AUTHOR'S NOTE

For someone who's used to speaking to groups and to communicating and sharing ideas in person, writing a book is a unique challenge. First, I had to choose what to include and what to leave out, knowing that there won't be a Q&A at the end during which you, the reader, can give a response or ask for more information. This is it. I have tried to give you enough information to understand it, but not so much that you're swamped by it. I didn't have room to give credit to all the thinkers and teachers whose work I relied on and those who made possible the very fact of my education and my opportunity to write this book. Beyond that I can't know who you are or what experiences, values and beliefs you bring to *The Future of Smart*. And there's much you don't know about me and how I came to these ideas. This author's note is in part my brief attempt to share that with you.

I'm a *third culture kid*. I first heard this term a few years ago. It refers to anyone raised in a culture that's not their parents' native culture, but who also lived in a third culture during a significant part of their formative childhood or adolescent years. My mother and father are ethnically Indian, but were both born and raised in Tanzania by families who migrated from the Indian subcontinent during the height of British colonial rule. My parents, their siblings and their siblings' children were born and identified as Tanzanian. But as African nationalist movements grew in strength and militancy during the 1950s and 1960s, non-black Africans like my relatives were forced to leave the country for reasons of safety and opportunity.

My parents' assets were locked in Tanzania when they arrived in Newark, New Jersey, with two suitcases each and a few hundred dollars. They soon came to realize they wouldn't be able to care for their infant daughter, so I was sent back to Tanzania to be raised by my extended family of Indian-Tanzanian aunts, uncles and cousins, along with ethnically Tanzanian household helpers—an atmosphere fraught with cultural complexities: biases, prejudices, power dynamics and residual colonial privilege. I returned to the US before kindergarten, an English language learner in today's terms. And while I was mostly educated in America, I spent a large part of my life between the ages of six and thirty living and studying outside the US in Botswana, India, Germany, England, France and the United Arab Emirates.

In the literature about third culture kids I read about an experience I had spent my whole life trying to grasp, to normalize. We are people who learned to move between cultures and adapt before we internalized any sense of belonging. We are often referred to as "cultural hybrids" or "global nomads." We are adept at building relationships across cultures and identities, in part because our identities are more diffuse, or more composite, than those of others. The downside is that we essentially belong nowhere. We see and experience cultures differently from those who have lived inside them. My background is no doubt part of why I was so drawn to schools that make identity and belonging a central part of their work. And the lens of cross-cultural nomad is an important part of how I explore education.

Though I live in the United States, my perspective on education is shaped as much by placelessness as by American-ness. Rather than seeking out the debates of the moment, I tend to look for elements of struggle that are common across cultures, across individuals and across communities.

Racism and colorism were a central part of my family's experience when I was growing up. In the 1970s and 1980s, realtors refused to show suburban homes to non-white families like mine. I was about seven when someone burned a cross on the lawn of a local black family, and later that year I was chased home by kids yelling "Go home black girl!" Yet when I was in Germany as an exchange student during my senior year of high school, and I told people I was American, they inevitably asked, "But what *are* you, really?" Members of my own family valued fair skin above dark skin, and rejected cousins in my generation who dated across religion and race. Even at age 11 I saw that my relatives in Tanzania and Botswana talked down to the local African help. By the time I took my first job, I knew something about how the American story of opportunity passes over Black people, Indigenous people and people of color (BIPOC), but when I married into a white family with roots in the Midwest, I also observed that people used to seeing themselves as the backbone of American prosperity were dealing with a sense of irrelevance and a dimming future. My sons' great-grandmother is a Nebraskan child of the Great Depression, a former Rosie the Riveter who will turn 100 this year. When I joined the family, I became one of the few non-white people she'd ever been close to. But the cast at her 100th birthday party will look like those old United Colors of Benetton commercials, with grandchildren and great-grandchildren representing Indian, Dominican, Puerto Rican, Guatemalan, Ethiopian, African-American and Filipino backgrounds—young people loved and raised by parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents who represent the full range of America's social, political and economic diversity. Many of these white relatives are figuring out how to raise and support BIPOC children in a system that is unfair to those children, even as

they grapple with a sense that their own identities as Americans are being called into question.

As a child learning English in school well before we had the phrase “English language learner”; as a young Indian girl who grew up navigating white, suburban schools with a weird name; as someone whose parents spent years apart from their daughter in order to establish themselves in a “good” school district, I’ve seen many facets of America’s unequal education system. As a teacher in a Newark, New Jersey, public school, I worked with lots of kids growing up as I did, learning English as they went—kids who didn’t see themselves represented in any stories or textbooks they were given. I have seen how decades of reform aimed at increasing equity have actually narrowed our definitions of success in school and life, and how this shift has devalued many of the capabilities people believe they have to offer, including many people in my own family. These experiences inform what I mean when I talk about building an education system that can serve all students well.

If we are honest with ourselves, we can see that our efforts toward educational equity in the past 20 years haven’t made much difference. We have documented some types of inequity, and in many cases have raised awareness of them, but we have done little to actually change them. And, in the process, we have created new forms of inequity.

In *The Future of Smart* I trace two dueling forces in education back to an essential conflict in human experience across cultures, a conflict that begins with the two hemispheres of the human brain. Drawing on the work of historians of the science of culture, I cite a massive shift in our experience of the world that began during the Scientific Revolution and became a dominant worldview that changed the very meaning of education.[1] Only by fully understanding this

shift, and its legacy in contemporary education, can we ever hope to shift our education system.

Is education a process of molding children to certain economic, social and political systems? Or is it about helping young people become fully themselves and develop their personhood and their most human capabilities—empathy, compassion, collaboration, communication? These two sets of priorities lead to very different ways of responding to learners—different ways of knowing and shaping the world.

Seeing ourselves as part of a larger story, united across time and nationalities, can be empowering. This challenge has been around for centuries. It is larger than our moment, and though we should commit ourselves as fully as possible to addressing it, we cannot expect to resolve it quickly and easily. The first part of this book broadens the question of how to improve education beyond the boundaries of the US and beyond this moment in history. The power dynamic we see in American schools today is not uniquely American. I saw it in Tanzania, Botswana and India, where black and brown children still sit in English-language-medium classes, in schools built by the British in an effort to "civilize" them, teaching them to appreciate and reify English culture as superior. The same dynamic defined American Indian Residential Schools, and it's present in today's curricula in which non-dominant cultures are written out of American history textbooks, and curricula more broadly.

I would like to clarify several terms I use throughout the book. I recognize that some of them have particular meanings in an American

or even Western context, but I aim to use them in ways that apply across cultures. My hope in doing so is to help us think beyond our local conflicts and contexts to explore the overarching patterns and themes of our shared human story.

Like many scholars and thinkers before me, I use the term *Cartesian-Newtonian* as shorthand for a worldview that emerged in the 1500s in Europe. Though I focus on the limitations of this worldview, I do not mean to dismiss the contributions Descartes and Newton made to overall human progress, which I believe were substantial. I chose Cartesian-Newtonian over *mechanistic-reductionistic* because the dynamics I'm describing are broader than the latter two adjectives suggest. In education, a focus on correcting mechanistic and reductionistic tendencies has led to superficial changes; we have neglected to address the underlying beliefs and values that give rise to mechanistic and reductionistic approaches, and thus the problems persist.

The term *indigenous* has a broader definition in this book than "those peoples who bore the brunt of colonization in the US and abroad." I chose the term because it refers to "growing, living or occurring naturally in a particular place" and "relating to the earliest known inhabitants of a place." For the story I'm telling, which begins in Europe before mass global colonization, I use the term to refer to ways of being and organizing human life before the arrival of outside religious, political and economic forces—that is, life organized by intuitive, local values rather than values imposed or inculcated from the outside. On balance it appears that human societies were more alike than different before the practice of imposing values on other cultures became widespread, in terms of how people related to the land and to each other. I do not mean to glorify human experience

or human societies pre-1500. War, power struggle, human sacrifice, cruelty—these are all constant in human history going back as far as we can know. But something changed fundamentally around 500 years ago that sets the time period since then apart from the tens of thousands of years of human existence before it. I use the term *holistic-indigenous* to describe this preexisting, foundational worldview, and as a counterpoint to the Cartesian-Newtonian worldview.

Finally, the term *liberatory*, which I use frequently to refer to certain approaches to education, has long been associated with Paulo Freire and other leaders in *critical pedagogy* and community-schools movements. My intention in using the term *liberatory* is not to minimize or appropriate their ideas, but to underscore the concept that we can effect social change through education that is based on consciousness-raising and engagement with oppressive forces. There were forebears of what has come to be known as critical pedagogy, many of them European, who were undeniably committed to liberatory education. Their work was a response to the harshness and inhumanity of the first efforts to formalize education for the masses, and they argued for a focus on the inherent value and potential in each child.

The educational thinkers I elevate in Part 1 of this book were white and privileged in their own ways, and their rise to prominence is inextricable from this privilege. Their ideas were not especially popular in their own communities at the time; indeed, they received warmer receptions outside of Europe than in their countries of origin. They were pushing against mainstream beliefs about young people and education, and they put their privilege on the line for ideas and work that mattered to them. While their models often served the more neglected children of their times, the present-day schools that grew out of those models have long been associated with

privileged communities—in America and abroad. I am heartened now to see these models embraced (and improved upon) by leaders and communities of color who are recognizing these models for their explicit focus on empowerment.

I believe these schools can be essential parts of a genuine move toward equity in education. To get there we will need to support the codification and expansion of the most promising human-centered/liberatory models that have emerged in recent years, and of schools designed *with* communities to meet the specific needs of their children. Appendix B provides a list of some such programs, especially those serving BIPOC and lower-income communities.

At a time when fear and anger dominate too many of our conversations, I believe that real change in education will only come through healing-centered approaches. By "healing-centered" I mean those that recognize how certain dominant worldviews have hurt—and are still hurting—all of us by cutting us off from our common humanity. *How* we do this work, *how* we talk to each other about change—educational or otherwise—will make all the difference.

INTRODUCTION

Many teachers looking back at their careers will remember at least one student like Joel. Joel was the one I was still thinking and worrying about when I left my classroom in Newark each night. He was the child whose story—father in prison; single, immigrant mother doing her best to raise three children; early head injury that led to cognitive and behavioral issues—led me to take him and his siblings to my parents' suburban neighborhood for the kind of Halloween night they don't have in Newark. He was the slight, skinny boy who could wear down my resolve with a crooked grin. He was the child who tried to protect me when another student went after a classmate with a pair of scissors.

Joel didn't fit neatly into any box, yet it was my job to build a box and escort him into it. He was the boy I desperately wanted to teach and serve, but simply didn't know how.

This was in 1998. I was a young teacher. I was hopeful. And my first few years of teaching nearly broke me. I didn't have words for the emotions, but I was yearning to do and be something for my students that felt elusive at the time. I felt I was failing in some intangible way.

I was interested in a lot of subjects in college, from economics to international relations to medicine. But whenever I thought about how I wanted to spend my professional life, it seemed to me that education sat at the heart of everything else; that the problems we spend so much time, effort and money trying to fix begin with what we teach our children. It would solve more problems to teach them that each person is valuable; that no one is more valuable than another; and that

we should respect difference, take responsibility for ourselves and our actions, and be accountable for our decisions and their effects on others. Systems are made up of people. Education is about shaping young people so that they can go on to shape the world.

I studied hard during my teacher training, completing assignments, learning theories and delivering practice lessons. I also spent months shadowing teachers who had meant the most to me when I was in school, trying to learn from their decades of experience—watching, asking questions, trying somehow to integrate their wisdom into my own practice. But by the time Joel entered my classroom, I knew there was something missing in my work, in my approach, in me.

I decided to take a break for two years to let my heart and body recover. I took a job with the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, which supports learning and the arts, and contributed to schools in New York, New Jersey and the New England states. During my visits to some of the schools in this network is when I first *felt it*. I say "felt it" because my first reaction had nothing to do with my intellect. It would take years before I could articulate and explain what I felt in those classrooms.

The first place I remember this happening was at Edgemont Montessori School, a public magnet Montessori school in Montclair, New Jersey, a few miles from the classroom in which I had taught. While doing a site visit for Dodge, I walked into what I thought was a kindergarten classroom to find 35 bodies of widely varying size. There was a buzz of voices and there were pockets of movement, but it wasn't chaotic, and no teacher was intervening to quiet things down. At least four children came up right away to shake my hand and formally greet me. In one corner a child was using a sharp kitchen knife to cut bananas, placing the slices on a table for his classmates.

Nearby a little boy was washing the dirty glass plates other children brought to the sink. Two children were seated together next to a white mat; the girl, who looked to be about five, arranged colored blocks carefully into a large box frame, while the little boy, about three, sat and watched. Another pair was seated at a "peace table" on which were candles, chimes and a single poppy in a vase. One boy was just wandering around the room watching the other children.

The teacher told me that the children were about two hours into their three-hour daily "work cycle," an uninterrupted period during which they were free to work on whatever they chose. I sat down with the little girl with the frame, which she explained was the trinomial cube. I had no idea what a trinomial cube was or what she was doing, but as she looked at the last three blocks on the mat she seemed to realize that she had done something wrong. She removed the blocks from the box and started over as the little boy got up and wandered away to pick up a broom and sweep the snack area.

Later, when I met with the two classroom teachers, they told me about the trinomial cube, a toy designed to help children practice visual and small-motor skills, which in the process subtly introduces them to the concepts of the algebraic trinomial formula. And they described *Cosmic Studies*, an interdisciplinary approach to exploring the connections between science, social studies and culture. They also talked about grace and courtesy and the desire children have at this age to engage with others in a dignified way. The teachers had been with many of the children for several years, and seemed to know them just as well as people as they knew them as students. They knew where each child was socially and emotionally, and their individual interests, strengths and areas for growth, and they could speak about all this in relation to theories

of child development that I had studied but had rarely heard discussed in the schools where I had taught. They talked about work, purpose and children's spirits.

I went to another classroom of students who were seven and eight, the same age range I had taught in Newark. But the focus of conversation there was not daily learning objectives, specific subjects or interim assessment scores. Children were talking about interdisciplinary projects focused on their areas of interest. They were teaching each other how to play on dynamic math boards, and solving multiplication problems I hadn't learned about until middle school. They were writing reports on the outcomes of community-based projects that helped them understand local history.

During my two years with Dodge I visited many schools, and most didn't affect me as Edgemont Montessori had. But a handful did give me that same feeling, which I came to recognize instantly upon entering classrooms in the Met School in Providence, Rhode Island; Lake Country Day School in Minneapolis, Minnesota; the Waldorf School of Princeton in Princeton, New Jersey; the Annie Fisher magnet school in Hartford, Connecticut; and the High School for Recording Arts in St. Paul, Minnesota. Over time I realized that what drew me to these schools was the feeling I had the moment I walked in, which I think is a version of what the children and teachers must feel. It is an experience comprised of a thousand dynamic interactions—a sense of welcome, curiosity and openness, combined with deep knowledge and expertise. It's a hard feeling to describe, but it emerges from a philosophy, a plan and a set of capabilities that I explore in this book.

Watching teachers interact with young people in these classrooms also made me feel at once sad and joyful. Sad because it was so

unlike what I had experienced as a student, despite having some excellent teachers, and so far from what I had been able to create for students like Joel. Joyful because I knew what I was seeing was quite profound, and that educators were bringing it to students from different backgrounds in ways that honored and celebrated their uniqueness. Sad because I realized I might have been a very different person had I spent time as a child in classrooms like these—not only a better educator but maybe a better friend, sibling, daughter. Joyful because I could see that these students were being engaged not only as learners but as human beings, relating to themselves and to each other in ways I knew would change their paths through life.

Even as I was visiting these schools, the Dodge Foundation was working on a project at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles focused on the role that arts play in education and learning. The foundation brought in a little-known professor from England who had just authored a government report advocating for more investment in school-based arts programming. His name was Ken Robinson. The answer to the question he asked—Do schools kill creativity?—seemed pretty obvious to many of us: Yes. But not all schools. The schools I found so compelling did the opposite. The people in them, adults and students alike, seemed to be alive and mutually engaged in a way I hadn't seen in many schools. However, what Robinson, I and others learned in the coming years is that fostering creativity and curiosity is not as straightforward as integrating the arts or talking about moving beyond the *industrial model* of education—also called the *factory model* or the *factory/industrial model*. Commitment to these ideas alone hasn't changed much in the last two decades. In *The Future of Smart* I explain what has kept us stuck for so long, and describe the next steps we should take.

This book's title was inspired partly by my two sons. They learned the concept of being smart quite early. Each of them began labeling kids in their classes "smart" (and others not) based on associations with the word that they'd learned from babysitters, relatives and, sadly, me. "Smart" meant good at the things most schools tell us are important: reading and writing well, understanding mathematical operations, finishing tests quickly and knowing lots of facts. In different ways, each of my sons measured himself against this standard and found himself lacking. One is a reluctant reader who prefers to access information through audio and video. He was flagged for years in school because he left out words when reading out loud, which he hates to do. The other is a strong student but he is a bit scattered, always thinking about five things at once, often when he is expected to be paying attention. As a parent it broke my heart to see how they internalized the messages they received about all the ways in which they didn't measure up to our society's conception of "smart." I of course see each of them as a unique constellation of potential. My reluctant reader can hold variables in his head visually in a way that lets him see many moves ahead on a chessboard and beat everyone in the family at strategy games. He has a wicked sense of humor and a natural athleticism. His brother taught himself to dissect a fetal pig and mastered the basics of surgical suturing, and launched a baking business a few months later.

Like many parents, I struggle with a painful tension: I know the unique brilliance of my children, but I also know the game of education in America, and what is at stake. And for those from families with less privilege, including Black, brown, lower-income and immigrant families, the stakes are even higher. In this game, much of a child's uniqueness is dismissed as either irrelevant or problematic. The

concept of *smart* keeps us from focusing primarily on our children's fulfillment and their development into thriving young people; it keeps them from developing the skills most critical to their developmental stage, and from being who they are for fear of not becoming who the game says they should be. This is a game in which the question is "*Are* you smart?" rather than "*How* are you smart?"

"Smart" has come to represent a flattened, largely dehumanized idea of human capability. It's an idea based on centuries of bias about what matters in people and cultures, and what doesn't. This idea of smart is more than just a foundation for what we do in schools; it's one of the organizing principles of our society. And it poses an existential threat to the development of our children and our communities. This book is an exploration of what *smart* should mean and what our system of education should value most: the complexity and richness of our humanity and the many different ways in which people engage with and contribute to the world. The schools that gave me that feeling, I now realize, were the ones built entirely around an idea of *smart* centered on these latter values.

I left the Dodge Foundation convinced that we shouldn't be building more schools like the ones where I had been a student and a teacher; that we should be building more like Edgemont Montessori School, the Met School and High School for Recording Arts. But I had very little idea about how to do that. Many of the debates about education at that time, the late 1990s, focused on the differences between school governance models—public district, public charter, private and magnet. (We're still hung up on these questions today.)

We talked about magnet schools as though this term, *magnet*, said something meaningful about the kind of education provided—something beyond reintegrating schools that housing, transportation and school-funding policies in urban districts had helped segregate. Nobody was really talking about why magnet schools that adopted the Montessori model, for example, seemed to attract wealthy, educated, white families to urban districts that otherwise serve mostly poor kids of color. Nobody was talking about the fact that the most privileged people seemed to get their kids into schools that prioritized a sense of wholeness, or the inherent value of each child, while those schools were mostly out of reach for underprivileged families.

As charter-school laws were established, ostensibly to allow more diverse approaches to education to exist in the public system, efforts soon converged on opening up no-excuses college preparatory schools that would raise test scores and close academic achievement gaps—"better" versions of the Newark school I taught in. Efforts to design schools that reflect human-centered guiding values, led by leaders like Ted Sizer of the Coalition of Essential Schools and Warren Simmons at the Annenberg Institute, were sidelined by a well-funded rush toward standards-based reform, with its emphasis on high-stakes accountability.

My research and career since then have focused on two intersecting areas: understanding what was different about the few schools that gave me that indescribable feeling, and how to make more of those schools available to more students in the public system. I wanted to understand what values, decisions and experiences made these environments so powerful and welcoming—how they managed to produce creative, independent, well-adjusted young adults who went on to engaged, fulfilled and purposeful lives. Privileged families would pay massive

tuitions to send their children to private versions of these schools even though I had seen amazing examples of similar programs that served diverse student populations in the public sector. My intuition was that the differences between these and more conventional schools were far more subtle and far more critical to understand than public education experts were saying at the time. I believed that if we could understand what made these schools unique—what distinguished them from so many schools that were trying to improve how they worked but with less success—we might gain insight into how to improve education as a system.

I refer to these schools as having holistic-indigenous learning programs and as being human-centered/liberatory—terms I describe in detail later in the book. I use "HIL" (for holistic-indigenous learning) as a catch-all term for both labels because I no longer see them as separate; the holistic-indigenous worldview that I describe in part 1 must inform what is called the human-centered or liberatory approach to education, and vice versa, in order for us to find the right path forward.

The last three decades of education reform have been hobbled by biases and blind spots that some call "white supremacy culture," but which I prefer to call "modern-Western supremacy culture." A defining trait of this dominant culture is a relentless sense of urgency—a sense that the best course of action is whatever is quickest and provides the most visible, replicable results. But I believe the best solutions in education are ones that enable us to reflect, engage communities, and work toward sustainable ways of being and organizing ourselves around the education of our children that will, to paraphrase an ancient Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) principle, remain in place for the seventh generation beyond us.

I have tried in my career to learn what it would take to bring these distinctions into the work of transforming American education. I kept hearing from educators in HIL programs that sustaining them within the public sector was getting harder all the time. Even as the field of education began to address questions of equity, we were suppressing or discouraging the very type of education that seemed to be the best solution. Why was this happening, and what could be done about it? What were the specific barriers to change, and what would it take to shift a system as complex and decentralized as American education? How could we bring legitimacy to these programs when the people in power were still communicating in the language of the conventional, factory model?

The Future of Smart is a synthesis of two decades of explorations, conversations, experiences, questions and insights. It is less a how-to guide than a survey of the landscape, one that I hope will help the field of human-centered education coalesce and increase its influence. With this book I don't intend to argue for one right way of doing education, but I do believe the entire system has to change. We need to refocus our energy on cultivating the unique abilities of each young person rather than continue to reinforce largely arbitrary and outdated hierarchies of merit.

The first part of the book examines the history of our education system. It may feel out of place in a book that's ultimately a vision of education's future, but any holistic change begins with a recognition of context. Just as we need to understand every child in terms of where they come from, where they live and how they think, we need to see

the present state of education in terms of its origins and the values that underlie it. Chapter 1 is about the big picture—the centuries-long interchange between two perspectives that mirrors the dialogue between the left and right hemispheres of our brains. Chapters 2 and 3 tell the story of a society driven by a left-hemispheric impulse to categorize and quantify that divided school-based learning into discrete subjects and assessed all students against the same narrow criteria. At the same time these chapters trace the history of a more holistic, indigenous, right-hemispheric worldview that has always been with us, though it has often been stigmatized or ignored.

Though these two outlooks have coexisted all along, the left-hemispheric worldview has been unusually dominant in the last 500 years. Before the emergence of modern society and the Scientific Revolution, people lived in small, dispersed communities. Their daily lives were tied to the earth and its rhythms, and neighbors were instinctively and deeply connected. Interdependence was taken for granted. The modern West emerged by emphasizing the individual over the collective; objectivity over felt experience; dominance over symbiosis. The energy of that shift propelled colonization, the establishment of what would become the United States, and the Industrial Revolution. But much was lost in the process, including indigenous and collective ways of being and knowing. There's much more to say about that story than I included; my focus in this book is on the aspects that most influenced the state of education today.

Our current assumptions about school and learning have a long and complicated history, and that history is a burden and a guide. Just as we chose to define learning in left-hemispheric terms when mass, factory schooling began in the eighteenth century, we can now choose to reconceive it. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 explore how that

reconceptualization works and what it looks like. You will see how and why educational programs that reflect a holistic-indigenous approach have struggled to find and keep their footing in a landscape dominated by the conventional approach. These programs organize themselves intentionally around relationship, community context, diversity, identity formation, uniqueness and deep, dynamic learning. This approach not only reflects the values of social and racial justice we claim to aspire to, it also aligns with what science now tells us about the human brain, learning, human development, neurodiversity and the future of the working world. For the first time since the advent of mass schooling and the development of the factory model, the goals of human-centered/liberatory education are explicitly aligned with what neuroscience, economics and the social sciences tell us about our children and the world that awaits them. The schools already working from this approach can be our models as we learn what it will take to move forward.

By the time you reach chapter 7, you will have an understanding of the assumptions that underlie much of the recent thinking about what educators should do, what students need and how people learn. You will have seen how a more intentional approach to designing educational opportunities can prepare young people for the future of work, and how it can better respond to the needs of a vastly diverse population whose children have unique abilities and learning strengths. Chapter 7 proposes a pathway—a broader, more dynamic field for inquiry about potential solutions.

An Opening

As a woman of color working on public education in America, I have, over time, found my tribe at the edges of the field—or entirely

outside it. This group includes brilliant and generous educators, school leaders, students, parents, researchers and advocates, people who have found a home in Montessori, Waldorf and United World College schools or in the worlds of alternative education, youth development and outdoor education. Some are connected to holistic education, progressive education, unschooling, forest schools, self-directed education—even homeschooling and learning co-ops. They touch the lives of students from truly diverse backgrounds: Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, white; wealthy, middle class, low-income; students all along the continuum of cognitive, affective, social and emotional capabilities; students who have overcome trauma in many different forms and those who have not. It includes many individual teachers who work in public systems and do amazing, life-changing work with the children who are lucky enough to be their students, but who are exhausted by constantly dancing and feinting and fighting against the larger system to do education in the way they know is best for nurturing the humanity and unique potential of the young people they work with each day. Because they often work within different siloes, these educators and advocates can't always see the common goals that unite them, or articulate the shared vision of education they are advancing for the rest of us to consider. I hope *The Future of Smart* will help make clearer why educational approaches that at first glance appear wildly different are actually similar in fundamental ways, enabling these practitioners to see themselves as "sticks in a bundle," able to collectively push for change in new ways.

I've been turning over their stories and thinking about writing this book since 2005, but the moment has never been quite right. In the past few years, though, something has changed; not only for me but for colleagues and mentors who have been in this work since

the 1960s or 1970s. At this moment it feels like our nation's choices about how to balance the values of the left and right hemispheres—of individualism and collectivism, progress and sustainability, technology and relationship—will determine a great deal about the future. The choices we make now in education will have ramifications for the climate, the economy, the criminal justice system, the weaponization of race in America, and our definition of human well-being.

The debates we are having in these very different spheres of our nation's life are, in essence, one and the same. They are rooted in a centuries-old choice to disrupt the long-standing dynamics of human connection and community in favor of one view of science, prosperity and expansion. This disruption was birthed in Europe in the 1500s, and it happened gradually. Its perpetuation has not been intentional—not in the sense of conscious choices made by individuals. It is not limited to America, but it is entrenched here in particularly powerful ways for reasons that other scholars have explored more thoroughly than I can.[2]

Mass education is among the last systems to take shape and to change in a society, in part because we use it to pass along the dominant values of the time. When we prioritize individualism, competition and rigged versions of meritocracy, education becomes a tool for preserving privilege and justifying inequality. But when the values we focus on defend every person's right to flourish, education can be a vehicle for individual and collective well-being. Only then do we fully realize that, in Martin Luther King Jr.'s words, "We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny."

As I write this introduction, the truth of our global interconnectedness has manifested in the increasing threat of climate change, a world-

altering pandemic, and unrest around the world in response to injustice and inequality. America is convulsing as these global events converge with our legacy of genocide, dehumanization and systemic oppression in the wake of a leader who boldly sought to undermine essential norms of democracy and due process.

My hope is that *The Future of Smart*, while focused on education, can provide a new perspective on the roots of these broader challenges and, in doing so, contribute to a new body of work emerging from holistic, ecologically-minded communities and cultures whose voices have long been silenced and devalued in America. Our conversations about education must be driven by our deepest convictions about who we want to be as a people and a nation and who we want our children to become. Such conversations are the only means by which we will commit ourselves to investing in the long-term work needed to provide our children with an abiding faith in their humanity and worth and prepare them to build a world that reflects our highest vision of who we can be individually and collectively.