ASHOKA

The LEGO Foundation

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS
RE-iMAGiNE
LEARN!NG

ASHOKA

Ashoka is a network of social entrepreneurs and innovators addressing the world's most pressing social, cultural and environmental problems. Ashoka identifies, accelerates and convenes cutting-edge social innovators across multiple sectors and helps to build a world in which everyone is equipped and empowered to be a changemaker.

The **LEGO** Foundation

The aim of the LEGO Foundation is to redefine play and to reimagine learning. The LEGO Foundation is dedicated to building a future in which learning through play empowers children to become creative, engaged, lifelong learners. In collaboration with thought leaders, influencers, educators and parents, the LEGO Foundation aims to equip, inspire and activate champions for play.

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POWER OF AN IDEA

Together, the LEGO Foundation and Ashoka launched the global Re-Imagine Learning network of 44 leading social entrepreneurs in 2014 to rethink how children best learn—at home, in school and in their communities. The Re-Imagine Learning network members are leaders in their field who collaborate across sectors to reimagine and reframe education and empower children with the critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving skills they will need to thrive and succeed in a world defined by change. From El Salvador to Egypt, South Africa to South Korea, these leaders who were selected from a pool of more than 600 global innovators, join parents, educators, multilateral institutions and governments to demonstrate what works best for children in education—and why.

The social entrepreneurs in the Re-Imagine Learning network use playful learning to ensure children not only develop important cognitive skills, such as math and reading, but also broader skills like collaboration, empathy, critical thinking and creativity, which are important for children to actively engage in shaping a rapidly changing future, no matter where they live. The challenges that our formal education systems now face—in what has been described as a global learning crisis by the World Bank—cannot be solved by incremental changes or one set of actors alone. Changing education systems requires us to design for learning through play from the beginning and build broad collaborations to address the full learning ecosystem, which includes teachers, parents, businesses, government and the larger community. This ecosystem spans a child's life from early childhood to primary and secondary school and across both formal and informal learning settings. A holistic understanding of a child's full learning journey must be at the center of any approach that seeks to equip and empower children to become creative, engaged, lifelong learners and changemakers driving positive change in their communities.

This report provides a selection of case studies from the Re-Imagine Learning network to showcase how social entrepreneurs are innovating learning in their groundbreaking enterprises. Passion and persistence are at the heart of these ventures. In addition, we have also distilled other success factors, such as designing for scale and quality from the beginning, transforming teachers and bringing parents and the wider community into the learning journey. Our hope is that this report will create greater awareness for the effective solutions of social entrepreneurs and that foundations, governments, international organizations and others will seek to collaborate with them to jointly overcome the global learning crisis.

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Learning through play exemplified in and around the classrooms of Re-Imagine Learning network members throughout the world.

VOICE FROM THE FIELD

Karima Grant
Founder of ImagiNation Afrika, Dakar, Senegal (2011)
Re-Imagine Learning Ashoka Fellow

At ten years old, Ndeye Maty Gueye is like many girls in the traditional Lebou village of Yoff in Senegal. Her family has little means, earning their living fishing the oceans that surround Yoff and selling the fish in local markets. Most weekday mornings, Ndeye Maty faces a day of instruction in French, rote memorization and exercises in school and then chores at home.

Ndeye Maty is both shy and curious. She first learned anatomy or rather, as she calls it in Wolof, bones and muscles, in a special makerspace program at ImagiNation Afrika. Not two months later at school - in her classroom of 75 children - she found the same lesson awaiting her. A teacher presented a diagram of bones and muscles on a chalkboard far from where she sat in the eighth row and tested her on the lesson. Fortunately, in the ImagiNation Labs, Ndeye Maty along with 25 other Yoff children had spent five consecutive Wednesdays and Saturdays touching, dissecting, questioning, hypothesizing and rebuilding the nervous and pulmonary systems using sheep hearts and brains, things Ndeye Maty had seen and knew about from her life in her village. The result: top grades on her exam.

At ImagiNation Afrika, we believe in a world of African children like Ndeye Maty solving the problem of development. Since 2011, ImagiNation Afrika has been expanding the paradigms for learning for over 12,000 children and the learning ecosystem of parents and teachers around them in three regions of Senegal. We aim to connect and enable a learning system for more than 100,000 children to transform not only how Ndeye Maty learns but to impact how adults that support children understand learning and play.

As founder of ImagiNation Afrika, I believe powerfully in the possibility of PLAY. I believe that inherent in play is the power to transform Africa and the world. Play means understanding the world in terms of possibility.

Play means inventing solutions—testing them out over and over again, learning each time, noting differences and rewiring our brain at each iteration. We are living in a time when this must become part of global culture—reflection and action, action and then reflection.

Play means creativity, belief in the power of creation, understanding that what we see is not the only way to be, to understand, to know.

Most of all, play means valuing children and honoring their citizenship—making space for them in the world and celebrating their competency as fellow people. Honoring their journey as intellectual, social, emotional, physical and spiritual co-travelers allows us to honor ourselves—to not deprive ourselves of the parts of who we are that make us bold and dreamy and deeply connect us to our purpose on this planet.

What Is a Social Entrepreneur?

social sntrepreneur so·cial \ ˈsō-shəl \ en·tre·pre·neur \ ˌäⁿn-
trə-p(r)ə-ˈnər, -ˈn(y) u̇r
(noun)
1. *Individual with innovative solutions to society's most pressing social, cultural
and environmental challenges;* **2.** *Ambitious and persistent person who tackles
major issues and offers new ideas for systems-level change;* **3.** *Powerful social
innovator.*

**SCALING
DISRUPTIVE
INNOVATIONS**

The LEGO Foundation and Ashoka had a simple question: What are we discovering about scaling innovation to advance learning outcomes? To answer this question, social entrepreneurs from the Re-Imagine Learning network teamed up with leading thinkers and organizations from OECD to UNICEF and met for three roundtable discussions in Boston (US), London (UK) and Reggio Emilia (Italy) to discuss measurement, formal education and early learning. Collectively, they sketched a powerful road map to increase the value of disruptive innovation with the promise to reimagine learning.

In his well-known model of disruptive innovation, Harvard Business School Professor Clayton Christensen shows how nimble newcomers can disrupt the business of big established enterprises by doing things simpler, quicker and better. This kind of disruption can seem almost impossible in such a monolithic, bureaucratic system as education, yet the Re-Imagine Learning social entrepreneurs highlighted in our case studies bring powerful disruptive ideas that can change the entire educational system.

RETHINKING LEARNING AS ENGAGEMENT, DISCOVERY AND PLAY

All of the enterprises have shown through their daily practices that education works when children are engaged and participate because they want to rather than because they have been compelled. They have shown that play, experimentation and discovery—trying a theory out and discovering information for yourself rather than being told about it—is the most effective and memorable way to learn. When children can explore and tinker with things, finding out what works and what doesn't work for themselves, they are engaged in enjoyable, memorable learning. This is play. It can be fun, but it has a serious and profound purpose.

TRANSFORMING TEACHERS

The experience of organizations such as STIR Education and Center for Inspired Teaching illustrates that educators can easily become cogs in an inflexible system—but that this is not what they want. In fact, if given the tools and support to become changemakers rather than administrators or disciplinarians, teachers are likely to embrace the opportunity. Even simply redefining teaching from knowledge-delivery to changemaking can bring about an immediate shift in educators, yet there still needs to be a system of support around them. Teachers who are viewed as disruptive mavericks are unlikely to have a sustainable impact. This is why the social enterprises highlighted have worked hard to gain support from parents, head teachers, administrators and policymakers.

COMMITTING TO EQUALITY

These social enterprises are united by a refusal to accept long-standing social injustices. From Skateistan's transformation of opportunities for girls who were left out of education and physical play; to VINYĀS's demonstration that state schools can be nourishing environments; to STIR Education's, AeioTU's and Kidogo's insistence that children who face barriers to education also deserve access, these social enterprises show the world that all children can become engaged learners through enjoyable ways of learning.

ADDING DESIGN THINKING AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The innovators use principles of design thinking and entrepreneurship in powerful ways in the classroom, giving kids the tools and support to creatively solve problems in their communities. The design-thinking ethos of learning, collaboration and problem-solving—distilled by Design for Change as "Feel, Imagine, Do and Share" for kids—is fundamental to social entrepreneurs. Their ventures thrived because their founders empathized deeply with a problem (Feel), dreamed of solutions (Imagine), courageously tried out different approaches (D0)—some of which didn't quite work, so they had to feel, imagine, and do again—and then shared their inspirational models with their communities and the rest of the world (Share). In each case, we see the power of problem solving by thinking about the needs of others and daring to experiment and collaborate until a new way of thinking emerges.

GOING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

The enterprises were most effective when the different, interconnected parts of a community became involved. Parental understanding and involvement was crucial to their success. Loyalty to the work increased when the wider community joined in playful-learning activities, such as when Kidogo invited parents to help make toys and resources for the children or when Imagination Foundation's Cardboard Challenge allowed people of all ages to feel the pleasure and achievement that comes from working with others to create something new. Powerful change occurs when all generations participate in playful learning.

DESIGNING FOR SCALE FROM THE BEGINNING

Reflections from the entrepreneurs show that designing for scale from the outset is critical. More often than not, this means recognizing that one individual or one organization cannot scale impact alone. As STIR notes, bringing public-sector actors in as partners from the beginning gives them a sense of ownership and agency in the design process.

Unleashing the creativity of public sector officials is just as important as unleashing the creativity of teachers.

FOCUSING ON VALUES

Many organizations struggle to ensure that their core values remain central as they grow. For this reason, the social entrepreneurs note how important it is to communicate values to all stakeholders at the start. For example, in a recruitment process, asking situation-based questions, like "What would you do if...?" opens up a dialogue for both parties to discuss and assess values alignment. Intentional design of physical space can also be a powerful way to reflect the values of an organization. VINYĀS works with the community and children to creatively and collaboratively design spaces in schools. In one collaboration, they reimagined window security bars as nonlinear and placed bottle-tops on the bars to transform them into a playful motor skills test. Children playing at the window not only invited the outside world to look in, but also communicated the value of putting children at the center of the design process.

MEASURING WHAT WE TREASURE TO SCALE WITH QUALITY

Depending on funding and the priorities of the communities they work with, these social entrepreneurs measure impact in different ways—from increased academic scores and fewer school absences to decreased engagement in violent crime and reduced unemployment. Regardless of the type of measure, they each focus on building quantitative evidence to strengthen their models and show the value they add to society. What do they all have in common around learning through play? Measuring the quality of the child's learning experience to determine if it is joyful, meaningful, iterative, socially interactive and actively engaged. This shared element enables powerful cross-learning among organizations, which leads to sector- wide and systems-level change.

HOW TO SCALE YOUR MODEL

TOP 3 APPROACHES TO GROWTH

Re-Imagine Learning enterprises show three distinct ways that social innovations in learning through play can be scaled.

1

BOTTOM-UP NETWORKS

In these cases (Kidogo, Center for Inspired Teaching, STIR Education and aeioTU), we find social enterprises building support and demand for change within communities of families and professionals—a primarily grassroots demand that leads to pressure for significant change higher up in the system. These enterprises often lead parents and teachers to think of early childhood development in a different way, and therefore to demand something better for their children. Parents and teachers are crucial as inspirational drivers of and advocates for change.

2

ADAPTABLE INTERVENTIONS

In these examples (Design for Change and VINYĀS), the innovators have created an inspirational model that can be effectively placed into different contexts—almost like a "plug and play" or ready-out-of-the-box solution. When a government is convinced by the evidence of the value of learning through play, and wishes to invest in it, these initiatives offer excellent value in terms of educational results. They also show how striking changes in a learning culture can be brought about in a relatively straightforward and inexpensive way.

3

UNLOCKING CREATIVE COMMUNITIES

In these enterprises (Imagination Foundation, Skateistan), we see that the power of playful learning can happen anywhere, not necessarily in a classroom. Here the freedom to play, experiment and learn from each other is presented to children as a route to empowerment, knowledge, mastery and fun. The learners themselves become powerful advocates of this approach to learning—and are often learning from each other. The non-classroom elements have a powerful effect when they get fed back into classrooms—the maverick non-school projects ultimately having a significant impact on schools.

These approaches are not wholly separate. In fact, there is much crossover between them. A social enterprise such as Design for Change offers an adaptable intervention, but its work is also about unlocking creative communities, including those beyond the classroom. Enterprises like this one typically gain support in a bottom-up, networked way as people see the power of the work and share this message with others.

KEY LESSON ON SCALING IMPACT

To create long-lasting, systemic change, it is crucial to scale your idea beyond the size of your organization, to liberate its core and to get it into the hands of others. By unleashing your idea to the world, you can engage new changemakers who enable your idea to grow, potentially improve upon it and eventually help it become the new standard.

CASE STUDIES

In 2016, sixteen members of the Re-Imagine Learning network participated in Ashoka's 'Re-Imagine Learning' Globalizer, a program designed to support advanced social entrepreneurs with the tools and networks to strategically and rapidly spread their innovations in order to achieve change on a much greater scale. The program helps enterprises scale their ideas and often results in a venture growing from one site or one region to national, multi- national or global enterprises. This report highlights eight of the ventures. The social enterprises represent an international array of different approaches, and these case studies describe their distinctive innovations and consider some of their challenges in scaling.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISES	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	YEAR ESTABLISHED
Kidogo	Kenya	2014
Center for Inspired Teaching	United States	1995
STIR Education	India	2012
aieoTU	Colombia	2008
Design for Change	India	2001
VINYĀS	India	2002
Imagination Foundation	United States	2012
Skateistan	Afghanistan	2007

1. KIDOGO

High-quality, affordable, playful childcare for children in poverty

VENTURE OVERVIEW

Kidogo is a social enterprise that improves access to high-quality, affordable early childhood care and education for the children of working mothers living in East Africa's informal settlements.

Responding to the need for higher-quality care and to help children thrive, Kidogo opened early-childhood centers that operate using a "hub and spoke" model focused on child impact, scalability and sustainability. These high-quality early-childhood development centers, which care for 50 to 100 children per day, are its hubs. Its "spokes" are Kidogo-trained and supported "Mamapreneurs," community-based women micro-business owners who launch their own childcare programs that care for ten to 30 children per day.

Kidogo's founders—social entrepreneurs Afzal Habib and Sabrina Natasha Habib—use the "Kidogo Way," a play-based, child-centered and holistic approach to early childhood care and education, in their centers. Their curriculum, which aligns with the Kenya Early Childhood Development Service Standard Guidelines and the Kenya Institute of Education Early Childhood Development and Education syllabus, emphasizes play, problem solving and social-emotional learning.

Kidogo's teacher-training methods focus on positive discipline and developmentally appropriate and adaptable learning experiences for children. Teachers become "facilitators" of the kind of learning that is based on the principles of play with the child at the center of his or her own playful, experiential learning. Health, nutrition and well-being are also central, and bright, open physical spaces are optimized for play-centered learning. Teacher-training is essential, as educators learn to become "facilitators of learning" in classrooms devoid of didactic, rote-based instruction.

SCALING STRATEGY

Kidogo's "hub and spoke" model has worked well for the organization. Its hubs provide high-quality, play-based childcare, covering 75 to 80 percent of monthly operating costs through childcare fees alone. Co-founder Afzal says these hubs are "costly and very challenging to manage, in terms of providing ongoing oversight to ensure that quality stays as high as the organization expects."

"As we prepare to scale-up, we are looking at repositioning our hubs as centers of excellence," Afzal explains. "We've been describing them recently as 'the teaching hospital for early childhood development,' where they operate not only as childcare centers but training grounds and demonstration sites for local governments and others."

Under this scaling strategy, there will be larger and fewer hubs, but each of them will have a greater number of "spokes." "We've seen that the right combination of training, mentorship and support to 'Mamapreneurs' can significantly improve the quality of childcare that they provide and the sustainability of their micro-businesses," Afzal says. "We really see our social franchising 'spokes' program as our route to scale." Kidogo is now developing a "business in a box," which is a complete kit of training and materials, coupled with ongoing mentorship and quality assurance, to help each woman start or grow her own childcare "spoke."

A second strategy for Kidogo involves consulting with large employers close to informal settlements, working with them to support their employees' childcare needs. Employers benefit from having less stressed, less absent, more productive workers who know that their children are being cared for properly, and it can lead to stable, ongoing services.

As a new, successful organization making a difference in the community, Kidogo's co-founders are now working to influence local and national government. "It's about changing the conversation around what early childhood development means, and the importance of nurturing care and play-based learning. And the way that we can influence that is by having a seat at the table," Sabrina says. Both she and Afzal have global aspirations: "We don't see Kidogo having a physical presence around the world, but we certainly see ourselves being a thought leader in terms of how to provide high-quality, holistic, play-based childcare services in a way that is replicable globally," Sabrina adds.

BIGGEST LESSONS LEARNED

Sabrina-Natasha Habib, Co-founder of Kidogo

#1: *We were very fortunate to receive a lot of larger grants in our first year that may have pushed us to grow bigger and earlier than we had expected. As a result, we began dealing with "growing pains," which developed from having inadequate systems and structures, and slowed our ability to innovate.*

#2: *In Kenya and particularly in [informal settlements], the principles of learning through play are nascent. In the communities we work in, it is believed that children start learning at the age of three, and therefore play is only acceptable for children under that age, and after that, children must be in regimented schooling with homework and exams. To tackle this, Kidogo has tried to build a "playful" culture—starting first with our own staff, and then rallying leaders from the community, national and county-level government, civil society and the private sector—around the need for more experiential-based learning. Our message is clear: Children are our future employees, leaders and customers. If you want a pipeline of human capital that can think critically and innovatively, you must invest in play-based early learning where these skills are nurtured.*

2. CENTER FOR INSPIRED TEACHING

The teacher as "instigator of thought"

VENTURE OVERVIEW

Center for Inspired Teaching was established by Aleta Margolis in 1995, making it a well-established enterprise that continues to grow today. In 1989 Margolis began her career in education, teaching playwriting to high schoolers in the juvenile justice system. She engaged them in creating and performing a play about their lives in Washington, D.C., and the students developed the idea that their performance could be a catalyst for change in the city. Margolis realized that her style of interaction—seeking engagement above all else—changed what the students thought they could do. As Margolis says now, "I really believe that if the young people in my class had experienced a different kind of teaching, one that prized engagement over compliance, throughout their academic careers, they never would've ended up in the juvenile justice system in the first place."

Later experiences teaching elementary and middle school, and at the university level, convinced Margolis that teacher transformation was the key to student success. "Over the years, the organization has grown tremendously. We've evolved, and we've become much

more sophisticated," Margolis explains. "But our core values have not changed. We teach teachers to shift their role from information provider to Instigator of Thought. That has not changed. And our core value of wanting schools to change from a place that prizes compliance to a place that promotes engagement—that has not changed."

Center for Inspired Teaching puts the power of play and the student's imagination at the heart of learning. The organization's process is based in improvisational theater, and teachers are trained to think like improvisational actors. They begin every class with a clear goal that does not change, but they welcome surprise and incorporate and follow children's inputs and suggestions on the journey.

"We say that the learner should be in a process we call Wonder-Experiment-Learn. The teacher's job is to get the learner into that process for as much of the day as possible," Margolis explains. The teacher begins with a great challenge or question, and then sets students off on an exploratory path. The teacher observes what happens, recalibrates the plan and then instigates more action. This playful cycle continues again and again, so

the students can build knowledge for themselves. While conventional learning approaches present learning as a mostly sedentary endeavor, students in an Inspired Teaching class are encouraged to move and use their whole bodies in the process of discovery. They know that they are respected and trusted to find their own way of learning. They are less likely to turn to their teacher for "the answer" because they know that the teacher will challenge them to work it out for themselves.

Margolis argues that the skills students develop through this learning style are essential if they are to thrive in and contribute to a complex, rapidly changing world. In an Inspired Teacher's classroom, students learn to solve problems, pursue continual learning and growth, analyze information and collaborate with others toward a shared goal.

SCALING STRATEGY

Over the years, it has become apparent that changing teachers is not enough because teachers work in a system that either approves or disapproves of their approaches to educating students. The Washington, D.C.-based Inspired Teaching has established a reputation for using engagement-based learning to achieve excellent results, yet in order to become a change leader across the United States and then the world, it must transform the education system and parental expectations about teaching.

"As we look at growing, we're going to continue to teach teachers, but we also need to work on changing the environment in which they teach, so that they can be changemakers, but they don't have to risk their jobs to be changemakers. So our new strategy is to bring in other voices from the corporate sector, along with parents, school leaders and others who understand the importance of building in young people the skills that they'll need to thrive in our society."

Inspired Teaching intends to build demand for the number of Inspired Teachers. This will include establishing National Inspired Teaching Institutes and a robust online network to reach educators. It also means working with a network of co-instigators to make engagement-based education the norm. "There's a lot of conversation that says we need high-quality schools and teachers, but almost no discussion on what that means. We really want to begin that conversation," Margolis says.

BIGGEST LESSONS LEARNED

Aleta Margolis,
Founder and President of
Center for Inspired Teaching

#1: *I'm proud of the success we have had over 22 years, particularly recognizing that for a long time at the beginning we were outliers in the education and teacher-training world. Learning through play did not have the recognition that is has today and few immediately understood how our approach was grounded in best practices. That said, if I were to start this journey again, I would have aimed to:*

- *Line up strong supporters and partners right from the start so that we could become bigger, faster. I would have tried to rally support in our ideas even as we were in the process of testing them in practice.*

- *Find ways to disperse the workload through a network of aligned allies. I dedicated an incredible amount of my own time and energy to launching the operation, and I could have used additional support.*

- *Be bolder from the start about an approach grounded in learning through play, emphasizing that improvisational theater is at the basis of our teacher training and explaining the extraordinary power of this approach.*

3. STIR EDUCATION

A novel approach to a classic challenge

VENTURE OVERVIEW

STIR Education is building a teacher-led movement to "reclaim teaching and improve learning for 4.5 million children by 2020." It began when STIR's founder and CEO, Sharath Jeevan, observed that the government of India had built over a million schools, yet children did not appear to be learning and thriving. He sought a new approach that is based on the idea that teachers can be the drivers of real change and emphasizes the empowerment that comes through creativity and play.

While education ministries were generally taking a "carrot and stick" approach to compel teachers to work, Jeevan sought to bring back the intrinsic motivation in teaching. "Rather than wait for a new generation of teachers or for externally driven initiatives, why couldn't we recreate a movement of the current generation of teachers within the teaching profession, and ask them to take control of leading change?"

This movement was achieved by building hundreds of networks of 30 to 40 teachers in an area. Each group comes together monthly to develop professional skills, such as collaboration, problem solving, reflecting,

influencing and "micro-innovating"—small changes that make learning more effective. These teachers work together on real problems in their communities to cultivate a more flexible, assertive mindset. As Jeevan explains, these teachers are "taking control of their own destiny professionally and learning to solve the problems in their communities at the same time."

STIR Education supports a culture of creativity and play in the classroom by showing teachers the power of play within their own learning. "The first three months of the process is called 'creating a buzz,'" says Jeevan, "where teachers come up with their own ideas and share their innovations openly." He adds, "They have really fun competitions to sort out the best ideas together. It creates a lot of energy and excitement among the teachers and reminds them why they wanted to be a teacher in the first place."

The approach embraces the ideas and individuality of teachers and helps them to recognize and value the individuality of each student. Evaluation studies have shown that 90 percent of participating teachers demonstrated improved teaching practices, and after STIR Education intervention, teachers' punctuality went from 20 percent to 80 percent.

SCALING STRATEGY

STIR's network-building model makes scaling possible. As of 2016, they work with 27,000 teachers and are responsible for a million children, but intend to reach 40 times that scale over the next ten years.

As ever, the key challenge is managing growth while maintaining quality, which in this case means maintaining the spirit of playful changemaking as well as other more straightforward measurable outcomes.

Jeevan says that part of the challenge is to avoid falling into more conventional solutions and to remember four key values: "We don't have all the answers; we support people to find the answers themselves; we are always listening and being open to feedback; and we are building this movement together, with stakeholders." Jeevan sees an appetite for change, and STIR's key stakeholders agree that the present system isn't working and that STIR Education offers a strong solution.

"We've learned that we have to work with governments very practically to make this change happen," Jeevan says. "We partner with states or countries, and we train their staff to run the approach, but there can be a little bit of tension between a movement that's generally teacher-led but has strong government endorsement."

Nevertheless, Jeevan knows that leading change throughout the system will be necessary for it to work. This requires teachers, parents, politicians and all parts of the government education system to modify their views and expectations. "That's the journey we're on, and of course, we are learning as we go."

BIGGEST LESSONS LEARNED

Sharath Jeevan, Founder and CEO of STIR Education

#1: Our key impact has been in helping many of the major players in education—from governments to donors to policy influencers and frontline people within education systems—see teachers as the solution, not the problem. We are already seeing that reframing in this way leads to different ways to harness teachers within education systems. We might have started with thinking of government adoption as our main scaling channel right from the start. It took us two years to figure out this made the most sense from a sustainability and long-term systems-level change perspective.

4. AEIOTU

Learning through play for the youngest children and the whole community

VENTURE OVERVIEW

Based in Colombia, aeioTU offers high-quality playful learning for children under five years old. The organization flourishes through networks that begin in aeioTU's childhood centers and reach out to involve the whole community.

The centers offer education, nutrition and care from gestation through the age of five, and partner with other early childhood centers and educators. In the first seven years of operation in Colombia, aeioTU opened 29 centers with a capacity of holding more than 13,000 children. Their aim is to create a network of sustainable and high-impact aeioTU centers and associate centers to support all young children in Colombia.

"Play is part of who we are," explains María Adelaida López, aeioTU's Executive Director. "The spirit of playful learning fostered in an aeioTU center is not simply a way to occupy young children; it is an activity of learning to be embraced by everyone involved with the center. Play to learn is not only a strategy to learn with the children, but also to grow and to take care of ourselves." Children's parents are invited to play, create and use their imagination whenever they come into contact with the center. "We engage parents in some kind of activity that is playful, and while we do that, we talk about raising our children, we talk about discipline, we talk about any challenges we have," López says. "Then we realize together how important play is for curiosity, self-awareness or for resolving any kind of problem." The enterprise is about transforming communities and building social networks. "Anything that we do with the children, we do with the parents and we do with the community," López explains. By building a sense of identity and belonging, the children's center becomes the whole community's roots.

aeioTU has contributed to many community transformations. In one case, a small town had been severely affected by the ongoing war in Colombia, and almost everyone had been displaced after a violent incident. As López recalls, "After some time, families started coming back. So five years ago, we started a center with nine community mothers. They didn't see themselves as teachers or professionals. They were just caregivers, and they were very much afraid of everything. There was talk about war and death all the time, and the children were traumatized and had behavioral challenges."

López continues, "But we started the center and built a new sense of who we were and of belonging. We cleaned the place up, and we trained the teachers. You could see a woman who didn't believe in herself, who punished the children all the time, changing little by little into believing that she is actually a professional and an educator, and that she has the right to be happy and to redefine her own life. When she was able to do that, she changed the life of many children. If you come there now, you don't hear everybody talking about death. You hear people laughing and playing, and it's all about life. It's a huge change in the whole community that you can see now.'

SCALING STRATEGY

aeioTU is opening new centers, sharing their experiences with other partners and training teachers. They plan to reach 300,000 children in the next ten years through a "Smart Network" of 30 partners with a shared vision of transforming early child development ecosystems as well as providing training and support to 100 government-funded centers each year.

aeioTU has found that persuading others of the power of playful learning occurs in steps as people experience it for themselves. The organization is working on ways to spread and outsource the model without compromising quality. By emphasizing community and networks, the organization is helping people learn together and from each other. Although specific messages from aeioTU about how to interact playfully or lead learning may be interpreted in variable ways, the broad intentions are passed along quite reliably, changing the lives of children at every stage.

BIGGEST LESSONS LEARNED

María Adelaida López,
Executive Director of aeioTU

#1: *We needed to be more aware of the importance of sustainability. We started focusing on high quality at any cost. Throughout the years, we began reconciling the reality with our dream and are now more aware of the importance of economic sustainability. If we could start all over, we would try to adjust to budgets established by the government from the beginning, without sacrificing quality. It can be done as long as you have it in your top priorities.*

#2: *We would also focus more on understanding the educational context and cultural background of our teachers. Having these characteristics in mind would have allowed us to develop more pedagogical and professional development tools to help teachers better understand and implement our educational model in a much simpler way.*

CASE STUDIES

5. DESIGN FOR CHANGE

From a design-led school to a global movement

VENTURE OVERVIEW

"What roll number is he?" the teacher asked. In this pivotal moment back in 2001, appalled that her son's teacher didn't even recognize his name, Kiran Bir Sethi immediately pulled her son out of that school and started her own in her home city of Ahmedabad.

Trained as a designer, she noticed that education had been designed to satisfy the demands of parents, not children. Sethi insisted on listening to children, co-creating learning with them and designing learning experiences that would enable them to flourish. "In India," she explains, "design was always thought of as happening only in design studios. It had nothing to do with children and education. I think that's what I really understood—how design thinking should shape education." This meant listening carefully to the needs of children and collaboratively designing a system that would enable them to learn in the best possible way.

Her school quickly grew to become The Riverside School in Ahmedabad with 390 students and an outstanding reputation as one of the best schools in

India. Creating this school led Sethi to articulate design processes in ways that made sense to young learners, and she developed her idea that schools should build the "I Can" mindset—where children instinctively know they can do things and make a difference in the world.

By 2009 Sethi realized she could have an impact beyond her own school and launched these principles as an inspiring national and then international movement, Design for Change. The core elements of design thinking were reduced to a memorable four-step process: "Feel – Imagine – Do – Share." "Feel" means to empathize with the people facing a problem; "Imagine" is about brainstorming possible solutions; "Do" means selecting and executing a plan; and "Share" is about communicating the story to inspire others.

In the past seven years, Design for Change has empowered children in more than 30,000 schools in over 44 countries to create 18,000 stories of change, uploaded to the Design for Change website. Riverside School is the base and offers training to other educators, but the Design for Change ideas and resources are spread for free. "We really simplified it. We

said if it has to reach, it has to be so accessible. We said, 'This is yours, you can do it however you like, but this is the why.'"

People could apply the process to whatever problem they wanted to tackle; it wasn't tied to any particular issue or initiative. "And we said it was open source, so you could download, you could customize, you could change. We would support you in any way we could," Sethi adds. "That's what made it global." Today, Design for Change describes itself as "the largest global movement of children driving change in their own communities—by unleashing their 'I can' superpower."

Sethi believes that the principles of design thinking are inseparable from the principles of play. Both kinds of activity "start with acts of the heart, the head, the hands and hope." Unlike competitive games—but like design thinking—play is inclusive, empathetic and personal. "I think one of the things that design thinking has enforced is the idea that there's no such thing as a problem – it's an opportunity. Just as in play, there is no failure, but rather an opportunity to do something different, do something better" says Sethi.

SCALING STRATEGY

Scaling is seen by Kiran Sethi as a natural process of amplification, as stories about great practices capture the imaginations of learners and educators. Design for Change has led to many diverse learning experiences, which are not centrally managed. Instead they are led by teachers and then children themselves, who are inspired by the Design for Change process and resources and use these ideas to do whatever they want. "Quality is an outcome of meaning," Sethi reflects. "When people find meaning, they want to do stuff well. That's what quality is."

Of course, people can be supported to do things even better, which is why Design for Change is developing a new online platform to share best practices around the world as well as a more intensive hybrid model with direct training from Riverside and online materials and discussions.

Because it is primarily about an idea and a way of

teaching, Design for Change is more straightforward to scale. People are driven when they see the achievements of others—especially at the celebratory global conference, now held in a different country each year, which showcases the extraordinary things that can happen when children are invited to "Feel – Imagine – Do – and Share."

BIGGEST LESSONS LEARNED

Kiran Bir Sethi,
Founder of Design for Change

#1: *We would have focused and worked more closely with school leaders right from the start as they play a very important role as change catalysts. And we would have kept in mind the impact and anticipated scale and demand for the idea—and put in place robust structures that would ensure smoother scaling.*

6. VINYĀS

The Building as Learning Aid (BaLA)

VENTURE OVERVIEW

VINYĀS has a unique way of thinking about buildings, where the settings and elements of every building can be a learning aid. Kabir Vajpeyi is both the principal architect at India's innovative architectural firm VINYĀS, a center for architectural research and design. He is also the founding president of VINYĀS Society, the nonprofit organization that drives the idea that the physical space and materials of schools can be absolutely central to children's learning. BaLA is about using the uniqueness of the three-dimensional space as a tool for learning and child development.

In rural India, VINYĀS has promoted the idea that every element of a school building—floors, windows, doorways, steps and furniture—can be modified as an affordable learning resource. Theories of child development are translated into a pool of simple design improvements and innovations that principals, teachers and engineers can implement in new and existing schools, so that children can learn in diverse ways. Vajpeyi saw that the uninviting, uninspiring public school and preschool building environments in India

did not suggest play at all. The VINYĀS solution is not simply to make them colorful or make spaces larger or lighter, but to utilize every bit of the environment as a tool of learning and play. The organization asks: How many different ways can I use this window, this door, or this tree? For Vajpeyi, play means engagement in rethinking all the stuff in the world.

When VINYĀS is engaged to remodel a school or build a new one, children, caregivers and teachers are involved in thinking about the space. Playful and creative methods are used to consider favorite spaces and to create models or performances that communicate the power of those environments. Their ideal way of working is to collaboratively design a school, build much of it and then let teachers and children occupy and use it for some time, before then moving to the next phase of adding and changing elements of the space based on their experiences. Despite many years building great learning environments, VINYĀS does not assert that they will know how best to make an interesting school in each context. "We try to restrain ourselves," Vajpeyi smiles. This helps in co-creating and developing a sense of ownership in the creation process.

Transforming rural schools into vibrant learning spaces has invigorated the whole world of learning. Engineers who have worked on these projects now pay attention to the children in these spaces and their needs because they have been so struck by the power of playful learning in schools. Teachers have been profoundly affected by the process. A head teacher who participated in the process and was previously protective of the school's library books, keeping them locked up in a chest, was moved to create an open library under a Kadamba tree—traditionally thought to bring peace of mind—where children could freely look at the books in a fresh, open space.

SCALING STRATEGY

The concept of BaLA has already reached over 110,000 schools in India. But scaling for VINYĀS is both horizontal and vertical. Horizontal scaling means to consolidate the learning and put it in a simpler, replicable form. Vertical scaling is to spread these ideas out for everyone in the education and childcare system who would like to take them forward.

VINYĀS has worked deliberately with government schools to make the biggest difference. "We are a small entity, but we are clear that we want to have a large impact area without necessarily increasing our own footprint," Vajpeyi explains. "By working with the government we can transform thousands of schools, and we are able to touch the lives of many more children." After seeing these huge changes in state schools, private schools have subsequently asked to revamp their spaces, too.

This school-wide transformation has faced funding difficulties because it is an interdisciplinary concept, while education administration is structured in silos. However, civic leaders who have been impressed by the concept have developed new, interdisciplinary ways of funding these developments, bringing together budgets and departments responsible for buildings, maintenance, pedagogy, teacher training and project management. These previously disconnected bureaucratic parts have now started to share efforts to bring about transformational changes.

The work of VINYĀS shows that when the school environment looks like a place of play and joy, everyone's behavior changes and playful learning starts to flow as a "natural" part of this world.

BIGGEST LESSONS LEARNED

Kabir Vajpeyi,
Principal Architect and
Founding President of VINYĀS

#1: *Make it simple. Make the BaLA ideas and their understanding, as well as implementation, much simpler. This would enable its acceptance to be wider and deeper. More complex ideas can always be brought in later.*

#2: *Work simultaneously and more integrally. To bring a change in the government system, work from grassroots to policy, and don't wait for one to feed the other.*

#3: *Just do it: Do not wait for that ideal opportunity of time, situation or preparedness. Just enter into the system at the slightest hint of an opportunity to create a foothold. Then expand, once already in.*

7. IMAGINATION FOUNDATION

A simple idea that sparked imaginations

VENTURE OVERVIEW

The Imagination Foundation was established in response to the huge success of the short online film *Caine's Arcade*, which went viral in 2012. *Caine's Arcade* is the story of a nine-year old boy who made an arcade-game center out of cardboard in his father's Los Angeles auto-parts store, just for fun. Nobody would have known about it except that filmmaker Nirvan Mullick discovered it by chance and was so entranced that he wanted to share it with others. He also wanted to help Caine finally get some customers.

His 11-minute video included a link for people to donate to Caine's college fund, which raised over $60,000 on the first day, and nearly $250,000 overall. Matched with funding from the Goldhirsh Foundation, this quickly led to the launch of the Imagination Foundation. Its mission is "to find, foster and fund creativity and entrepreneurship in children around the world, to raise a new generation of innovators and problem solvers who have the tools they need to build the world they imagine."

In 2012, the Foundation held its first Global Cardboard Challenge, an international celebration of creativity where the public was invited to make things out of cardboard and recyclables, and then share their creations online and at community events around the world. Since then, the Challenge has engaged over 750,000 participants from 77 countries.

The Foundation soon found that people wanted to enjoy shared creative time together throughout the year—not just on special occasions. Therefore, in 2014 they launched Imagination Chapters, which are "pop-up learning spaces that foster creativity, entrepreneurship and 21st century skills through Creative Play" and which they capitalize to indicate that "Creative Play" is a particular pedagogy. There are already more than 120 chapters around the world—in libraries, community centers and other spaces as well as in schools—using a range of tools and materials, from cardboard to advanced electronics, to enjoy shared Creative Play. Chapters usually meet weekly, and a diverse group of Chapter Leaders have formed a highly active online social network for idea sharing and support.

The Imagination Foundation's experiences with the Global Cardboard Challenge led them to highlight the value and practice of Creative Play, which they define as "a process of learning that is fundamental and natural to all children—a "constructionist" approach based on imagination and the process of building and playing. In the Foundation's model, the work "culminates in the public sharing of an original artifact." Creative Play requires few resources and does not depend on adult expertise or input—indeed, it is often best if adults can just "get out of the way."

The Foundation's "Creative Play Spiral" begins with "inspire" and then proceeds through "imagine," "build," "play," and "share," which is reflective of how the Caine's Arcade movement began: Children and adults were inspired by the short film and started to share their cardboard creations through images and videos on their Facebook page.

Play is emphasized as central to everyday life and all kinds of learning. "Not only is play fundamental to learning, but it's so positive and creative; it can break down all kinds of barriers," says Mike McGalliard, founding executive director of the Foundation. "For example, there's an Imagination Chapter in Bosnia, where we have Croatians and Bosnians building together. The themes of what they make are so interesting. They often take on superhero personas and talk about the powers they would have to improve life in their community. It's really affirming and empowering addressing very specific challenges of that region. These playful spaces have also had unexpected impacts on the adults involved. We're doing this because we want kids to be transformed, but the key to transforming the kids is the adults being transformed. And we hear amazing stories from them every day."

SCALING STRATEGY

Scaling a global movement that is deliberately informal, flexible and creative is not easy. McGalliard recalls that the first Imagination chapters were weekly two-hour sessions where participants could build whatever they wanted. "People said, 'This is great, we love the freedom, but actually we need more direction.'"

The Imagination Foundation is developing tools for support—to provide a rich stream of inspirations as well as personal support for leaders. "We communicate with people a lot online, but they are still very personal interactions. Our chapter leaders are from all walks of life; half are teachers but half have no teaching experience at all. They support and inspire each other all the time," McGalliard says.

The Foundation intends to build an "Imagination Marketplace," which will be a global social network of individuals sharing inspiration, tools and ideas for fostering creativity in their communities. Through this network and partnerships with corporations and NGOs, they intend to reach two million children with campaigns like the Cardboard Challenge as well as new Challenges, such as the Inventor's Challenge and others that address the relationship between play and STEM. They expect to grow from 150 to 1,500 chapters within three years.

Although conceived as an out-of-school activity, Imagination Chapters are being used as tools of "modest disruption" by teachers who want to change their systems. "The chapters are such a positive thing," McGalliard notes. "Nobody's actually going to stop you." But the chapters open up a playful space that is unlike most other kinds of school learning, and they are beginning to have an impact on how learning is conceived in other parts of those schools.

BIGGEST LESSONS LEARNED

Mike McGalliard,
Founder of Imagination Foundation

#1: We could have done a better job transitioning the followers and fan culture of *Caine's Arcade* to the Imagination Foundation, as evidenced by the significant difference between the social media statistics for the two entities. This problem might have been corrected by a better and more coherent communication strategy in the early days.

#2: We could have also had a more granular and robust data collection system to better report, assess and manage the impact of our programs. For example, though we know that there have been over 750,000 participants in the Global Cardboard Challenge since 2012, we couldn't until recently report on the participants with as much detail as we would have liked. Now we use Salesforce and have gotten pretty meticulous with data collection. But in the early days, we were straddling three to four different databases and messy data-entry workflows.

8. SKATEISTAN

No rules saying that girls can't skateboard

VENTURE OVERVIEW

Founded in Afghanistan and now also in Cambodia and South Africa, Skateistan's skate schools offer a combination of skateboarding and arts-based learning to children with barriers to learning.

An extraordinary aspect of Skateistan's work has been the emphasis on gender equity. This stemmed from founder Oliver Percovich's deeply felt sense of the sheer unfairness of the situation for young women in Afghanistan. "I didn't see any women driving a car or serving me in a shop, or anywhere—they're just invisible in society." But when he was skateboarding on the streets of Kabul, girls and boys were eager to have a go. Because there were not any cultural rules forbidding girls from skateboarding, girls found a chance to flourish. Percovich took this as an opportunity to support girls in succeeding at something unexpected.

"I wanted the girls to beat the boys. In every sphere, the boys were saying they were better than the girls, simply because they've had the opportunities to do those things. Boys practiced things so they had gotten better.

The girls had their opportunities cut off. They were told they couldn't do anything, but girls didn't have any opportunities to do anything in the first place. I thought that was grossly unfair. I could get away with enabling skateboarding because skateboarding hadn't been seen before. Nobody had made up rules saying that girls shouldn't."

Skateistan was established with a particular emphasis on recruiting and supporting girls. "We put 80 percent of our effort into getting 50 percent girls." This involved gaining support from the community and religious leaders and working within cultural norms, such as having separate days for boys and girls and only female teachers with female students. Step by step, they were able to get girls skateboarding and then into the classroom. Because they felt comfortable and safe, the girls and boys became eager learners. Older and more confident children became teachers to others.

This led to a delegation of the Skateistan girls traveling to speak in the Afghan parliament and at United Nations conferences in other countries. "It was amazing, first just getting them to school, and then getting them to

represent Afghan youth around the world though the bridge that the skateboard created," Percovich reflects. Skateistan ensures participation of at least 40 percent girls in all its programs. Afghanistan now has the highest proportion of female skateboarders in the world.

Percovich feels that skateboarding is intrinsically playful because there is no "correct" way to do it. Skateboarding tends to create a community of people who, whatever their own ability, are highly supportive of others and welcome innovation rather than competition. "It's important that there is no right and wrong way. The more playful you are, the more inventive and creative you are with the skateboard—that is what is celebrated in skateboarding culture."

Skateboarding is uniquely associated with a playful mindset, Percovich asserts. "I've seen if you hang out with 55-year-old skateboarders that have been skateboarders since they were ten years old, you can be sure they've got a different mindset, and they are looking at the world quite differently because they've continuously been in this creative community." Unlike in rule-bound sports, being playful and inventive is central to skateboarding culture. "You're not actually doing it right unless you're somehow breaking the rules." This is why numerous adults who have been skateboarding for years end up in creative professions. As Percovich puts it, "They reinvent themselves. They reinvent themselves quite fast. I think that's a gift that needs to be given to children who don't have a lot of opportunities."

SCALING STRATEGY

Because Skateistan's schools are expensive to build, require teachers with an unusual set of skills and are established with careful regard to the local context, it is not easy for them to spread very quickly. With their centrally-controlled model, Skateistan grew from one school to four in six years. These Skate Schools are seen as labs for establishing the best practices.

In the new knowledge-dissemination model, Skate Uni, Skateistan will publish open-source resources that teach the fundamentals of their method; offer a free on-site training program for parties interested in starting a similar venture; give Skateistan awards for cases of best practice and create an online community as well as make use of connections with other networks.

In these ways, Skateistan can support change in some of the world's most challenging regions. Of course, as Percovich says, "Change has to happen from the local people themselves. And if you go through this rote learning system at school, how are you going to solve these complex problems?" Skateistan is on a mission to change learning and unlock creativity, so that these cultures can thrive.

BIGGEST LESSONS LEARNED

Oliver Percovich,
Founder of Skateistan

#1: I would have handed operations to capable locals earlier. Local ownership is so essential to long-term success as they understand the "problems" and "solutions" better.

#2: We would have focused more efforts on building community within the students. A big part of the community-building aspect was staff focused, and we wanted it to filter down, which it did.

#3: Hire only the best people for the job. I'm still making hiring mistakes!

"Children are our future employees, leaders and customers. If you want a pipeline of human capital that can think critically and innovatively, you must invest in play-based early learning where these skills are nurtured."

Kidogo, Kenya,
co-founder Sabrina-Natasha Habib

"I really believe that if the young people in my [earlier] classes had experienced a different kind of teaching, one that prized engagement over compliance, they never would've ended up in the juvenile justice system in the first place."

Center for Inspired Teaching, US,
founder Aleta Margolis

"[We] help many of the major players in education see teachers as the solution, not the problem."

STIR Education, India,
founder Sharath Jeevan

"Anything that we do with the children, we do with the parents and we do with the community."

aeioTU, Colombia,
Executive Director Maria Adelaida López

RE-iMAGiNE LEARN!NG

FEATURED SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

"In India, design was always thought of as happening only in design studios. [It had] nothing to do with children and education. I think that's what I really understood - how design thinking should shape education."

Design for Change, India,
founder Kiran Bir Sethi

Change in [the educational] system cannot be driven by one initiative, or at only one level."

VINYĀS, India,
founder Kabir Vajpeyi

"Not only is play fundamental to learning, but it's so positive and creative that it can break down all kinds of barriers."

Imagination Foundation, US,
founder Mike McGalliard

"[We] started with getting one girl, Faiza, who was begging on the streets, to teach other girls to skateboard in an abandoned fountain in Kabul. She demonstrated that no matter what your background is, you can be a teacher and a leader."

Skateistan, Afghanistan,
founder Oliver Percovich

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LEARNING EVENTS & PARTICIPANTS

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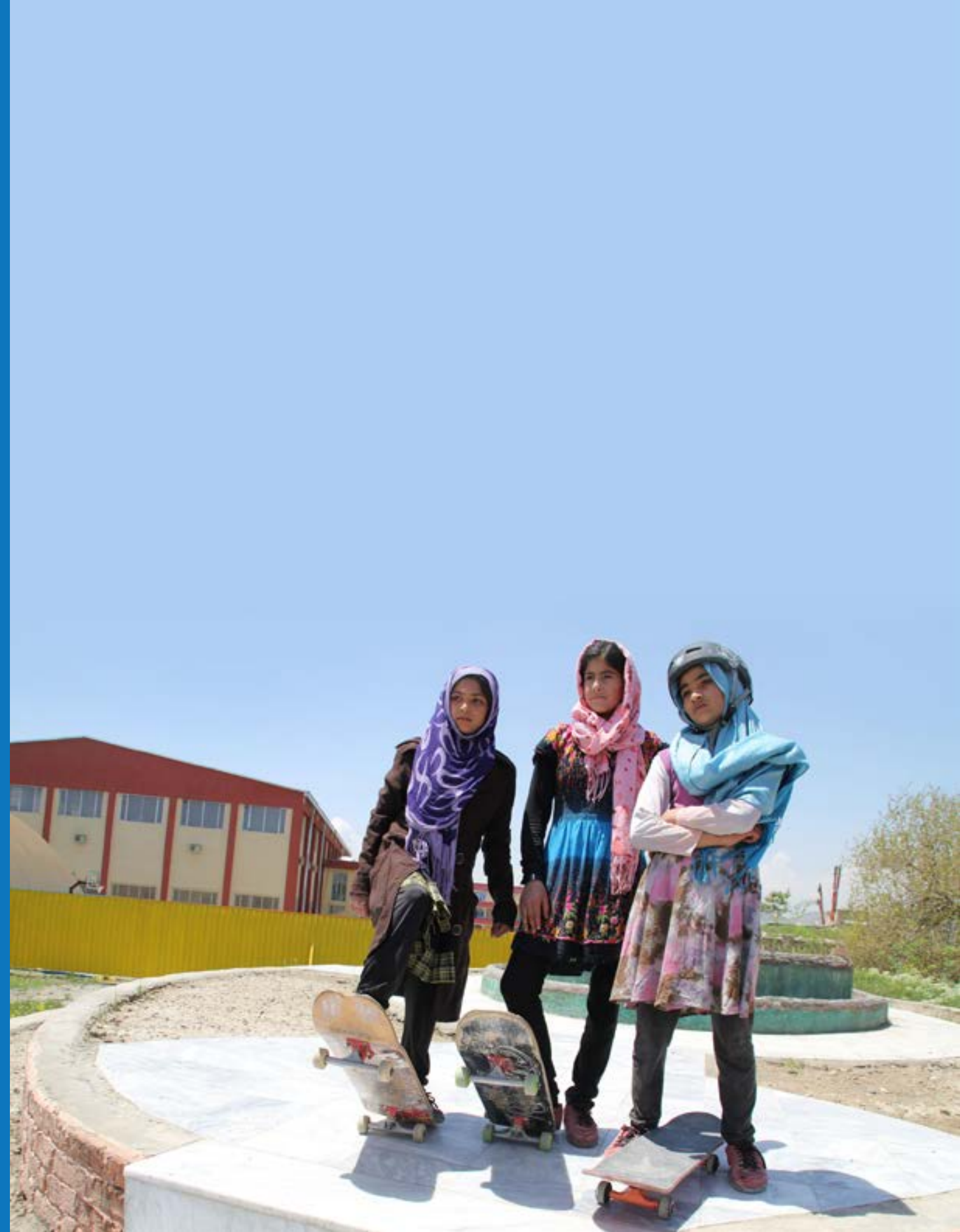
About the Re-Imagine Learning Partnership

The Re-Imagine Learning Network launched in the spring of 2014 as a partnership between Ashoka and the LEGO Foundation. One of the earliest priorities was to identify leading social entrepreneurs and understand their business models, distill their insights and then share what was learned with learning and skills stakeholders eager for change. Findings from these conversations and interviews were packaged in a 50-page report entitled *Social Innovation Mapping: Entrepreneurial Patterns for the Future of Learning*.

The engagement also included the Re-Imagine Learning Challenge, which gave more than 600 learning advocates from 78 countries a chance to tell their stories. Innovators—from nonprofit founders who deliver books to remote locations to curators of museum play—shared their solutions on Ashoka's website. The 10 best ideas—as evaluated by a panel of expert judges—split US$200K in cash prizes, received technical assistance and in-kind support and were celebrated at the 2015 IDEA Conference and WISE Conference as "Champions of Learning Through Play." These Champions, alongside select education-focused Ashoka Fellows, drive the Re-Imagine Learning Network as a leadership team.

In early 2016, sixteen members of the Re-Imagine Learning network participated in Ashoka's Globalizer, a program designed to help late-stage innovators scale their work beyond geographical borders. Participants were matched with top advisors from the business world to help refine their scaling strategies. Culminating in a summit in London, the program brought innovators and high-level stakeholders in education and learning from around the world together to discuss reimagining learning strategies for the 21st century.

The Re-Imagine Learning network members are leaders in their fields, and collaborating across sectors to tip the education system. Some members of the network have partnered with their local and state governments, as well as with ministries of education, to replicate their work. Others have linked up with multilateral institutions, including UNICEF, to ensure that children everywhere have access to the meaningful support they need to succeed.

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