



Co-Designing the Future of Education with Citizens

CASE STUDY

Situational Context

The current Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, leader of the New Zealand Labour Party, took office on October 26th, 2017. A key priority for her government was a thirty year strategy to reform the education system. The strategy to execute on that priority relied on two bold decisions:

- 1. **Take a 30-year approach to go beyond small wins and achieve something truly transformational across three generations.**
- 2. **Be citizen centric and develop the reform through collaboration across all key stakeholders in the system to prevent bureaucratic and politics driven decisions.**

In February 2018, the Minister of Education Chris Hipkins followed up on this commitment by releasing details of an extensive three-year work programme to develop an education system that meets the needs of the 21st century from early learning through secondary and beyond.



Minister Hipkins believes the system needs to be inclusive and able to adapt to the needs of the modern world. It needs to engage every learner in a much more personalised learning experience. He stressed that achieving successful change would not happen “by dictating what ought to be done”. Instead, he committed to seeking broad engagement across the sector and the community as part of the change process.

A collaborative approach to the reform program

Minister Chris Hipkins’ decided to launch a national Education Conversation, Kōrero Mātauranga, to meaningfully engage with all New Zealanders.

He asked to kick-start the Education Conversation with two “Education Summits” - large scale 800 person events in Christchurch and Auckland that would bring together all walks of life: students, parents, teachers, academics and employers, etc. A special emphasis was placed on inviting people and communities whose voices are not always heard – Māori, Pacific people, children and young people, and people with disabilities and learning support needs, junior teachers in small rural schools, young people on probation and small employers.

The objective of the events was to “Engage in a meaningful dialogue to surface the diversity of our

perspectives and lay the foundation of a better and more inclusive education system for future generations of New Zealanders”. They were designed to ignite a national conversation about the future of education. By hosting the most inclusive and diverse education conversation ever held in New Zealand and using values as a participatory decision-making framework; the events re-framed the conversation from a problem that public servants single-handedly had a responsibility to solve - to a distributed responsibility and participatory citizen-driven conversation.

By the end of the summits, participants demonstrated individual and community ownership for the tangible change that would be required for such a large scale reform program, restoring confidence in the public service and setting manageable expectations for the road ahead.

Our Approach

CO-DESIGN AT ALL LEVELS

If the future of education was to be co-designed collaboratively with citizens, then the summits themselves also had to be co-designed by a diverse group representing multiple perspectives across the sector.

➡ We assembled a ‘design council’ composed of twelve representatives from across the sector and held six co-design workshops to develop a shared understanding of the context and challenges, a shared vision and ambition for the outcomes, and a shared sense of ownership of the process.

➡ In parallel to engage deeper with a limited number of stakeholder groups whose support we believed was essential, we developed bespoke engagement pathways with multiple touch-points. We focused on disability groups, Maori representatives, businesses, parents & students.

Our approach relied on three core principles that informed every aspect of the design process.

BALANCING CONTENT AND EXPERIENCE

The summits had to deliver on two distinct but profoundly complementary considerations: on one hand, create a holistic experience that enables authentic, inclusive, and enjoyable conversations while on the other hand, producing a quality tangible outcome to inform the education reform.

➡ Content: we curated over 40 speakers per summit, local and international, from multiple fields, as well as a broad range of videos and articles to re-frame the thinking. We also assembled a reference group of 50 representatives from across the sector to challenge our thinking during co-design. Finally, we deployed a digital solution to manage in real-time the inputs and outputs of the hundred conversations taking place simultaneously at any point in time and ensure full traceability of any idea surfaced at any time.

➡ Experience: we designed a physical space and a collaborative journey over the two days to create a safe space for everyone to express the views and emotions, and to foster authentic dialogue. In particular we designed processes to manage the energy, the flows of people, and the rhythm and pace of the work.

PARTICIPANT CENTRICITY

Although the scale and importance of the summits required robust pre-planning and impeccable execution, we needed to preserve a high degree of situational awareness and operational flexibility, before and during the events, to ensure that real time participant feedback would be heard, analysed and used in real time to course correct as the process unfolded.

➡ We designed a solid operational backbone to deliver a seamless experience throughout the two days. In addition, our team was resourced and our process designed to enrich the main program with multiple possibilities for participants to engage and contribute in a bespoke way that would genuinely inform the unfolding of the session.

In Auckland, a group of students aged 12 to 18 even decided to claim a space and have their own conversations, in their own terms, before reporting their conclusions out to adults later in the day.



We were faced with a very challenging political time-line with less than 7 weeks between the start of the project and the first summit in Christchurch. With the right dose of pragmatism and agility from everyone involved, we managed to co-design the two summits and create the conditions for a successful delivery within a time frame no-one imagined possible.

Key Design Features

CAREFUL CURATION OF PARTICIPANTS

One of the first and most important questions to address was ‘who should be involved and how?’ in order to be truly inclusive without compromising on the level of ambition and tight deadlines. A decision was made to assemble a group of participants that would be truly representative of the diversity of perspectives and opinions across the sector and in doing so, to give a voice to people we usually don’t hear rather than creating yet another platform for (self-proclaimed) spokespersons and community representatives.

Ultimately, we managed to balance the representation of age groups (from 12 yo), ethnic backgrounds, social classes, roles in the system (students, parents, teachers, headmasters, board members, etc.) or specific learning needs. Those people were nominated at local level through an open process, thus bypassing the institutional filters of the various interest groups. The perspectives of those groups was built into the process through a number of stakeholder engagement workshops during co-design.

By the end of the summits, everyone felt respected, included and listened to.

THE HUB STRUCTURE

The “future of education” is a very broad and therefore somewhat overwhelming topic. We broke it down into six holistic sub-topics to create different entry points into the main conversation. Each of those sub-topics was hosted in a specific space – a hub – which were broken down into coffee tables of eight people to allow for intimate conversations.

Participants could attend up to three hubs in the different rounds of work and got regular opportunities to connect conversations and ideas in a central sense-making space. The content produced at each table was captured and displayed in the hubs, while our team built visual models of emerging concepts and trends in the central space.



HUB

H1

Ways of learning

Ngā ara ako

HUB

H2

Ways of teaching

Ngā ara whakaako

HUB

H3

Lifelong learning

Te ara mutunga kore o te whai i te mātauranga

HUB

H4

Skills, competencies & behaviours

Ngā pukenga, ngā āheitunga me ngā whanonga

HUB

H5

Enabling self-fulfilling lives

E whāia ana te iti kahurangi

HUB

H6

Thriving as a society

Mauri mahi, mauri ora.

SENSE MAKING

One of our challenges was to break down the main conversation into “manageable chunks” that people could engage with – we did that through hubs and coffee tables - while ‘re-assembling’ all the insights into patterns and trends that made sense and faithfully represented the sum of individual contributions. The integrity and transparency of that process would be essential to preserve the trust that participants would place into the summit.

Each piece of content produced by participants on templates, was rigorously captured, logged and made available in real-time physically in their hub, and digitally through a network of 100 iPads across

the room. At any point in time, any participant could access any template they had worked on.

In parallel to this process, a ‘sense-making team’ was analysing the content being produced to detect recurring ideas and stand-out contradictions. A team of visual facilitators captured the key insights in close real-time through large scale visual models visible to all participants. These visuals triggered further conversations as participants engaged with the team to understand the process and iterate on the content. Post summit, the data has been processed in AI engines to produce deeper and more objective insights from the 1,000+ templates that were produced.

From a completely different vantage point, a team of twelve Maori artists created six bespoke pou – Maori painted wooden posts – to create their own real-time representation of the stories and the energy emerging from the room. These artistic artefacts became an additional way for participants to engage and now constitute a testimony of the quality of our conversation and a legacy for future generations.

6.

Key Design Features

INDIVIDUAL PATHWAYS

We were very mindful of the diversity of profiles, styles and expectations amongst the participants and we deliberately designed the sessions to allow each individual to create their own path throughout the two days. The hubs created different entry points into the conversation and participants were free to choose the topics they related the most to. For those who did not choose to participate in ‘organised’ discussions, we created a range of options for attendees to participate in conversations based on their preferences and abilities: six café areas, six libraries where people could gather, discuss or reflect, two individual booths to record individual messages and six screening tables for individuals to stream a selection of videos about the current and possible future experiences of education throughout the world.

The physical lay out was designed to enable accessibility of access across and around the Summit, in particular for participants with special needs.

FOCUS ON FUTURE AND POSSIBILITIES

To avoid getting stuck in unsolvable debates about which part of the system most needed fixing today, and to stay away from incremental thinking, we positioned the conversation thirty years into the future. We invested the entire first day to re-frame the conversation through external contributions: over eighty speakers from around the world attended the sessions with talks being offered in multi-languages and in a variety of scenarios.

That focus on the future allowed us to openly explore possibilities and to re-contextualise the conversation. The group realised that the future could be created and that they had not only the possibility but the responsibility to create it together.



Values as a Differentiator

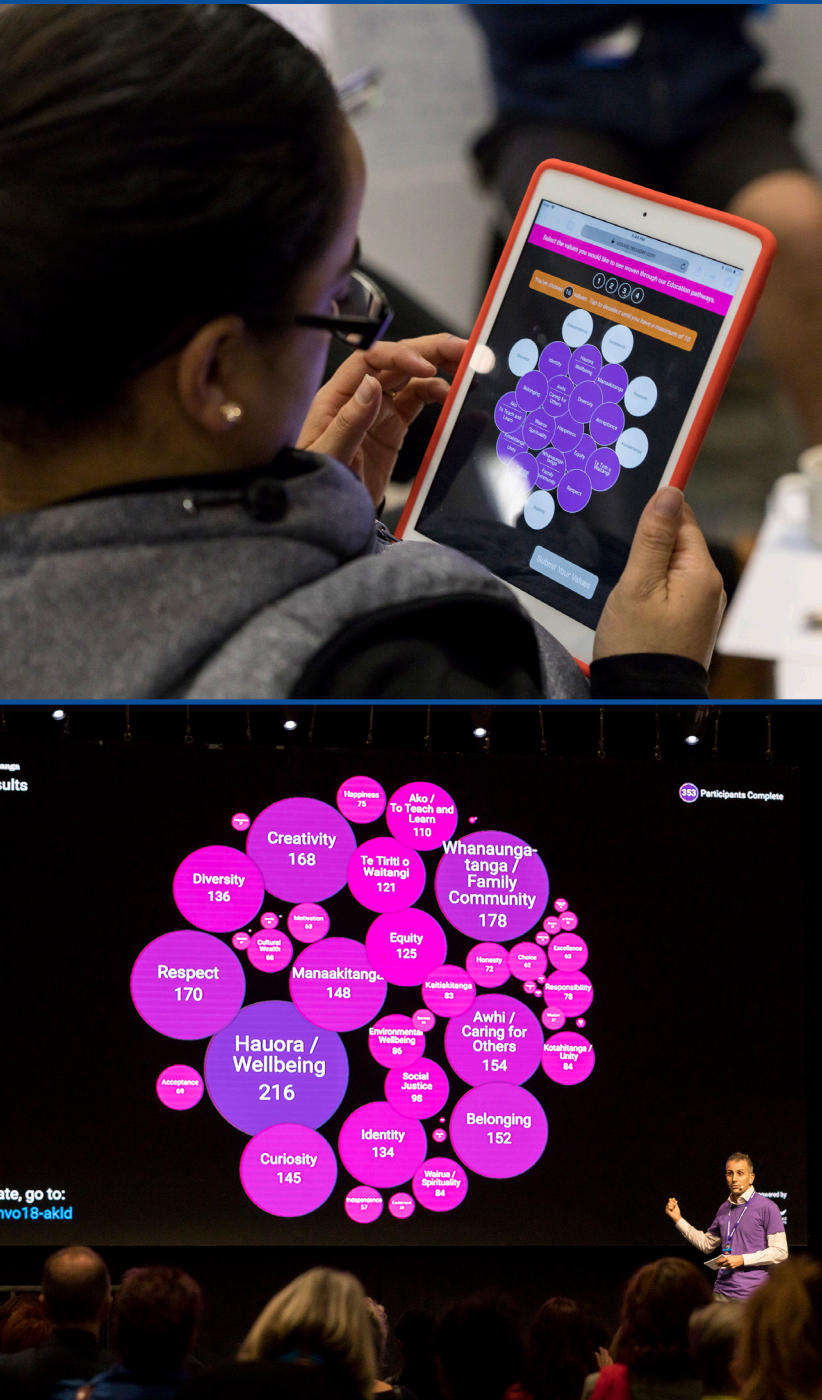
During the sessions, participants were introduced to the Watershed Values Explorer Interactive digital tool. The Values Explorer enables groups of people to define, share and explore their values in relation to a question or context. It is designed to be a ‘conversation starter’, creating a common shared experience and language set for participants to begin exploring a topic that matters to them. In the Summits, participants were asked to select up to ten values (out of a custom curated list of forty-nine) that they felt should be “woven into New Zealand’s education pathways”.

The three most important values chosen by over 1500 participants across two Summits were “Hauora – Well-being”, “Creativity” and “Whānaungatanga - Family Community”. Historically, the education system in New Zealand - and arguably around the world - have been oriented around academic achievement, individual performance and behaviour. This was a strong statement that showed up time and time again in both summits across discussions, speaker panels, and participant feedback and in small group forums.

By bringing to the surface the values that shape why and how people make decisions we were able to create a decision-making framework that shaped the creation of the key elements of the Future of Education strategy. This enabled the public service to move beyond their own assumptions about what people wanted, relying instead on data driven insights that at a very deep level, reflected the principles people wanted the education system to adhere to. The value in bringing this level of depth of meaning and understanding to the conversations was profound for both the development of the system and as a thinking tool for how people considered their own biases and assumptions. There was a widespread understanding that this depth of conversation in itself would bring huge value to the equitable reform of the education system that the Values Explorer tool is now being made available for all actors in the education system, from school classrooms through to the Ministry, to ignite better, deeper conversations.

“Education is too important to be left to politicians. To which I could add to public servants and experts as well. No matter how well intentioned we are. As the old saying goes, ‘Whatever you do for me but without me; you do to me’. In future, we want education and learning policy built by participants and communities. Not by others for them. We want ministries to spend more time listening, engaging, and involving people in change in future, for the future.”

-Minister Chris Hipkins



Potential Unlocked

Participants found discussing the future of New Zealand’s education system to be both a challenging and rewarding experience. During the two Summits thousands of conversations happened in small, diverse groups with participants coming to the conversation from many different places. Yet, together they ensured the dialogue was authentic, inclusive and valuable, and that the Summit created a safe place to explore frustrations, as well as hopes and dreams.

The Summits have started a nationwide conversation on the topic of education and it went well beyond the participants of the summits with over seven million impressions on Twitter over ten days. By uncovering key values, principles and ideas in an authentic way and from a diverse and inclusive target audience, the Government of New Zealand can set the parameters for legislation, public service and solutions to problems in such a way that outcomes are truly reflective of what matters most to citizens.

Within ten days of the summits, all citizens could access an online platform to download any of the content they had worked on as well as tools to help them run smaller conversations in their communities and feed it back into the project. In a true spirit of transparency, all the content has been made accessible to the public. Within less than a month, dozens of participants continued to champion the conversation by running their own events in the classrooms, schools, workplace or at home, sharing their key insights on the website or on social media.



Key Outcomes

- Over 1,000 documented possibilities, ideas and principles synthesised into directional priorities to form the foundation of the future system.
- A set of core shared values to frame the next steps of the conversation.
- A large diverse group of engaged New Zealanders from all walks of life, taking ownership of the content and the process of the reform: over a hundred community workshops organised in the first month.
- A public website sharing content and process in full transparency and providing tools and guidance for citizens to take the conversation forward.
- A video and a timeless visual with strong symbolic value to carry the initial aspirational intent forward.
- A new context where cross-sector collaboration is evidently more in line with the nature of the challenge and the level of ambition.

Key Learnings

- Be fully transparent to inspire trust: Participants were willing to trust the process but there was a constant latent suspicion of manipulation. Exploring values for example has been extremely powerful but surfaced many questions around the integrity of the design of the tool and the process. Absolute transparency about the co-design, decision making and through process was paramount.
- Don’t under-estimate the logistics: The logistics of getting 800 citizens from all over the country together is lengthy and time consuming. It should be on the critical path from day one.
- Protect the integrity of the curation process: The curation of participants and external speakers was critical to enable a re-framing of the conversation yet, consciously or not, the system will try to influence the curation to satisfy specific interest group. When this happens, it is critical to detect it, discuss it, and protect the integrity of the process.
- Be ready for success: The participants felt a engaged, inspired and energised by the experience. The make the most of this potential, we need to be ready to give them a perspective of what will come next and to create a clear framework for them to engage further from the day after.

Where to from here?

Overall, the summits have been a giant step forward, but only a first step in the direction of a truly inclusive, 30-year education reform. With hundreds of people across the country determined to expand the conversation and drive progress, the Ministry of Education has created a unique platform for change.

Since hosting the summits, they are pursuing the possibility of embedding end-to-end co-design at the heart of several projects of the work programme in order to nurture the quality and integrity of the national conversation at all steps of the journey. The appetite is strong on the political side to drive more engagement, and on the citizens' side to keep playing a central role in shaping their own future.

Inevitably, the summits have also revealed the need for the Ministry to transform some of their ways of thinking and working. The team is now exploring agile experimentation based approaches to extend the intent of putting its citizens at the heart of public sector decision making. This will require a slow and deep cultural transformation that the ministry is ready for.

As the minister said in his closing remarks:

"As the old saying goes, 'Whatever you do for me but without me; you do to me'. In future, we want education and learning policy built by participants and communities. Not by others for them. We want ministries to spend more time listening, engaging, and involving people in change in future, for the future."

"Changing nothing is not an option. Pupils will always be cheaper to fund than prisoners and patients"

- A participant



wheretofromhere?
5° 42' 15" N / 113° 18' 49" E / 5000 km

Philippe Coullomb
+61 478 090 180
philippe@wheretofromhere.com

CREATIVE|HQ

Stefan Korn
+64 21 420 330
stefan.korn@creativehq.co.nz



Sandra Daniel
+ 1 (778) 677 1450
sandra.daniel@watershed.co