

REIMAGINING SPACE FOR THE CHILDREN



Photo by Ben McLeod, Unsplash

SEPTEMBER 2020

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dearest Friends of ReImagine Science,

I hope this letter finds you in good health. For our next newsletter, we had initially planned a business-as-usual update of our current projects, some of which have had intense progress, others which are bumping along, waiting for our attention. But instead, this moment in time is calling for my (and, I hope, our) attention – a depth of acknowledgement, honoring. Addressing.

I have spent the past decade leaning into the future, walking and working with many others to find paths toward thriving – thriving science, thriving society, thriving environment. And simultaneously aware that things in the natural world were breaking apart, changing dramatically. For many years I've said 'population crashes will wash up on a shore near us' – dramatic changes in our ecosystems could not but come to affect our human systems – everything is so interconnected. We honor the independent, strong spirit. But co-dependent we are.

Well, here we are, at a *moment*, to say the least. Covid-19 sits squarely in our laps. In this moment I feel a tremendous need, and opportunity. The path I myself have experienced tells me that a feeling of common purpose of thriving, one that includes *everyone* – is very difficult to create and maintain. The gaps, or limitations to thriving in our current set-ups, are widely being revealed.

One challenge rises to the top: our children.

I ask that you direct your gaze to society's youngest sector, who must spend every day *somewhere*. If we are to nurture the seeds of the future (and what does it say about us if we don't?), how we experience what they are experiencing, and how we make them the center of our priorities, will have a profound impact.

Why is this of interest to me? How is it woven into the work of an organization centered around science? **Science is the natural dwelling place for curiosity, discovery, wonder, and invention – our child-like qualities.** It is also the dwelling place for monitoring, assessing, checking and learning – the parental oversight that creates 'knowing,' awareness, and can also paint the path to desired outcomes.

Science forms a beautiful partnership with creativity, and the arts (all of which are native parts of human function). Change and necessity invite us to tap into the qualities that nature imbues us with, which should vibrantly come alive as we develop through childhood*.

Audrey Ichida, introduced to me by Anamaria Aristizabal because she was a fellow scientist, shifted my own gaze a handful of years ago. Audrey made the startling claim that children are the last, overlooked and under-served 'minority' of the US population. With no voting rights, they are a voiceless constituency in our representative government.

As a parent myself, who came up through the high-demand, your-time-is-our-time academic career path, I was made sensitive to an unwritten clause that, though a woman might become a mother, that should not take away from her professional duties. **Children may exist, their photos displayed at your desk, but other than that, they should be both not seen and not heard.** Never did I get a sense that my kids were championed, celebrated, or a focus of intent interest for those I worked for.

Now, as the world struggles with how to live in a modern era of a global pandemic that is stressing all of our systems, we are struggling too with what priorities to focus on.

It may seem simplistic, even silly, but I've been looking at change through a simple model of process, process, process, DECISION. Process, process, process, DECISION. Depending on

ones' personal power of position or the combined decisions of a group (again, process leading to group decision), 'decision' is what creates action, movement, outcome. The process may be as simple as viewing a TED talk or as complex as the Paris Climate Agreement. 'Decision' is our collective, and individual, choice.

I'd like to take you back about 6 months. This past Winter was as busy as most. March 20-22nd was the date set for our long-awaited Learning Journey launch, at the 1440 Multiversity in the Santa Cruz mountains. This project has been on a high-priority launch list for many years, in fact. As we watched the flu pandemic in China slowly unfolding, it seemed its presence was fairly far from the shores of California, which, along with Washington DC, is ReImagine Science's home base. But things began to unravel the weekend of March 16th and 17th, when I was in Ashland, Oregon. I attended an in-person 'Work that Reconnects' retreat, from the work of Joanna Macy and Molly Brown, authors of [Coming Back to Life](#).

I read *Coming Back to Life* after finding it on Keith McCandless's Liberating Structures reading list (noted in our blog [here](#)). After speaking with Molly Brown, I found we had a shared history of having lived in Los Alamos New Mexico. I felt the draw of a warm spirit with unabiding commitment to the future. I jumped on the chance to participate in one of Molly's workshops.

The [Work That Reconnects](#) is, indeed, about the great unraveling – creating resilient, pro-active capabilities by reconnecting with both nature and our human nature as our structures fall apart. The dramatic changes we are experiencing on many levels, through many lenses, have been the focus of so many current movements, initiatives, non-profits, and other organizations – including ReImagine Science.

So, beginning with the Work That Reconnects workshop on March 14-15th, just the week before, was also a fitting beginning for us at ReImagine Science for our learning journey launch, and this great transition we are *all* in. It was during the drive up to Oregon, after much consideration, that the decision was made to cancel the in-person retreat the very next weekend in Santa Cruz, and transition to an online-only event. News was coming fast. The change in group gatherings was already evident while at the retreat in Ashland. For those who decided to attend after all (many cancelled) we had a group agreement to maintain personal distances, regularly sanitize our hands, and to follow general no-spread practices. The head of the community center space we used is an emergency room physician – the decision to be together in the space was a mindful one.

On Sunday night, March 15th, California Governor Newsom was about to declare a shelter-in-place recommendation for elders. Molly asked that we leave an hour earlier than planned to drive across

the state border into California the following morning (we had ride-shared from Mt Shasta). The fast-moving nature of what was quickly coming upon us was visceral.

Our own retreat to 'build a better scientist,' in Santa Cruz the very next weekend would consist of 13 of us, gathering from around the world – to build a prototype for training scientists for the future. **This Learning Journey was, finally, the launch we had been working toward for many years.** Our 'virtualized' retreat, facilitated by Anamaria Aristazibal of [Leading Change](#), was highly energized, and felt very productive. I was proud of us for pulling it off and adapting so well.

As we left the energy of the retreat with plans in place for bi-monthly meetings and further work together over the following months, things changed around us dramatically. The shelters-in-place, students sent home from college, local schools shuttering their doors, and workplaces that became virtual made life feel like it was sliding to a halt. At the same time, for so many, it was speeding up instead. The trips and meetings that fell off my schedule also changed my own cadence of work, but did not slow it down.

I assert that education quickly became clear as one of the biggest issues, as it remains now.

We also have witnessed a number of conflicting social positions unravel during this time. Some people found their lives had decompressed, allowing for more time to be with their families, with less (or no) time in their cars. For some, work ramped up on Zoom. Others suddenly found themselves without jobs or a paycheck, increasing the social anxiety that permeates this country. And others were slammed, helping keep people alive, or seeing them through their unexpected passing; providing food and goods in the grocery stores; or delivering mail, which did not stop. **The support and infrastructure people deserve our deepest gratitude and debt.**

I vividly recall going to the grocery store in those early days, donning my gloves and mask, looking timidly at the store employees, wondering that they would put their lives on the line to keep us all stocked with food and necessities. And there were the aisles for toilet paper and cleaners, stripped bare. Clearly we had suddenly been launched into a new world, a different time. The meaning of life became palpable, even as a question. What matters most right now, I feel, is the questions we are asking.

For a small window of time – as March slid into April - possibilities for trying new things seemed to be all around. Parents now responsible for overseeing their children's remote learning could have used creative alternatives. The crisis that swept through the scientific community put all foreign nationals on notice, threatened with being deported or not having visas renewed. **It threatened**

to totally upend our current scientific education – at the undergrad, PhD and Post-doctoral levels. Change was barreling down the road and had caught up with everyone.

But then, suddenly, people seemed to become very busy with what was in front of them. What they knew to do from before, in minute detail, but with extra burden now – of PPE and washing of everything and doing work remotely and most of all, finding a space for the children. We are all very busy now, it feels to me and others I've spoken with, but a question lingers: *for what?*

So now we're here. What's next?

In the mix of this we fully acknowledge the darker sides that have come into full view. There's an over-ripe call for anti-racism in this country (which once considered itself fully democratic) – something that we must not turn a blind eye to when it comes to informing our children and offering them truth and hope.

What else is threshed into view? What needs addressing, before we fall back into patterns of the past in a last-ditch effort to return to normalcy? At ReImagine Science, we are asking: "What would it take to make whole, to give our next generation, the space they need for healthy growth so they can become creative, enchanted, fully loving adults, particularly in this time of great vulnerability?" I invite you, our loyal followers and supporters, to look to the future through the eyes of our children.

In life, as in science, it is the quality of our questions that gives life to new possibilities. It is clear that we are in a process. **So, I ask: *what decisions are we, collectively, making, and why? And for whom?***

If you would like to have a discussion about these ideas, please get in touch by emailing me at kennan@reimaginescience.org.

Best wishes,
Kennan Salinero

*Tobias Mayer, an admired explorer through the thickets of organizational design and author of [The People's Scrum](#), has a beautiful rendition of these ideals in a poem by Rufus Jones, featured in his [archival web collection](#).