore, evidence use in these contexts needs to reflect this transformative potential, moving beyond static metrics to capture more complex and dynamic aspects of learning.

The critical insight here is that learning ecosystems are not just about immediate, easily measurable outcomes but about fostering long-term change. This requires evidence systems that capture both the process of learning and the impact of that process. For example, measuring progress in areas such as learner agency, social cohesion, and well-being requires forms of evidence that go beyond quantitative assessments. Qualitative data, such as narratives from participants, community feedback, and observations of learner engagement, are often just as important, if not more so, in capturing the depth of transformation (Hannon et al., 2023).

One of the core challenges in assessing effectiveness is the difficulty in defining success for learning ecosystems. Given their broad goals—ranging from academic improvement to community empowerment—no single metric can capture all aspects of effectiveness.

> "We need to think beyond the usual metrics. Success in a learning ecosystem might mean better academic outcomes, but it might also mean stronger community ties, greater student agency, or increased family involvement. Measuring those things requires new thinking and new tools."
> **Emily Morris, Brookings**

Similarly, Tyler Samstag (Remake Learning) pointed to the difficulties in capturing long-term, qualitative impacts within their programs. According to Samstag, traditional metrics often fall short when reflecting the depth of learning and engagement that happens over time. He explained that measuring the long-term impact of something as dynamic and relational as a learning ecosystem is challenging.

This challenge is compounded by the limitations of traditional metrics. Jonathan Kay from the EEF acknowledged that while quantitative metrics like test scores remain useful, they often fail to capture the full picture, especially in more dynamic and community-driven learning environments.

> "We recognise that traditional metrics like test scores don't always capture the full picture, particularly in environments where learning is more dynamic and community-driven. There's a need for more flexible forms of assessment that can reflect the different ways students engage with and benefit from learning."
> **Jonathan Kay, EEF.**

These insights underscore the importance of using evidence not just to assess what has been

achieved but also to guide the evolution of learning ecosystems.

Broadening the scope with new metrics

Since CLLEs aim for outcomes more expansive than preparing learners for jobs, the metrics they use must also be expansive. Researchers such as Karen Pittman (2023) critique the narrow focus on academic achievement for overlooking crucial dimensions of personal growth and social-emotional development. Likewise, Emily Liebtag (Education Reimagined) highlights the need to assess learner-centred competencies—like critical thinking, collaboration, and personal agency: "If we're only measuring success by test scores, we're missing out on the entire context of a learner's experience. Learner-centred practices are about personal growth, critical thinking, collaboration, and the development of a student's agency, and that requires new metrics to assess."

Liebtag also highlighted the importance of qualitative data—such as student feedback, teacher reflections, and community involvement—in assessing the success of these ecosystems. She emphasised the need to shift both institutional and public understanding of what effective learning looks like.

> "We need to move beyond the numbers and start looking at what really matters to students—how engaged they are, whether they feel ownership over their learning, and how they're growing as individuals."
> **Emily Liebtag, Education Reimagined**

Similarly, Tyler Samstag from Remake Learning emphasised the importance of qualitative and narrative-based evidence to capture the full impact of learning ecosystems. He noted that these stories help Remake Learning to capture the lived experiences of learners and educators, providing a richer picture of how their learning ecosystems affect communities.

> "We collect a lot of stories from our partners about how these collaborations are influencing student learning and community development. Those stories are an important part of the evidence base because they reveal what's happening on the ground in ways that numbers alone can't."
> **Tyler Samstag, Remake Learning**

Despite growing interest in measuring 21st-century skills like critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, many education systems lack effective tools to assess these competencies. This highlights a significant gap between the goals of learning ecosystems and the tools available for evaluating success. While traditional metrics like test scores provide clear, quantitative data, they often fall short of capturing the full scope of what learning ecosystems aim to achieve. This gap between ambition and measurement capacity represents a key tension within the field of community-led learning. For instance, the HPST initiative has identified potential competencies with suggested approaches to assessment, aiming to underpin education for human flourishing (Stevenson, 2022).

Using ecosystemic approaches to identify what evidence is needed

Another recurring theme is the idea that community empowerment lies at the heart of CLLEs. Many organisations and initiatives reject the notion that success can be boiled down to easily quantifiable indicators. Instead, they prioritise participatory evidence systems designed to capture both visible results and deeper, often intangible transformations.

The Firelight Foundation, for instance, emphasises the importance of using evidence that reflects community leadership and sustainability. Their participatory approach integrates community feedback into decision-making processes, capturing both the outcomes and the ongoing shifts that lead

to long-term systemic change. Firelight focuses on non-traditional indicators of success, such as qualitative data drawn from community narratives, participant feedback, and case studies. For Firelight, the process of generating evidence is as crucial as the outcomes it seeks to measure, ensuring that the evidence used reflects community voices and leadership.

> "We use participatory approaches, collecting stories and feedback from communities to assess how well local organisations are driving systems change and whether our approach is building long-term sustainability."
> **Ronald Kimambo, Firelight Foundation**

Emily Morris (Brookings) echoes this sentiment, noting that family-school-community partnerships yield richer data and more authentic evaluations. By involving parents, learners, teachers, and community actors in co-creating assessment criteria, CLLEs can generate evidence that is more reflective of real experiences on the ground. This collaborative perspective broadens the conversation, ensuring that the metrics used align with the ecosystem's diverse values and stakeholders.

> "We're seeing that when families, schools, and communities come together to co-create the learning environment, we get richer evidence. It's not just about student performance; it's about how well the ecosystem is working for everyone involved."
> **Emily Morris, Brookings**

A recurring theme among interviewees was the difficulty of capturing long-term, systemic changes within learning ecosystems. Given that learning often occurs across different contexts and through varied experiences, many participants emphasised the need for flexible and adaptive measurement tools. This need for contextual, community-driven approaches to measurement is further reinforced by insights from Tyler Samstag at Remake Learning, who pointed out that learning ecosystems must "tailor our assessment tools to reflect the unique needs and challenges of the communities we are serving."

Emily Liebtag from Education Reimagined, also stressed the importance of developing flexible, community-embedded assessment tools:

> "Our assessment frameworks should be flexible enough to grow with the students and the ecosystem. We need systems that measure learning over time, that are embedded in the community, and that value diverse learning pathways."
> **Emily Liebtag, Education Reimagined**

This reinforces the idea that learning ecosystems are not static; they are dynamic, evolving in response to the specific needs of the learners and communities they serve.

In response to this challenge, several interviewees suggested measuring the health of the learning ecosystem itself. This notion goes beyond individual or organisational metrics to examine how different actors—students, families, educators, community groups—collaborate over time. Indicators of ecosystem health might include sustained partnerships, effective communication channels, and cohesive visioning among local stakeholders:

> "We're piloting new ways to assess the health of our ecosystem by looking at the relationships and collaborations within it. Our goal is to understand how different actors are working together to create new learning opportunities and whether those relationships are sustained over time."
> **Tyler Samstang, Remake Learning**

This focus on sustainability is central to the long-term success of learning ecosystems. Interviewees emphasised the importance of measuring the sustained impact of community-driven initiatives rather than focusing solely on immediate academic outcomes. As one interviewee noted, "Measuring sustainability over time is key. Short-term results matter, but we need to ensure that the changes we support in communities can be sustained long after the programs have ended." This highlights the need for evidence systems that track ongoing, community-led progress and ensure that changes are embedded within local contexts.

Despite the increasing awareness of these challenges, many interviewees acknowledged that the tools and frameworks needed to assess ecosystem effectiveness are still in development. Emily Morris from Brookings noted, "We don't have all the answers yet, but the gaps in how we measure these more intangible outcomes—like collaboration, learner agency, and community resilience—are becoming more apparent." She explained that while the academic metrics are still relevant, they do not capture the full story.

> "If we want to measure the effectiveness of learning ecosystems, we need to focus on how the system is changing, not just the outcomes it produces. Are schools becoming more connected with their communities? Are families more engaged in the learning process? These are the indicators of long-term success."
> **Emily Morris, Brookings**

This collective recognition, from diverse ecosystems and initiatives, aligns with existing reviews that have highlighted the need for more comprehensive and adaptable tools for assessing learning ecosystems.

4.7 Enablers and barriers to evidence use

Over the past decades, research and practice have highlighted a set of contextual, cultural, and structural factors that make these ecosystems successful, including a shared vision for change, cross-sector stakeholder engagement, and collaborative leadership (Big Change Innovation Unit, 2019; Faul & Savage, 2023; Hannon et al., 2023). At the same time, a parallel body of work underscores the significance of evidence—data, research, and feedback loops—for guiding policy and practice in ways that reflect local needs and spur innovation (Aiyar et al., 2021; Hickey & Hossain, 2019)

In practice, these two strands are deeply connected: the conditions that enable a CLLE to thrive often pave the way for effective evidence use, yet the act of gathering, interpreting, and acting on evidence also raises unique challenges.

From the literature and interviews with practitioners, we have identified key factors and conditions that consistently contribute to the success of learning ecosystems.

Enabling conditions

A shared vision for change

A shared vision for change is often the foundation of a successful CLLE as well as the bedrock of evidence-informed approaches. When community members, educators, and policy-makers converge on a mission that transcends any single organisation, they create the conditions for evidence to drive cohesive action.

According to the Big Change Innovation Unit (2019), formulating a collective narrative—one that combines personal stories with data—helps

stakeholders grasp why reform is needed and how evidence can guide it. Crafting these narratives involves both data and personal stories, which help to illustrate the need for change in ways that resonate across different groups.

A compelling story for change is essential. This involves clearly communicating why change is needed and adapting the message for different audiences. Whether using data, qualitative evidence, or personal stories, the narrative must resonate with stakeholders at every level (Big Change, Innovation Unit, 2019).

Moreover, instigating broader public conversations about the purpose of education can shift conventional patterns of thought. According to Hannon et al. (2023), this requires a national or community-level dialogue, as well as localised spaces for discussions. Changing public narratives helps create a sense of collective purpose and readiness for transformation.

Locally relevant evidence is key for effective implementation

A recurring theme in the literature is that locally relevant evidence is essential for the success of CLLEs. While globally produced evidence can offer valuable insights, it often lacks the specificity needed for effective implementation in local contexts. Faul & Savage (2023) emphasise that what is required is evidence that aligns with local needs, combined with systemic rewards for integrating such evidence into practice.

In education reforms across Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ghana, Rwanda, and South Africa, for instance, local buy-in emerged when stakeholders understood how evidence directly related to community priorities (Hickey & Hossain, 2019). Aiyar et al. (2021) report a similar pattern in Delhi, where frontline workers only supported reforms once they recognised the potential impact on the students they served. In each case, the local ownership of data—collected and interpreted in ways that align with local realities—drove meaningful change.

Co-designing with stakeholders ensures local ownership

Stakeholder engagement goes hand in hand with trust. Co-designing solutions, inviting community members to articulate research questions, and training local evidence users and producers ensures that the evidence genuinely reflects the needs and aspirations of participants (Big Change Innovation Unit, 2019).

Active engagement with diverse stakeholders is a cornerstone of successful learning ecosystems. Convening different actors—across disciplines and sectors—and co-designing solutions helps align goals and meet the diverse needs of the ecosystem. In practice, this means listening to different voices to understand what they require and what they can contribute to the process of change (Big Change, Innovation Unit, 2019).

Building sophisticated coalitions and alliances is critical to learning ecosystems' sustainability. These ecosystems depend on partnerships between NGOs, civil society organisations, and government institutions, especially in areas where government structures are weaker. In many contexts, the hierarchical structures of conventional education systems clash with the horizontal collaboration that learning ecosystems require. Successful ecosystems foster trust-based, long-term relationships, enabling the sharing of power and responsibility. For example, the ecosystem in Delhi unified siloed government departments under a shared vision, while global NGOs often play a critical role by brokering networks and providing legitimacy to these efforts (Hannon et al., 2023).

Collaborative leadership drives transformation across all levels

Leadership and an evidence-oriented culture also prove essential. Leaders who model data-driven practice, invest in professional learning, and champion research-based approaches embed evidence use into the organisational fabric (Breakspear et al., 2017). These leaders frequently distribute decision-making power across multiple levels, mirroring how CLLEs thrive on collaborative, horizontal relationships rather than hierarchical structures (Big Change Innovation Unit, 2019; WISE & Centre for Strategic Education, 2023). In Doncaster, for example, political and educational leaders worked in system-wide partnerships, aligning efforts across sectors and creating a consistent approach to data collection and use (Big Change Innovation Unit, 2019).

Building new skills is necessary for supporting evolving learning needs

The transition to a new education paradigm requires the development of new capacities and skills for all stakeholders in CLLEs. Teachers are no longer just transmitters of knowledge; they are shifting to roles as facilitators of learning, requiring a deeper understanding of child development, trauma, and the use of empathy, creativity, and non-judgmental engagement in the classroom. Community partners and civil society organisations are becoming increasingly vital in supporting the development of children, both inside and outside the classroom.

Additionally, parents engage more actively in their children's education, prompting a shift in their expectations of schools. At the policy level, government officials must embrace new governance and management approaches to oversee these changing educational ecosystems. This transformation is mirrored in the move towards curricula focused on life skills, social-emotional learning, and well-being (Hannon et al., 2023).

Challenges

Building and maintaining trust

A key challenge for CLLEs lies in establishing trust around evidence use, particularly in communities that are sceptical of external research or data-driven initiatives. If local stakeholders feel excluded from the process of generating and interpreting data—or do not understand how the information will be used—evidence can be dismissed as a top-down tool that does not truly address local needs.

Lack of transparency thus undermines community buy-in and can stall collaborative efforts. To overcome this barrier, CLLEs must engage stakeholders in co-creating evidence systems, openly communicate the objectives behind data collection, and show how results will be acted upon. By doing so, they can build the legitimacy and shared ownership needed to make evidence-informed decision-making both inclusive and impactful.

Academic metrics do not reflect the wide spectrum of learning experiences in CLLEs

There is a persistent challenge in balancing the need to measure life skills and social-emotional development with the traditional reliance on academic metrics. Education systems, driven by government policies and accountability standards, often prioritise quantifiable academic outcomes like test scores. This emphasis sidelines critical yet harder-to-measure aspects such as resilience, collaboration, or emotional well-being.

While some organisations are developing mixed method approaches to capture these nuances, the lack of formal or widely accepted indicators for life skills makes it difficult to secure investment in holistic education. Moreover, when measurement focuses solely on learning within formal school settings, it overlooks the many ways young people develop essential abilities outside the classroom.

This gap not only marginalises community actors who contribute significantly to life-skills development but also perpetuates a narrow view of success that does not fully reflect the transformative potential of CLLEs. The complexity of aligning community-driven goals with national accountability frameworks thus remains a persistent challenge. It further highlights the need for more inclusive and context-sensitive metrics within national frameworks.

Political economy of evidence

The political economy of evidence can stifle experimental or community-driven approaches to data. Education systems can be risk-averse and are not always receptive to new evidence frameworks that challenge established practice. Competing agendas, institutional inertia, and reluctance to shift resource allocations add layers of complexity. Donor priorities can reinforce existing norms by pushing for standardised data that might ignore locally relevant indicators. Even when organisations manage to implement innovative measures, the sustainability of evidence practice remains uncertain once initial funding ends.

Resource and financial constraints

Sustained, comprehensive evidence collection is resource-intensive, particularly when it includes qualitative methods like interviews, case studies, and ethnographic data. The cost of maintaining long-term data collection—especially in rural or underserved areas—often exceeds available funding. This creates a major barrier for learning ecosystems that aim to track not just immediate outputs but long-term outcomes, including community empowerment and systemic change. Moreover, funders frequently expect evidence of impact in the short term, pushing organisations to prioritise less resource-intensive, but also less comprehensive, data collection methods. These dynamics limit the depth and breadth of evidence that can be gathered and, in some cases, even forces organisations to compromise on the types of data they collect, focusing more on what is funder-friendly than community-relevant.

Continuous feedback and iterative learning

Establishing effective feedback mechanisms requires not only the necessary technological infrastructure but also the capacity to consistently collect, analyse, and act upon evidence. Additionally, fostering a culture that embraces constant change and values ongoing improvement can be challenging, particularly in environments resistant to frequent adjustments.

Without these continuous feedback systems, evidence can become static and underutilised, limiting the ability of CLLEs to respond effectively to emerging challenges and refine interventions in a timely manner. Furthermore, ensuring that feedback is both actionable and integrated into decision-making processes demands strong leadership and a commitment to data-driven practices, which may not always be present.

Challenges of scaling across contexts

Scaling up successful initiatives is a frequent consideration in CLLEs, where local actors often wonder how to transfer effective models from one context to another. However, research and practitioner insights consistently warn that simply replicating a proven approach rarely guarantees the same results elsewhere. Faul and Savage (2023) argue that fidelity to the original design does not automatically lead to large-scale impact, because every community setting has unique cultural, relational, and institutional dynamics.

For example, Bold et al. (2018) highlight an RCT in Kenya that tested a pilot project using fixed-term contracts to improve teacher performance. While the small-scale results were promising, the study cautioned that if the government were to roll out

the project more broadly, systemic factors such as potential union resistance and bureaucratic inefficiencies could undermine success. This example shows the importance of paying attention to local relationships, cultural nuances, and systemic conditions when considering how to scale interventions.

There is no one-size-fits-all system that can be transplanted identically across different contexts. Flexibility must be built into any learning framework to allow for adaptations that address specific local needs and concerns (Big Change Innovation Unit, 2019). This perspective resonates strongly within CLLEs, where scaling often aims to amplify existing community-driven successes rather than impose uniform structures. Cultural values, communication styles, and stakeholder relationships - all essential to a thriving local ecosystem - can easily be overlooked when moving a program from one area to another, even within the same country (Economist Impact, 2022a).

> **"**Scaling up isn't about replication; it's about adaptation. Every context brings its own set of challenges and requires a tailored approach to ensure programs meet the needs of the communities they serve.**"**
> **Varsha Pilai, Dream a Dream**

In India, Dream a Dream's efforts to expand across multiple states have been anything but straightforward. For example, "a successful life skills program in Karnataka needed to be completely restructured to fit the cultural context of Rajasthan." Such experiences highlight how a key question for CLLEs is not merely whether to scale, but how to adapt community-oriented models to maintain their local relevance in new contexts.

Recommendations for better supporting CLLEs

5

5. Implementing CLLEs

In the previous sections, we delved into the existing body of knowledge on CLLEs and the intricate dynamics of evidence use within these ecosystems. Through our exploration, several key insights emerged, highlighting both the potential and the complexities inherent in CLLEs.

By their very nature, CLLEs foster collaborative, localised educational approaches better suited to address the unique needs of diverse communities. By emphasising the involvement of local actors—such as schools, community organisations, and NGOs—CLLEs create dynamic and adaptive learning environments capable of tackling specific challenges like inequality, student disengagement, and access to extracurricular opportunities.

Evidence use within these ecosystems is both complex and contextual. It must encompass a wide range of data types, from academic research and quantitative data to local, experiential knowledge. This multifaceted approach to evidence supports a more inclusive and responsive decision-making process, enabling continuous adaptation to meet local needs effectively.

The review underscores that CLLEs are challenging to define, measure, and standardise. The inherent diversity and context-specific nature of these ecosystems resist one-size-fits-all definitions and metrics. There is no singular method to implement CLLEs; instead, they thrive on locally relevant and contextually adapted approaches. This adaptability offers a significant opportunity to examine, amplify, and understand the role of evidence at the local level, fostering educational transformations that are deeply rooted in community needs and values.

However, the same barriers that impede effective evidence use in conventional approaches persist within CLLEs. These include capacity constraints, resource limitations, and systemic resistance. Additionally, conceptual issues around defining evidence and the types of evidence use further complicate the landscape, making it difficult to establish universally accepted standards or practices.

While **local knowledge is crucial for designing effective CLLEs, it is not always fully integrated into decision-making processes.** Many ecosystems rely on external evidence or standardised approaches that do not always align with the specific needs and realities of local communities, leading to missed opportunities for tailored, impactful interventions.

Furthermore, conventional metrics fall short in capturing the holistic outcomes that these ecosystems aim to achieve, such as student well-being, agency, and community cohesion. Addressing these gaps requires the development of innovative, process-based metrics that reflect the comprehensive impact of CLLEs.

5.1 Finding and filling in the gaps

To advance the field of CLLEs and enhance evidence use, several areas require deeper understanding and concerted effort:

- **Understanding the political economy of evidence use is crucial.** This involves exploring how political and institutional dynamics influence the generation, interpretation, and

application of evidence within CLLEs. This includes examining power relations, policy influences, and the role of various stakeholders in shaping evidence practices. Furthermore, **mapping evidence flows in schools** can provide insights into how evidence circulates within educational institutions, facilitating optimal data-driven decision-making processes that align with both local and systemic needs.

- There is a pressing need to **balance local leadership and scaling dynamics**. Understanding how to maintain local ownership and leadership while scaling successful initiatives involves navigating the tension between adapting to local contexts and meeting broader, often standardised, requirements. This balance is critical to ensuring that scaling efforts do not dilute the core principles that make CLLEs effective.

- Enhancing **national engagement with CLLEs** is another key area. Strengthening the integration of CLLEs within national education systems can amplify their impact by aligning local initiatives with national policies and frameworks. This alignment ensures coherence and support across different governance levels, facilitating broader scalability and policy influence.

Our findings demonstrate that in order to foster robust and effective CLLEs, targeted support in several key areas is necessary:

- **Developing and nurturing cultures of evidence within CLLEs** is fundamental for sustained, data-informed decision-making. This involves cultivating environments where evidence is valued and utilised through comprehensive training programs, access to resources, and leadership that champions evidence-based practices.

- **Promoting cross-collaboration within CLLEs is essential for creating holistic and sustainable educational solutions**. Stakeholders interviewed during this research highlighted the importance of fostering partnerships across different sectors and organisations, such as schools, NGOs, local governments, and community groups, to leverage diverse expertise and resources. Strengthening existing networks and promoting peer learning can enhance cross-regional collaboration and knowledge sharing, fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation. Funders and implementers should invest in platforms that enable regular interaction and collaboration among ecosystem actors, thereby reducing fragmentation and duplication of efforts. Interviewees also expressed a strong appetite for this type of approach to collaboration, reinforcing the need for targeted investments in cross-sector partnerships.

- **Fostering conscious learning about CLLEs as a distinct approach** is necessary to ensure that stakeholders understand and appreciate the unique dynamics of community-led initiatives. This involves educating stakeholders about the benefits and methodologies of CLLEs without undermining local leadership or imposing top-down scaling strategies. Promoting a deep understanding of CLLEs through workshops, training sessions, and collaborative forums can empower local actors to lead and innovate within their contexts, ensuring that scaling efforts are driven by community needs rather than external agendas.

- **Implementing holistic metrics and measurement approaches is critical for accurately assessing the effectiveness of CLLEs.** Conventional academic metrics often fall short in capturing the broader, multidimensional

goals of CLLEs. By creating metrics that consider learners holistically and are relevant to their specific contexts, CLLEs can better capture the full spectrum of learning outcomes and inform more nuanced decision-making.

- **Ensuring alignment with national and regional education systems is vital for the scalability and sustainability of CLLEs**. This involves fostering dialogue and collaboration between local ecosystems and national education authorities to harmonise goals and practices. By facilitating stronger connections between local initiatives and national policies, funders and implementers can ensure that CLLEs receive the necessary support and recognition within broader education frameworks, enhancing their capacity to influence and integrate with formal education systems.

5.2 Additional areas to consider

In efforts to support CLLEs effectively, it is important to consider the following:

- **Identifying CLLE entry points** requires careful consideration to ensure that interventions are inclusive and equitable without "cherry picking winners." Supporting entire ecosystems holistically rather than isolated projects is essential to maintain the integrity and sustainability of CLLEs.

- Additionally, it is crucial to **avoid imposing external expectations**, such as rigid alignment with national systems or specific evidence requirements, which can stifle innovation and undermine the relevance of CLLE initiatives. Ensuring that evidence practices align with community values and needs, rather than solely meeting external accountability demands, is important.

- Preventing **over-institutionalisation and projectisation** is also vital to preserve the organic, community-driven nature of CLLEs. Excessive institutional control or fragmenting initiatives into isolated projects can dilute their impact and sustainability.

- Finally, it is important to **keep learning outcomes as a central objective**. Ensuring that educational and developmental goals remain the primary focus prevents narrow academic metrics from overshadowing the broader transformative objectives of CLLEs. Balancing the need for measurable outcomes with holistic and transformative goals is essential for the long-term success of CLLE initiatives.

5.3 Recommendations for funders and implementers

Drawing on insights from interviews with key stakeholders, we offer the following recommendations for funders aiming to contribute to the growth and sustainability of these ecosystems. These recommendations emphasise the need for coordinated support, enhanced collaboration, and flexible approaches that empower communities to lead and innovate within their local contexts.

Leverage convening power to foster collaboration and avoid duplication

A significant challenge facing CLLEs is the fragmentation caused by duplicated efforts and overlapping initiatives. Funders have a unique opportunity to address this issue by utilising their convening power to bring together diverse stakeholders. By facilitating strategic discussions and collaborative platforms, funders can support coordination, align efforts, and streamline initiatives across the ecosystem. Supporting regional and international conferences facilitates knowledge

exchange around best practices and innovative approaches. These gatherings enable ecosystem actors to build a collective learning agenda, address common challenges, and leverage regional strengths.

Strengthen existing networks and promote peer learning

The importance of peer learning and knowledge-sharing emerged as a central theme among stakeholders within learning ecosystems. Funders should prioritise strengthening existing networks rather than creating new, potentially duplicative platforms. Investing in strengthening these networks, ensuring they are well-resourced, provides the necessary opportunities for cross-regional collaboration and building a shared learning. By supporting and enhancing these spaces, funders can foster a culture of continuous learning and innovation, which is essential for the long-term sustainability and growth of community-led initiatives.

Advance discussions on measurement and impact evaluation

A key challenge highlighted by stakeholders is the need for robust mechanisms to measure the success of learning ecosystems. Effective measurement and evaluation are critical for demonstrating the impact of learning ecosystems and guiding their development. Funders can play a pivotal role by supporting the creation of contextualised measurement frameworks that align with the goals and priorities of community-led initiatives. Investing in developing tools and frameworks that capture both academic and non-academic outcomes ensures that evaluations reflect the full range of impacts, including social-emotional development and community engagement. Funders should encourage the co-creation of these frameworks with ecosystem actors to ensure relevance and applicability. Additionally, promoting knowledge sharing around measurement practices enhances the ability of ecosystems to learn from one another and improve their evaluation methodologies.

Advance advocacy and policy engagement

Aligning CLLEs with national and regional policies is crucial for their scalability and sustainability. Funders can support advocacy efforts by facilitating dialogues between ecosystem actors and policy-makers. This collaboration can lead to policy reforms that embed successful community-led models within formal education frameworks.

Investing in developing advocacy tools, such as policy briefs, storytelling, presentations, enables communities to effectively communicate their needs and successes to policy-makers. By supporting evidence-based advocacy, funders can help institutionalise community-led initiatives, ensuring they receive the recognition and support necessary for long-term impact.

Support long-term learning and sustainability

Funders should consider adopting a long-term approach to supporting CLLEs, with a focus on capacity-building and sustainability. This involves not only providing financial resources but also investing in the development of local leadership, technical expertise, and institutional capacity within communities. Our key informants underscored the importance of creating an environment where community actors feel empowered to lead and innovate. Long-term support will allow these ecosystems to develop resilient structures that can adapt to evolving challenges, ensuring that they continue to thrive even after external funding ends. Furthermore, funders should be open to flexible, adaptive funding models that allow initiatives to experiment, learn, and iterate in response to the dynamic needs of their communities.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Interviewees

1. Annette Cairnduff, Executive Director, Learning Creates (Australia)
2. Cecilia Beloqui, Educational Evaluation Expert (Argentina)
3. Chelsea Waite, Center on Reinventing Public Education (USA)
4. Dante Castillo, Director of Policy and Innovative Practices, SUMMA (Chile)
5. Emily Liebtag, Chief Innovation Officer, Education Reimagined (USA)
6. Emily Morris, Fellow, Global Economy and Development, Centre for Universal Education, The Brookings Institution (Washington D.C, USA)
7. Enric Aragonès, former Director, Educació360 (Catalunya, Spain)
8. Jonathan Kay, Head of Evidence Synthesis, Education Endowment Foundation (London, UK)
9. Dr Kirsty Newman, VP of Programs, Luminos Fund
10. Michael Stevenson, Senior Adviser, Education and Skills OECD; Lead of the High Performing Systems for Tomorrow (UK)
11. Mpho Tshweneyame, Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Impact Lead, Smart Start (South Africa)
12. Pablo Jaramillo, CEO, Luker Foundation (Manizales, Colombia)
13. Rachel Akrofie, ECD Advocacy and Systems Change Manager, Lively Minds (Ghana, Uganda)
14. Katie Godfrey, Head of Monitoring and Evaluation, Lively Minds (Ghana, Uganda)
15. Rastee Chaudhry, Associate Director of Programs, Luminos Fund
16. Marieme Daff, Executive Director, Firelight (Africa, USA)
17. Sadaf Shallwani, former Director of Programs and Learning, Firelight (Africa, USA)
18. Ronald Kimambo, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Specialist, Firelight (Africa, USA)
19. Santiago Isaza, Director of Education, Luker Foundation (Manizales, Colombia)
20. Tyler Samstag, Executive Director, Remake Learning (Pittsburg, USA)
21. Dr Varsha Pillai, Associate Director, Narrative Building and Communications, Dream a Dream (India)
22. Dr Sreehari Ravindranath, Director, Research and Impact, Dream a Dream (India)
23. Whitney Warren, Chief Education Officer, Building Tomorrow (Uganda)
24. Innocent Akampurira, MEL Manager, Building Tomorrow (Uganda)
25. Dr Jo Gleeson, Co-Director Q Project, Monash University

Annex 2: Profiles of selected evidence use in CLLEs

Organisation/Initiative	Type of Evidence	Evidence Use
Luminos Fund	Research evidence Sector-generated data Pedagogical evidence	Instrumental use (real-time data adjustment) Embedded use (ongoing adaptation)
Building Tomorrow	Research evidence Sector-generated data Pedagogical evidence	Instrumental Use (RCT data informs teaching models) Embedded Use (continuous adaptation)
Smart Start	Research Evidence Sector-Generated Data Practice-Informed Advice Pedagogical Evidence	Instrumental Use (adapting curriculum) Embedded Use (coaching and feedback system)
Dream a Dream	Research Evidence Sector-Generated Data	Transparent Use (raising awareness on life skills) Embedded Use (tailoring interventions based on state feedback)
Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)	Research Evidence Practice-Informed Advice	Transparent Use (toolkit for awareness) Instrumental Use (guiding policy and program adaptations)
Firelight Foundation	Practice-Informed Advice Sector-Generated Data	Embedded Use (long-term systemic change, community-driven data collection)
Lively Minds	Practice-Informed Advice Sector-Generated Data	Embedded Use (community input) Instrumental Use (adjusting ECD programs)
Remake Learning	Qualitative Data Sector-Generated Insights Practice-Informed Advice	Embedded Use (informal learning, community networks) Transparent Use (raising awareness on innovative learning practices)
Education Reimagined	Practice-Informed Advice Collaborative Evidence Community-Based Insights	Embedded Use (learner-centered practices in schools) Instrumental Use (guiding new frameworks for learner-centered education)
Brookings FSCE (Family, School, Community Engagement)	Research Evidence Practice-Informed Advice	Instrumental Use (guiding family-school-community partnership strategies) Embedded Use (community-driven adjustments to engagement models)
Lively Minds	Sector-Generated Data Practice-Informed Advice	Embedded Use (adjusting ECD programs) Instrumental Use (ongoing adaptations from community feedback)

Annex 3: Selected case studies

This annex presents a curated collection of case studies that exemplify the diverse implementations of CLLEs across various geographical and cultural contexts. These case studies have been compiled through a literature review, an examination of institutional websites, and insightful conversations with practitioners who are at the forefront of these initiatives.

The selection process was guided by prominent examples identified in existing academic literature and recommendations that emerged from our interviews with key stakeholders. By focusing on initiatives that have been covered in other reviews, this annex aims to delve deeper into the nuances of evidence use within CLLEs, providing a richer understanding of how evidence is perceived, integrated, and utilised in these community-driven educational settings.

Educació360 Alliance (Catalonia, Spain)

The Educació360 Alliance was launched as a collaborative effort by the Jaume Bofill Foundation, the Diputació de Barcelona, and the Federation of Movements for Pedagogical Renewal to address a growing concern in Catalonia: the inequality in access to after-school activities. Against the backdrop of debates surrounding the length of the school day and the limited opportunities available to disadvantaged families, the alliance champions the idea of "full-time learning" for all children and young people. The initiative aims to provide every young person with access to high-quality out-of-school learning, ultimately integrating these opportunities into a coherent learning framework, supported by municipalities and backed by policy.

Who is part of the ecosystem?

At the heart of the Educació360 Alliance is a broad coalition that includes 52 local authorities and 48 diverse partners from across Catalonia. This partnership is made up of municipalities, NGOs, cultural institutions, schools, and other community organisations, all committed to ensuring equitable access to learning opportunities beyond the school setting. By pooling their resources and expertise, the alliance seeks to create a robust network of learning ecosystems that bridge in-school and out-of-school education.

Approach to pursuit of goals

The primary goal of the Educació360 Alliance is to integrate in-school and out-of-school learning by mobilising local community resources and municipality-funded initiatives. Rather than focusing on schools themselves, the alliance works to change the broader context in which young people and schools operate. This approach involves organising and leveraging community assets, such as cultural institutions and local programs, to complement the formal education system. The alliance has developed several "key drivers" to facilitate this integration, including using digital badges to recognise achievements, celebrating Educació360

Week to promote learning initiatives, and introducing a Children's Passport, which helps connect young people to the city's cultural life.

Types of Evidence

The Educació360 Alliance employs a mixed-methods approach to evidence collection, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data. While formal impact data for Educació360's pilots and projects are currently limited, the alliance places a strong emphasis on learning through practice. Network events, workshops, and training sessions serve as informal evidence-sharing mechanisms, facilitating the exchange of ideas between municipalities and pilot sites.

Evidence of effectiveness

While formal impact data for Educació360's pilots and projects is currently limited (Hannon et al., 2019), the alliance has placed a strong emphasis on learning through practice. It conducts network events, workshops, and training sessions that facilitate the exchange of ideas between municipalities and pilot sites, fostering an environment of shared learning. Although quantitative data on outcomes is not yet fully available, these events create informal evidence-sharing mechanisms that help improve practices. The collaborative nature of the initiative demonstrates an iterative approach to evidence use, where learning is based on experience and context, allowing for continual adaptation and refinement of the projects.

Lessons and good practices

A key lesson from this initiative is that there is no one-size-fits-all approach; each municipality develops its own strategy based on local needs and capacities, while benefiting from shared resources such as digital badges and collective learning events. The leadership of foundations and local authorities has been instrumental in driving the initiative, while municipalities play a key role in ensuring equitable access to learning opportunities for all children. The combination of local, practical initiatives and broader policy advocacy—such as campaigning for the right to high-quality out-of-school learning—has been a central factor in Educació360's growth. Moreover, the initiative fosters a bottom-up approach, encouraging localities to build their own ecosystems while maintaining a shared sense of purpose across the region.

LRNG (Chicago, USA)

LRNG was created in 2015 by Collective Shift, a non-profit organisation aimed at redesigning social systems. The primary objective of LRNG is to connect out-of-school learning experiences to career opportunities through the use of digital platforms and badges. This initiative focuses particularly on underserved communities, ensuring that young people receive the inspiration, skills, and guidance they need to prepare for life and work in the modern economy.

Who is part of the ecosystem?

The LRNG ecosystem is made up of a diverse network spanning across 16 cities and 30 partners, including organisations such as the Fossil Foundation, GAP Foundation, and the National Writing Project. These partnerships aim to provide a wide range of learning opportunities to young people, creating connections

between learning experiences and career pathways. The involvement of both private and public organisations highlights LRNG's collaborative approach to reaching young people and providing them with meaningful, actionable skills outside the formal education system.

Approach to pursuit of goals

LRNG's core strategy is to connect young people with real-world opportunities through digital badges. These badges are designed to recognise and reward the skills learned through various out-of-school experiences, with the goal that universities, employers, and other institutions will acknowledge and value these achievements. By facilitating connections between young people and mentors, educators, and employers, LRNG aims to create a seamless pathway from learning to tangible opportunities such as academic credits, internships, and jobs. It offers more than 150,000 learning experiences, including 300 regional playlists and 33 national playlists that provide a variety of learning opportunities for young people. These playlists are curated to align with student interests, fostering engagement and practical application of learned skills.

Types of Evidence

The initiative incorporates input from a community of scholars, designers, practitioners, and policy-makers, who continue to test and refine LRNG's approach to learning ecosystems. This evidence includes both quantitative data from program participation and qualitative insights from user experiences, enabling continuous improvement and adaptation of LRNG's offerings to better meet the needs of its participants.

Lessons and good practices

LRNG's success underscores the importance of public funding for initial support, while highlighting that building and maintaining strong relationships is crucial for engaging both learners and stakeholders. Designing learning experiences that resonate with young people's interests is key to driving engagement, and local partnerships help bridge the gap between users and learning opportunities. The initiative challenges traditional accreditation by promoting the use of digital badges as credible markers of achievement, with youth voices playing a central role in shaping its direction. Additionally, LRNG demonstrates the value of community-based learning, leveraging non-traditional educators and local resources to create impactful learning experiences.

Kuopio Cultural Pathways (Kuopio, Finland)

The Kuopio Cultural Pathways initiative was developed to integrate culture into the curriculum across individual subjects and larger subject areas in schools, with a focus on socialisation, cultural identity, media, and sustainable development. The core learning aim is to help students express themselves freely and creatively as members of a community, while also supporting their physical, social, and spiritual well-being of young people, better familiarising them with the cultural life of Kuopio.

Who is part of the ecosystem?

The ecosystem involves the City of Kuopio and the Finnish National Board of Education. The program fosters

collaboration between schools, cultural institutions, and city education services, all committed to enriching the students' learning experiences through cultural activities.

Approach to pursuit of goals

Kuopio Cultural Pathways provides practical tools for teachers to implement goal-oriented cultural education. The initiative strengthens the cooperation between schools and cultural institutions to develop schools as cultural communities. It is built around nine 'paths,' each focusing on different cultural fields such as art and music, tailored to specific grade levels and curriculum objectives. Every school has its own Culture Courier, a key figure who acts as a liaison between the schools and the cultural facilities, ensuring coordination and smooth operation of the program.

Evidence

Although the project formally ended in 2009, the pathways have been embedded into the schools' and cultural institutions' daily operations, providing sustainable evidence of its impact over time. Structured data on student engagement with cultural activities has been documented. This quantitative data is complemented by qualitative insights from student feedback and observations, offering a comprehensive view of the program's effectiveness in enhancing student engagement and cultural participation.

Lessons and good practices

The program highlights the importance of repurposing existing budget pools to fund innovative educational initiatives. Kuopio's Culture Education Plan laid the foundation for the program, ensuring flexibility within the national core curriculum while giving local schools the autonomy to design their own approaches. Key to the program's success are high-quality learning experiences, careful preparation of teachers, and strong partnerships between schools and cultural institutions, facilitated by the Culture Couriers. The initiative also demonstrates that learning can extend beyond the classroom and that cultural and creative learning can serve as a unifying force among various sectors.

Remake Learning (Pittsburg, USA)

Remake Learning is a network of individuals and organisations across Western Pennsylvania working alongside public school systems to promote equitable learning practices. Established in 2007, the network aims to equip learners with critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, communication, and collaboration skills to prepare them for a technology-driven future. The initiative challenges learners to critically examine social systems, address and deconstruct inequalities, and construct a more just and equitable world. Remake Learning connects all the places where learners live, work, and play, including schools, libraries, museums, parks, community centers, and online platforms.

Who is part of the ecosystem?

The Remake Learning ecosystem includes over 500 organisations in the region, involving 137 school districts. This diverse network comprises museums, libraries, out-of-school education nonprofits, philanthropies, government bodies, industry partners, and education startups. The initiative emphasises convening support

that intentionally invites people from diverse backgrounds to participate in conversations about the future of learning, helping them to build strong, face-to-face relationships.

Approach to pursuit of goals

Remake Learning's primary goal is to foster innovative learning experiences through strong partnerships. To achieve this, the network has trained over 5,300 educators in innovative teaching methods and distributed USD 70 million in philanthropic support to local learning innovation efforts. In addition, the network catalyses activity by administering mini-grants for partnership innovation, most recently awarding $400,000 to 66 organisations. Remake Learning also coordinates several working groups around themes such as STEM, professional development, and educational policy, helping to reduce duplication and increase subject-specific efficiencies across the region.

Type of evidence used

Remake Learning employs a robust evidence use framework that includes both quantitative and qualitative data. The network collects data on program participation, learning outcomes, and community engagement through surveys, assessments, and feedback from participants. Additionally, qualitative evidence from participant narratives, case studies, and observational research provides deeper insights into the effectiveness of learning initiatives.

Lessons and good practices

One of the key lessons from Remake Learning is the importance of building strong partnerships, especially for schools in disenfranchised areas. Schools are more likely to execute successful projects when they have strong support networks, whether from industry, universities, or other schools. Philanthropic stewardship has been a crucial factor in Remake Learning's success, leveraging funding and aligning efforts across different philanthropists in the education space. Strategic leadership, provided by the Remake Learning Council—a commission of more than 40 regional leaders from education, government, and business sectors—has guided the initiative with a unifying vision for learning, allowing stakeholders to pursue diverse interests within a common framework. The introduction of Remake Learning Ambassadors further strengthened governance by ensuring that key intermediaries and network leaders are engaged.

Learning Creates (Australia)

Learning Creates Australia (LCA) is a national initiative launched to explore alternative models of learning, assessment, and credentialing to ensure that all young Australians are prepared for life beyond school. LCA aims to reimagine learning pathways, providing students with a holistic approach that integrates formal education with skills gained in community settings, work environments, and personal experiences. The initiative focuses on developing new ways to recognise and assess learning that goes beyond traditional academic metrics, aligning with the needs of a modern workforce and society.

Who is part of the ecosystem?

LCA operates within a broad ecosystem of schools, government agencies, businesses, community organisations, and youth advocacy groups. The initiative collaborates with partners across sectors to co-create innovative learning and assessment models. This partnership-driven approach enables LCA to pilot programs that are tailored to diverse educational contexts, with a focus on ensuring that marginalised and underserved youth have access to meaningful learning and employment opportunities. LCA's broad network fosters cross-sector collaboration, ensuring that learning is recognised and valued in multiple forms, from formal credentials to experiential learning.

Approach to pursuit of goals

LCA aims to disrupt the conventional educational paradigm by introducing learner-centred pathways that validate learning in a variety of contexts, not just within traditional schooling systems. A central component of LCA's work is its focus on new forms of assessment, particularly micro-credentialing and alternative accreditation models that acknowledge the diverse ways young people acquire skills and knowledge. The initiative engages students, educators, and industry partners to co-design a framework that recognises capabilities such as creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving alongside traditional academic achievements.

LCA also drives its mission through extensive research and evidence generation, working with educational leaders and policy-makers to test and scale alternative assessment models. Through its partnerships, LCA has facilitated a number of pilot programs, which test how different methods of assessment and credentialing work in real-world settings. These pilots are accompanied by rigorous evaluation processes, ensuring that the evidence gathered informs future educational policies and practices.

Type of evidence used

Learning Creates employs a multifaceted evidence use strategy that includes both quantitative and qualitative data. The initiative conducts pilot program evaluations, surveys, and case studies to gather data on learning outcomes, student engagement, and the effectiveness of alternative assessment models. Additionally, LCA leverages qualitative evidence from student and educator feedback, focus groups, and narrative assessments to understand the broader impact of its programs.

Lessons and good practices

LCA's innovative approach to reimagining learning and assessment has generated significant interest in alternative pathways for young Australians, particularly for those who do not thrive in traditional academic settings. The initiative emphasises equity and inclusion, ensuring that learners from all backgrounds are given opportunities to demonstrate their strengths and competencies. The success of LCA lies in its ability to foster cross-sector collaboration, bringing together schools, communities, and industries to co-design learning experiences that prepare students for the complexities of the modern workforce.

By shifting the focus from purely academic outcomes to a more holistic view of learning, LCA is leading the charge in creating educational systems that are adaptable, inclusive, and reflective of the real-world skills needed for the 21st century. Its approach to measurement and credentialing offers new insights into how

learning ecosystems can create more equitable opportunities for all students, particularly those who are traditionally underrepresented in formal education pathways.

Education Reimagined (USA)

Education Reimagined is a national initiative committed to transforming the traditional education system into one that is learner-centred. This shift moves away from a one-size-fits-all model to an approach that emphasises individualised, holistic learning experiences. Education Reimagined champions the idea that education should empower learners to follow their interests, develop critical life skills, and build meaningful connections to their communities. Their goal is to make learner-centred education the standard across the United States.

Who is part of the ecosystem?

Education Reimagined brings together a wide range of stakeholders including educators, learners, school leaders, parents, policy-makers, and community organisations. The initiative works in collaboration with schools, districts, non-profits, and other education-focused entities to reimagine what learning looks like in diverse environments. This broad coalition is united by a shared belief in the potential of learner-centred education to create more equitable, inclusive, and empowering educational experiences for all students, especially those from underserved communities.

Approach to pursuit of goals

Education Reimagined works to embed learner-centred practices within schools and communities by providing frameworks, resources, and professional development opportunities for educators and school leaders. The initiative is focused on co-creating educational environments where students have agency over their learning, are deeply engaged, and where learning is personalised to their needs and passions. Education Reimagined's model is built on five core elements: competency-based learning, personalised learning, relevant and contextualised learning, socially-embedded learning, and open-walled learning.

A central aspect of their work is creating learning ecosystems that extend beyond the classroom. This means connecting students with learning opportunities in their communities, workplaces, and through digital platforms. To support this transformation, Education Reimagined facilitates peer-learning networks and collaborative research initiatives where educators can share best practices, pilot new models, and gather evidence on the impact of learner-centred education. Their goal is to continuously adapt and improve the learner-centred framework through ongoing evaluation and feedback from practitioners in the field.

Type of evidence used

Education Reimagined utilises a comprehensive evidence use framework that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data. The initiative conducts regular evaluations of its programs through surveys, assessments, and longitudinal studies to measure student outcomes and engagement. Additionally, qualitative evidence from teacher reflections, student narratives, and community feedback provides deeper insights into the effectiveness and impact of learner-centred practices.

Lessons and good practices

A key strength of Education Reimagined is its ability to engage diverse stakeholders in the transformation process. By promoting collaboration across sectors and encouraging co-creation of educational solutions, the initiative has successfully cultivated a national movement towards learner-centred education. Education Reimagined has established innovative professional development programs for educators that support the shift from traditional to learner-centred models. They provide platforms for educators to explore new pedagogical approaches, experiment with innovative practices, and reflect on their own learning journeys.

Additionally, the initiative has made significant strides in redefining success in education. Rather than focusing solely on academic outcomes, Education Reimagined promotes the development of the whole child, emphasising the importance of social-emotional growth, community involvement, and life skills. Their approach encourages schools to rethink assessment, moving away from standardised testing towards more holistic measures of student growth and achievement.

Family, School and Community Engagement in Education Initiative, Brookings (USA)

The Family, School, and Community Engagement (FSCE) initiative, launched by the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at Brookings in 2018, focuses on strengthening partnerships that support student development and thriving schools. The program aims to leverage family, school, and community relationships to transform education systems by providing research-backed tools and frameworks to build effective engagement strategies. FSCE highlights the essential role of families and community members in shaping education's future and works towards embedding these relationships into education systems globally.

Who is part of the ecosystem?

The initiative involves a broad coalition of schools, government bodies, civil society organisations, education leaders, and research institutions, all committed to promoting family-school partnerships. With nearly 60 collaborators across 18 countries, the FSCE initiative connects stakeholders, educators, and families to co-construct actionable, open-source tools that can be utilised by educators and communities alike to build meaningful engagement partnerships.

Approach to pursuit of goals

FSCE provides a structured set of tools to support schools and communities in building robust family-school-community partnerships. One key tool, the Strategy Finder, offers an interactive database with evidence-based strategies on effective engagement that can be filtered by geography, age group, and other characteristics. The initiative also supports the co-creation of research-based rubrics and guides that assist school teams in assessing and mapping their progress in building inclusive engagement strategies. Through ongoing workshops and interactive events, FSCE works to strengthen education systems by embedding equity, inclusion, and student voice in engagement efforts.

FSCE's research agenda focuses on generating evidence around family-school partnerships and sharing it through peer-learning networks. The 2021 Collaborating to Transform and Improve Education Systems: A Playbook for Family-School Engagement serves as the foundation for FSCE's strategy development, offering a comprehensive guide for educators to co-create engagement strategies that foster inclusivity and community involvement. While quantitative data around program impacts is still emerging, FSCE's tools have already been adopted by schools and networks across the globe, creating new opportunities for families and communities to play a direct role in shaping educational outcomes.

Type of evidence used

FSCE employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence to inform its strategies and evaluate its impact. The Strategy Finder tool aggregates data from various studies and program evaluations to provide evidence-based engagement strategies tailored to different contexts. Additionally, qualitative evidence from case studies, participant feedback, and observational research enriches the understanding of effective engagement practices

Lessons and good practices

A notable feature of FSCE is its focus on equity and inclusion, particularly ensuring that students from marginalised backgrounds and their families are active participants in educational decisions. The development of the Strategy Finder tool has helped provide actionable, evidence-based strategies for family engagement globally. The initiative's success lies in its ability to convene diverse stakeholders across continents through peer-learning networks, such as the Global Family Engagement in Education Network (FEEN) and its regional counterpart, the Brazil FEEN. These networks foster collaborative research and knowledge exchange on effective engagement strategies. Through these initiatives, FSCE champions the notion that strong partnerships between families, schools, and communities are critical to education system transformation.

Education Endowment Foundation's Research Schools Network (UK)

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) plays a key role in synthesising and translating research evidence to guide schools and policy-makers in adopting effective teaching strategies. Through its flagship initiative, the Teaching and Learning Toolkit, the EEF provides schools with accessible summaries of research, offering insights into the cost, impact, and security of various educational practices. This toolkit has become a trusted resource for schools worldwide, helping educators make informed decisions about how to allocate resources, including pupil premium funding.

Who is part of the ecosystem?

At the heart of the EEF's ecosystem are schools, teachers, policy-makers, and community organisations. The Research Schools Network, consisting of select schools across England, plays a vital role in translating research into actionable strategies. These schools act as hubs, demonstrating how evidence can be implemented in practical ways and supporting other schools in their regions. In addition, the EEF

collaborates with academic institutions, NGOs, philanthropies, and educators to ensure that the evidence base is robust and relevant to the needs of local schools and communities.

Approach to pursuit of goals

The primary goal of the EEF is to help schools accelerate pupil progress by providing high-quality, research-based evidence. The Teaching and Learning Toolkit synthesises over 3,500 studies, offering a nuanced look at what works in education. It goes beyond summarising the impact of different teaching practices, offering insights into the conditions for success and challenges in implementation. Schools are supported in using this evidence through mixed-methods evaluations, including classroom observations, surveys, and data collection, with the EEF serving as a trusted broker of research.

Evidence of effectiveness

The Toolkit has been widely adopted across the UK, with approximately 70% of teachers citing it as their go-to source for evidence. The majority of the research included in the toolkit comes from large-scale academic studies funded by NGOs and philanthropic organisations. However, the EEF also values practitioner expertise, incorporating it into guidance reports and recommendations through panels that include teachers. Mixed-methods research, particularly on implementation, ensures that the toolkit remains relevant to diverse educational contexts.

Lessons and good practices

One key lesson from the EEF's work is the importance of balancing global evidence with local context. While the toolkit provides a general overview of what works, the Research Schools Network demonstrates how evidence can be adapted to meet the specific needs of local communities. Teachers are not only recipients of research but active contributors, helping to co-construct the evidence base through their involvement in guidance reports. The EEF also highlights the need for simplifying complex research into concise, accessible formats, as time and evidence literacy are significant barriers for many educators.

SmartStart (South Africa)

SmartStart is a national early childhood development (ECD) initiative in South Africa, focused on providing quality early learning opportunities to children aged 3-5 years, particularly those from disadvantaged communities. By utilising a social franchise model, SmartStart empowers unemployed women in these communities to become trained early learning facilitators, running programs from their homes or community spaces. The aim is to ensure that every child in South Africa has access to the early learning experiences they need to be school-ready and thrive in their formative years.

Who is part of the ecosystem?

SmartStart works within a multi-layered ecosystem that includes local communities, families, early childhood practitioners, government agencies, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). At the heart of this ecosystem are the SmartStarters—the trained facilitators who deliver early learning programs in their communities. The initiative also engages Community Leaders, who oversee clusters of facilitators,

and coaches, who provide regular mentorship and support. SmartStart's partnerships with local NGOs, government bodies, and educational institutions help ensure that the program is sustainable and aligned with broader early childhood development strategies in South Africa.

Approach to pursuit of goals

SmartStart's approach to early childhood education focuses on scaling quality early learning through a social franchise model. This model trains women to deliver structured play-based learning programs, which follow a curriculum designed to promote cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. SmartStart facilitators are provided with a starter kit, ongoing training, and continuous support from coaches, ensuring that they can effectively deliver these programs.

A critical component of SmartStart's approach is data-driven decision-making. The program regularly collects data from the field through tools like the Child Outcome Study, which measures developmental outcomes in children. This data is used to inform program adjustments and to ensure that SmartStart's approach remains responsive to the needs of children in different contexts. The initiative also emphasises community engagement by working closely with parents and families to ensure that early learning is supported both at home and in the community.

Type of Evidence

SmartStart employs a robust evidence use strategy that integrates both quantitative and qualitative data. The Child Outcome Study provides quantitative measures of child development, while qualitative feedback from facilitators, parents, and community leaders offers deeper insights into program effectiveness and areas for improvement.

Lessons and good practices

SmartStart's focus on evidence-based practice is another key strength. By systematically collecting data on child outcomes, the initiative ensures that its programs are continuously improved and aligned with best practices in early childhood development. The use of feedback loops, where data informs adjustments in curriculum and facilitator training, is central to ensuring the long-term success of the initiative.

Luker Foundation (Manizales Colombia)

Fundación Luker, based in Manizales, Colombia, has been at the forefront of addressing structural issues in education for over 30 years. Rather than traditional philanthropy, their approach treats Manizales as a "social learning lab" where local stakeholders—schools, teachers, parents, and government—collaborate to improve educational outcomes, particularly in reading, mathematics, and social-emotional learning. Through programs like Aprendamos a Leer and Escuela Activa, the foundation implements evidence-based interventions tailored to the local context, ensuring they are both effective and sustainable. Their overarching goal is to develop replicable, scalable models that can be transferred to other municipalities across Colombia.

Who is part of the ecosystem?

Fundación Luker works in close collaboration with local schools, teachers, educational authorities, and government bodies in Manizales. By forging strong public-private partnerships, the foundation ensures its programs are co-owned by local governments and schools, enabling widespread engagement. Their approach emphasises capacity-building, with a focus on teacher training and support. Schools participate voluntarily, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to the success of the programs.

Approach to pursuit of goals

The foundation's educational initiatives are grounded in a data-driven, evidence-based approach. Programs like Aprendamos a Leer and Aprendamos Matemáticas focus on strengthening literacy and math skills, while Escuela Activa promotes participatory, collaborative learning, and socio-emotional development. In all their initiatives, Fundación Luker provides ongoing teacher support, develops educational materials, and fosters student collaboration. Schools with greater needs are paired with stronger-performing institutions for mentorship, while students facing difficulties receive targeted tutoring. The foundation consistently uses evidence to adjust its methods, ensuring interventions remain relevant and effective.

Evidence

Fundación Luker is deeply committed to using evidence to guide and improve their interventions. They rely on both secondary data, such as World Bank and OECD reports, and their own primary research. For example, after an initial experimental evaluation of their Aprendamos Juntos a Leer tutoring program showed no significant impact on reading outcomes, the foundation made targeted adjustments to the tutoring sessions, which resulted in notable improvements. By continuously conducting RCTs and other assessments, the foundation maintains a robust evidence base, adjusting its approach based on findings and ensuring that programs meet the specific needs of students in Manizales.

Type of Evidence

Fundación Luker employs a comprehensive evidence use strategy that includes both secondary data from sources like the World Bank and OECD, and primary research through RCTs and other assessments.

Lessons and good practices

A key lesson from Fundación Luker's work is the importance of voluntary participation and shared ownership. By allowing schools to opt into their programs, they ensure high engagement levels. The foundation's collaborative approach, especially in sharing financial resources and credit with local governments, fosters a sense of shared responsibility. This partnership model empowers schools and teachers to take ownership of their educational outcomes, ensuring sustainability beyond the foundation's direct involvement. Moreover, Fundación Luker's careful diagnostic approach, understanding each school's unique challenges, builds trust and supports the scaling of successful interventions to new municipalities.

Lively Minds (Ghana and Uganda)

Lively Minds is an early childhood development (ECD) initiative operating in Ghana and Uganda. The program focuses on empowering rural communities to improve their children's cognitive and social development through a sustainable and cost-effective model. Lively Minds works with local governments and parents, especially mothers, to establish and run play-based early childhood education (ECE) sessions in existing community-run schools, emphasising the importance of active learning and parental involvement.

Who is part of the ecosystem?

Lively Minds operates within a multi-stakeholder ecosystem that includes local communities, governments, parents, and schools. The initiative engages government partners at the district level to ensure sustainability and scalability, while also embedding the program into existing national early childhood education systems. At the community level, mothers and caregivers are trained to lead play-based learning sessions, while teachers and school leaders are given the support needed to facilitate these programs within schools.

By leveraging a community-led model, Lively Minds ensures that parents—who often have limited formal education themselves—can deliver simple, high-impact activities that promote their children's development. The program is built on the premise that parents are the first and most important teachers in a child's life, and that empowering them to take an active role in education is key to transforming learning outcomes in rural communities.

Approach to pursuit of goals

Lively Minds' primary goal is to improve school readiness and promote holistic development among young children in rural communities by equipping parents with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to support their children's early learning. The program is delivered through a community-led model, where parents (mostly mothers) are trained to facilitate weekly play-based learning sessions. The curriculum is designed to be simple and low-cost, ensuring it can be easily replicated across communities with minimal resources.

The initiative works closely with local governments to integrate the program into existing systems, enabling sustainability and scalability. Government partnerships are critical in ensuring that the program is embedded into national education policies and that it receives the support needed for long-term impact. Additionally, Lively Minds emphasises capacity-building for local government officials, teachers, and school leaders, enabling them to monitor and sustain the program without external intervention.

Evidence

Lively Minds utilises a combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence to assess and improve its programs. The initiative conducts regular assessments using the TaRL methodology to measure foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Additionally, routine monitoring, RCTs, and surveys are employed to evaluate program impact and effectiveness. Qualitative evidence from participant feedback, community observations, and narrative assessments enriches the understanding of program outcomes and informs ongoing adjustments to the curriculum and delivery methods.

Lessons and good practices

Lively Minds has successfully shown how parental engagement can be a transformative tool in early childhood education, particularly in resource-poor settings. By training parents—many of whom have no formal education—the program empowers them to take charge of their children's development, fostering a sense of ownership and pride. This low-cost, community-driven model is highly scalable and adaptable, offering a sustainable solution to the challenge of providing early childhood education in rural areas.

The initiative's partnership with governments has also been crucial to its success. By embedding the program into government systems, Lively Minds ensures that it is not a standalone intervention but part of a broader national effort to improve early childhood education outcomes. This alignment with local policies and priorities helps to ensure long-term sustainability and government ownership of the program.

Firelight Foundation (Sub-Saharan Africa)

Based in the U.S, the Firelight Foundation is a philanthropic organisation that supports community-based organisations (CBOs) in east and southern Africa to support child development, education, and well-being. Firelight focuses on community-driven systems change, emphasising the importance of local leadership and autonomy in improving the lives of vulnerable children. The foundation's approach is holistic and long-term, providing flexible support to grassroots organisations that work at the intersection of education, child protection, health, and social justice.

Who is part of the ecosystem?

Firelight operates within a community-centered ecosystem, partnering with local CBOs, grassroots leaders, and local governments to develop sustainable solutions to challenges faced by children and their families. The foundation's model is deeply rooted in the belief that local knowledge and leadership are critical to solving complex social problems. By empowering communities to drive their own solutions, Firelight ensures that interventions are culturally relevant, sustainable, and aligned with the community's priorities. Firelight also collaborates with a wide network of international donors, advocacy organisations, and research institutions, ensuring that local initiatives receive both the financial support and technical expertise needed to scale their impact.

How do they pursue their goals?

Firelight's approach is based on flexible funding and capacity-building. Rather than imposing strict programmatic requirements, Firelight provides CBOs with the autonomy to define their own priorities and solutions, based on the unique needs of the communities they serve. This bottom-up approach allows for contextualised interventions that are designed and implemented by local actors, leading to more sustainable and meaningful change.

The foundation supports CBOs through long-term funding, which enables organisations to invest in systemic change rather than short-term projects. Firelight also provides technical support, helping organisations strengthen their organisational capacity, improve their data collection and evidence-use practices, and

develop leadership skills. This support is critical in ensuring that CBOs can continue to drive change long after initial funding has ended.

Evidence

A core element of Firelight's strategy is evidence use. The foundation emphasises the importance of non-traditional data—including qualitative evidence such as community stories, participant narratives, and local observations—to complement more conventional forms of data like child development outcomes. Firelight encourages CBOs to use this diverse set of evidence to make informed decisions about their programs and to advocate for community needs at both the local and national levels.

Lessons and good practices

Firelight's community-driven model is a powerful example of how local leadership can transform systems of education and child development. By providing CBOs with the flexibility to design and implement their own solutions, Firelight enables them to address root causes of systemic challenges rather than just treating the symptoms. This approach allows for more sustainable and scalable interventions that are tailored to the specific needs of each community.

The foundation recognises that local knowledge is invaluable when it comes to designing interventions that are both effective and culturally appropriate. By shifting power to the communities themselves, Firelight ensures that the solutions developed are not only more sustainable but also more empowering for the people they are intended to help.

Dream a Dream (India)

Dream a Dream is a non-profit organisation based in India that focuses on equipping young people from vulnerable backgrounds with the life skills they need to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Through a combination of life skills education, teacher training, and systemic advocacy, Dream a Dream aims to reimagine what education can achieve, moving beyond academics to a more holistic, child-centred approach that emphasises resilience, adaptability, and agency in young people.

Who is part of the ecosystem?

Dream a Dream operates within a multi-stakeholder ecosystem that includes young people, teachers, school systems, state governments, corporate partners, and international organisations. At the centre of this ecosystem are the young people from vulnerable communities that the organisation serves. Dream a Dream works closely with public schools and state education departments to integrate life skills development into existing educational curricula, training teachers and educators to deliver its programs.

The organisation also partners with corporations to provide young people with mentorship and access to career opportunities, and with international NGOs and research organisations to gather evidence, share best practices, and influence educational policies. These collaborations allow Dream a Dream to scale its interventions and have a broader impact on the Indian education system.

Approach to pursuit of goals

Dream a Dream's primary approach is focused on life skills education—helping young people develop the critical skills they need to navigate the complexities of life, such as critical thinking, decision-making, creativity, and resilience. The organisation's Life Skills Program engages young people through activities like sports and arts, creating safe spaces where they can build their confidence, problem-solving abilities, and social-emotional skills. Dream a Dream's programs are designed to be child-centred and experiential, allowing young people to learn by doing, reflecting, and applying their skills in real-world situations.

A core component of Dream a Dream's strategy is its Teacher Development Program, which trains teachers to adopt a facilitative, empathetic approach that encourages students to be active participants in their own learning journeys. By equipping educators with the tools and mindset needed to foster life skills development, Dream a Dream extends its impact beyond individual students to the broader school system.

Dream a Dream also focuses on systemic change. Through partnerships with state governments—particularly in Karnataka and Delhi—Dream a Dream has worked to embed life skills education into the state curriculum. By doing so, they aim to create long-term, sustainable change in the way education is delivered, shifting the focus from rote learning to building well-rounded, resilient individuals.

Evidence

The organisation conducts pre- and post-program assessments to measure improvements in life skills among participants. Additionally, qualitative data is gathered through participant feedback, teacher reflections, and community evaluations. This combination of data types allows Dream a Dream to assess both the measurable impact of its programs and the broader, more subjective changes in student behaviour and community engagement.

Lessons and good practices

Dream a Dream's life skills-centred approach offers a strong model for reimagining education to better meet the needs of young people in vulnerable situations. By focusing on social-emotional learning (SEL) and life skills rather than just academic achievement, the organisation addresses the holistic development of children, equipping them with the tools they need to navigate life's challenges.

A key lesson from Dream a Dream's experience is the importance of teacher empowerment. By providing educators with the skills to foster life skills in their students, Dream a Dream ensures that its impact can be sustained and scaled across the public school system. Teachers are trained not just as instructors, but as facilitators of learning, able to create safe, supportive spaces for young people to thrive.

Building Tomorrow (Uganda, East Africa)

Building Tomorrow is a non-profit organisation based in Uganda that focuses on improving educational outcomes for underserved communities by engaging community members, recent university graduates, and volunteers in creating and supporting sustainable educational programs. Building Tomorrow's work

is centered around its Roots to Rise program, which is inspired by the TaRL methodology and emphasises community involvement in solving the education challenges that local communities face.

Who is part of the ecosystem?

Building Tomorrow's ecosystem includes CEVs, recent university graduates known as Fellows, school administrators, teachers, parents, and students in rural Ugandan communities. Additionally, the organisation works closely with government bodies, local authorities, and research organisations to monitor and evaluate the impact of their programs. Their aim is to create a network of local stakeholders who are empowered to support children's learning both inside and outside the classroom.

The Fellows are key players in Building Tomorrow's model. These recent university graduates are trained to work in underserved schools, helping teachers to deliver more effective lessons, and encouraging parental and community engagement. The CEVs work alongside the Fellows and help bring community involvement to the forefront by visiting homes and engaging with parents and guardians, ensuring children's attendance and involvement in school.

Approach to pursuit of goals

Building Tomorrow's Roots to Rise program focuses on foundational literacy and numeracy skills, using the TaRL approach. The TaRL methodology, which originated in India, focuses on grouping children by their learning level rather than by age or grade. By doing this, children receive targeted instruction that helps them gain critical literacy and numeracy skills at their own pace. Through regular assessments, students are regrouped based on their progress, allowing for dynamic and personalised learning.

Evidence

Building Tomorrow places a strong emphasis on evidence use and data-driven decision-making. The organisation employs routine monitoring, RCTs, and surveys to measure the impact of its programs. Collaborations with research organisations and academic institutions ensure that the data collected informs both day-to-day operations and long-term program design. This commitment to evidence helps Building Tomorrow to adapt its interventions and maximise its impact.

Lessons and good practices

One of the critical lessons from Building Tomorrow's work is the power of community engagement. By empowering CEVs and Fellows to take leadership roles in promoting education, the organisation ensures that local ownership is central to its model. The Roots to Rise program relies heavily on the community's investment in educational success, making the program sustainable over the long term.
Partnerships with government agencies and research institutions have also played a key role in Building Tomorrow's success. By aligning with national education priorities and contributing data on student performance, Building Tomorrow can advocate for policy changes that support better learning outcomes across Uganda. In addition, their data-driven approach allows them to make evidence-based adjustments to their programs, ensuring continuous improvement.

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