

Summary of *Generative Education: nurturing children in resonance with their unique role in the universe*

Generative education is an integrated approach to creating learning environments that enable each child and teacher to develop agency, connection, and courage so that they can sense and respond in life-affirming ways throughout their life.

This is not just a theoretical description. We are describing living systems of learning that we observe today. We know they exist. We know they work. We want to describe them and support their emergence in more schools.

We do not believe there's a single set of 'best practices' that can be dropped into any school, radically transforming it into a model of generative education. Such approaches deprive school community members of their own agency, creativity, and cultural insight.

Our full description, [*Generative Education: nurturing children in resonance with their unique role in the universe*](#), provides a clear definition of generative education and then lays out the mindset, values, and practices that we observe in living examples of this kind of education. Generative education is *not* a curriculum that can simply be implemented. It is *not* an abstract philosophy that merely inspires without defining a path forward.

Generative education is an integration of mindset, values, and practices into a living, dynamic whole. The text is our current best attempt to describe those finer points of mindset, values, and practices with clarity and detail.

More specifically, *Generative Education: nurturing children in resonance with their unique role in the universe* covers main topics:

- A. **Definition:** what is generative education? There are many movements to evolve education from its current forms. But not all of them are alike. We are working hard to develop a clear understanding of what generative education is, how it feels, what it looks like in real life. Our current definition is: “Generative education is an integrated approach to creating learning environments that enable each child and teacher to develop agency, connection, and courage so that they can sense and respond in life-affirming ways throughout their life.” In this first section of the text, the definition is broken down phrase by phrase to clearly spell out all that is packed within. This is not empty jargon or pleasant-sounding language, but a carefully and intentionally crafted definition we hope gives a fuller picture of what generative education is.
- B. **Mindset:** The wellspring of generative education is its mindset. When we as educators have a mindset that is holistic and life-affirming, based in an understanding of each individual's unique, authentic gifts to be discovered and developed throughout their life, then supporting actions will follow. We believe these points of mindset to be of extreme importance, and so they are our first point of focus.

In this chapter, we elucidate why we see mindset as the true source and foundation of generative education and describe 14 key points of mindset that we know undergird generative educators. Because mindset is so critical, the 14 points are as follows:

1. The universe is a joyful unfolding.

We choose to live by a view of the universe as inherently benign and co-creative, with givens which we accept. While we find support for this view both in the quantum sciences and various spiritual traditions, ultimately we see this foundational assumption as a choice for joy, meaning, and collaboration.

2. The best way to cultivate the joyful unfolding of the universe is to attend to the present moment and accept what is.

Joyful unfolding happens best when we are fiercely present to now. Through presence, the rich possibilities of each moment make themselves felt and allow us to choose how we wish to respond.

3. All life is unique, interconnected, and has the ability to sense and respond.

Everything and everyone is interrelated. This we take both as a simple fact and a life-affirming perspective. It demands that we take a holistic view of all our practices and that we value all forms of diversity as a source of enrichment.

4. Each person is valuable as a unique expression in the universe.

Everyone has inherent value simply by being. Each person has an authentic and valuable voice, which they can express with dignity. The beautiful complexity of every system ensures that value and resilience are supported by the authentic expression of each individual.

5. Learning environments matter and can be more or less supportive of the joyful unfolding of the universe.

Learning environments for children have a strong influence on their ability to cultivate more supportive expressions. Some environments will support the discovery and mastery of each individual's unique voice, while others will stifle this process through demands of conformity.

6. Every person is deserving of our faith in their potential and capacity for growth.

Because we believe the universe is in a co-creative relationship with all life, we also believe that our relationships with those around us matter greatly. That is why we believe it essential to assume, with unshakable certainty, that each child has the potential to succeed according to the standards they deem of greatest value. This sense for possibility forms a vital point of departure in this approach.

7. Human identity and belonging are a dynamic interaction of individuals, communities, and their living narratives.

We don't see the universe as a living environment populated by separate individuals. Instead, we see individuals, communities, and the practices and narratives that are their way of manifesting in the universe as inextricably interwoven. For us, this means that all these 'windows onto one reality' deserve our time and attention. We must care for communities and the stories they tell just as much as each individual within.

8. Each person has a need to belong to meaningful groups and to connect with something beyond themselves.

A relationship is a foundation through which anything meaningful can occur. Existence itself, in our understanding, is a quality of relationships. This means that we cannot simply focus our energy on each individual unfolding their unique voice

and neglect the communities or universal context in which they live. Instead, we must nurture those groups and how they choose to connect to all of existence. Connection, we believe, is the antidote to the alienations so many suffer from.

9. Language is the ability to actively participate in a social construction of meaning making and communication.

Although we as humans engage in many modes of expression and communication, language certainly has a special place among them. Language is dramatically more than just a mode of communication with others. It is the dominant mode of self-communication; it is the prime bearer of the stories and identities we live into; it is often the very medium for interpreting our experience. Because of this, language is – for most children in most contexts – an absolutely essential tool to master. Furthermore, a playful approach to this tool is desirable in order for children to hold their narratives lightly, and to extend into territories they are not yet familiar with. The skill for participating with uncertainty, for which there is often no language, forms part of the process for this learning.

10. Each person has the potential to express their authentic voice.

We inherit language from multiple environments, and our multi-voiced voices are constructed largely through our education and narrative norms. Amidst these various voices, there is an underlying pattern authentic to each person. We trust that each person has the potential to offer this voice as part of their act of service to the world. Generative education assumes the existence of this potential, the value of this potential, and supports its natural unfolding.

11. One role of education is to enable the appropriate and effective expression of that authentic voice, and to strengthen our capability to lovingly serve.

It is our responsibility to care for ourselves, those around us, and our environment. To be in service to others, the school and the common good. We believe this can only be accomplished when each individual discovers and lives into their unique place in the world, their authentic voice. This discovery obviously serves the individual themselves, allowing them to live in resonance with what they have to give, but it is simultaneously a discovery of how they can be in loving service to those around them.

12. Every child can.

It is our unshakable belief *and* experience that every child can develop all the necessary knowledge, skills, and practices to flourish and succeed. Success is not

out of reach to some from “adverse backgrounds”, those with “learning disabilities”, or those who have suffered real trauma. To believe and act otherwise is to rob these children of their birthright to be nurtured and supported in the development of their authentic voice and the discovery of their role in life. Every child can. No exceptions.

13. Language acquisition and literacy occurs in a consistent developmental process.

While there are many approaches and practices to the development of oral language and the transition to print, there is a consistent developmental pattern. Each child, absent severe neurological issues, is born ready to develop oral language if placed in a safe, meaningful oral language environment. Each child is also born ready to easily recognize faces. In order to link these two natural processes and represent oral language in print, each child must be able to attend to the sound structure of speech and map those sounds to the symbols in text.

14. Behavior issues are a symptom of being stuck in development.

In almost every instance, behavior issues – in both children and teachers – are a symptom of being stuck in some area of their development. Growth and discovery bring joy and satisfaction, while their opposites bring depression, boredom, and frustration. Most often in school learning environments, the stuckness is in literacy or numeracy skills. And that stuckness may be because the student has been subjected to traumas that make it very difficult to self-regulate, attend and learn. Regardless, when behavior issues arise, they are seen not as a need to provide punishment or reward for different behaviors, but as signs that self-regulation, learning and development need to be addressed more particularly.

C. **Values:** Specific values follow from the mindset of generative education. What is important, what we value, what we pay attention to – courage, joy, agency, authenticity, and more – flow from how we understand the role of education in the life of each child. These values are useful tools of perception; they allow us to act in the moment in ways that are in resonance with our fundamental mindset.

The text dives deeper into precisely what we mean by values, how they work to orient our daily actions, and then dives into 10 values we have found in all living examples of generative education.

D. **Practices:** Mindset and values become new habits and routines in the practices of generative education. We don't have all the answers. But we have learned a great deal from the generative-education environments we have experienced first hand. They all share certain fundamental practices such as an emphasis on oral language, effective literacy practices, a calm, focused learning environment, a strong culture of the entire school as a learning environment, and more. We are highly interested in understanding these practices better and identifying others so that generative education can be put into practice with greater ease.

This chapter of the text is the most concrete, describing actual policies, codes of conduct, organizational structures, points of curriculum, and more that recur in generative-education environments.

Ultimately our work is simply to support the emergence of generative education wherever it can. Part of this work, we have clearly seen, comes from providing textual descriptions that make sense, that give people something to hold onto intellectually, that invite them into conversation. If you are curious or inspired to find out more about a more life-affirming way to educate our children, then we encourage you to dive deeper into the full text of [*Generative Education: nurturing children in resonance with their unique role in the universe*](#) (2018) by Benjamin Smith, Chuck Peters, and Jennifer Wilson.

That text references several sources, including two videos made on the transformation and sustainability of St. George's Primary School in Battersea, London in which all children, many from severely deprived backgrounds, have learned to read each of the last six years, with a strong emphasis on wholeness and agency:

1. The story of the transformation of St. George's - From Crisis to Calm - <https://vimeo.com/152360941>
2. The story of how St. George's is continuing to thrive with staffing changes - Commitment and Consistency - <https://vimeo.com/178801747>