

EDMUND RICE EDUCATION AUSTRALIA

**FLEXIBLE
SCHOOLS**

Transformative Learning: A Model of Pedagogy for EREA Flexible Schools

Position Paper

2025



Transformation for the Whole of Life – Personalising a Skills Based Approach

The following narrative tells the ‘why’ of Transformative Learning. It is the story of an experience at a NAIDOC celebration at The Centre Education Programme (aka Centre), one of the first schools that have come to be known as EREA Flexible Schools and set up through the collaborative efforts of the Christian Brothers, the Presentation Sisters with the support of Logan Youth and Family Services and The Outlook at Boonah. Versions of this same story are experienced every day in all of our schools. In this particular one, I arrived at Centre just as the Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony began. As the crowd moved in closer to the yarning circle, I shuffled around and found myself standing next to a group of Centre Young People dressed and painted up ready to dance.

I became aware of the conversation between a couple of them standing close by me as they waited for the Mabel Park State School dancers to finish their performance. It was clear that the young fella, was terrified of participating in the dance coming up. He was scared that he would make a mistake and that everyone would laugh at him. It felt a bit touch and go about whether he would move into the circle at the right time and dance with the rest of the group or whether he would back out. He really didn't have the confidence that he could do it. A young woman, a fellow dancer and Centre young person, was doing her best to calm his fears and encourage him. Watching the younger children dancing seemed only to reinforce his sense of inadequacy. The young woman continued to coach and build up this young man, letting him know that she felt nervous too, even though she had been doing cultural dancing since she was as small as the children we were watching. She told him that it was completely understandable for him to be scared since he'd only had half an hour to practice.

I tapped him on the shoulder and added my encouragement to the conversation. I pointed to the dancers and then to people in the crowd and told him that that no-one knew how the dance was supposed to go so we wouldn't know if he mistepped anyway. He asked if any of the children in the circle were mine, trying to connect with why I was there. I told him that, no, none were mine, but I had worked in Flexi Schools for a while. His eyes widened a little when I told him that I had spent a term working at Centre 'about 15 years ago, in 2007'. The young woman, being part of this

conversation, very quickly corrected my flawed maths and told me that it was actually 17 years ago. I went on to big note myself that I got to travel and visit all the Flexi Schools in the country. This clearly didn't impress them because they lost interest. I don't know whether my contribution made any difference, if it did, it was probably through distraction more than anything else. Either way, the young man seemed calmer and a moment later he entered the circle with the rest of dance group. He watched his fellow performers intently to make sure he was following their direction. He barely missed a move when part of his lap lap fell off in the middle of the dance performance. The group did a brilliant job and rightly received the recognition from their community through praise and applause. Within this short interaction of maybe 10 minutes, I experienced two Young People using their skills to make the world better, through empathy, persistence, self-management, collaboration, cultural awareness, even numeracy. Such demonstrations of capability are rarely recognised in ways that are purposeful beyond the moment.

Following this event, the Head of Campus at Centre included me in a weekly staff newsletter that referenced the celebration. In it she recalled Martin Kelly, a former Head of Campus of Centre, a foundational Flexi practitioner and mentor to many. He would say that we have a responsibility to be 'light catchers' for our Young People. Lorraine Browne, with the same credentials of experience as Martin, would add that we need to reflect that light back so that Young People can deeply know how much they are truly capable of. The role of our learning communities as light catchers and reflectors is at the foundation of Transformative Learning. A personalised, skills-based approach to the whole of life calls us to further equip Young People to spark and catch their own light and to direct that light for a future in which all can flourish.



Kellie Stemp

Director of Learning and Pedagogy EREA Flexi Schools Ltd, 2025

Rationale

The schools that form Edmund Rice Education Australia Flexible Schools Ltd (EREA Flexible Schools) each operate as a community of learners premised on Principles.

The four principles of respect, participation, safe and legal and honesty, provide a common ground for relationships in learning communities where Young People and adults commit to participate in a learning environment that is democratic, relational, safe and inclusive.

Ann Morgan - EREA Aspects of Flexi Practice Ed 01

Our vision and purpose as EREA Flexible Schools is to walk in authentic relationship with those Young People most in need as they become empowered through a liberating education to flourish in full and hope-filled lives. This flourishing is for all of us, our communities and our world. To enact such a vision and purpose, our Young People need to be confident and capable, with agency to choose, create and navigate their own pathways.

As registered schools in Australia, our civil obligation is directed by federal and state government funding and educational outcomes informed by the goals and commitment to action of the Mparntwe (Alice Springs) Declaration. This declaration calls us to work towards two goals: an Australian education system that promotes both excellence and equity; and that all Young People become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners and active and informed members of the community. ([The Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration - Department of Education, Australian Government](#)).

We have a moral imperative to our Young People rooted in social justice and human dignity and affirmed through our accreditation as Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice tradition. A model of Transformative Learning brings the EREA Touchstones to life in our teaching and learning and is our expression of the Liberating Practices of the EREA Learning Statement.

Driven through a practice rooted in Common Ground and Operation by Principles, the model of Transformative Learning meets our vision and purpose, as well as our civil and moral accountabilities. Our inclusive communities in which all find a place of safety and belonging, are responsive to the needs of Young People and the skills focused landscape of work and life into which they are transitioning. We ensure access, foster engagement and communicate progress through relational activities that intentionally honour the voice of Young People. The Transformative Learning pedagogical model is designed with key features, processes and strategies that ensure an entry point and a destination for every young person, with flexibility of learning progress, to build confidence and capability through credible and portable recognition of skills. Recognition that equips Young People with the agency to create and navigate their own pathways to flourish for a better world.

A Landscape for the Whole of Life

The landscape for both work and life is one where Human and Thinking skills are increasingly in demand, collective action is needed for the well-being of societies and courage and agility are essential to flourish in a world of constant change (WEF, LinkedIn, Forbes, JSA, OECD, UNESCO)¹.

Students face a future filled with uncertainty and change. For education systems to continue to remain relevant, they must empower students to navigate these changes and succeed in the future by equipping them with the requisite knowledge, skills and values. (OECD, April 2024)²

There is a range of research-based evidence, including from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)³, United Nations (UN)⁴ and World Economic Forum (WEF)⁵ to challenge the traditional structures of education and call for a reimagining of what schools should look like in action. Movements including the OECD 'Future of Education and Skills 2030' and 'UNESCO Global Education 2030' agenda call for a shift to a focus on skills as the currency for success. Skills can be defined as the ability to demonstrate in practice what you can do with what you know. Increasingly, evidence of foundational and transferable skills is becoming the lens through which employers and industry are looking to determine workforce needs and role suitability. In the space of recruitment, the wall of institutional qualifications as a measure of potential is crumbling.

A “skills-first” approach focuses on whether someone has the right skills and competencies for a particular role, rather than having the right degree, job history or previous job titles.

(WEF, PwC January 2024)⁶

Skills can remove the barrier of a socially disadvantaged background and promote inclusion and equity. Evidence of the relevant skills for work that focus on the capabilities required is increasingly what matters, rather than a qualification representing how they may (or may not) have been developed. There is recognition that a diverse range of experiences that develop skills are not limited to a classroom or a specific job title. This perspective promotes greater inclusivity and equity and breaks down an assumption that knowledge exists as separately codified subjects or learning areas.

The concept of “job-proof skills”, highlighting the importance of critical thinking, problem-solving, empathy, ethics, and other human attributes that machines cannot replicate with the same standards and agility...Critical thinking is not only essential for the future of work, but also for informed citizenship in an increasingly complex world. (National Library of Medicine, October, 2023)⁷

Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) identified a skills focus, especially transferable human and thinking skills, in its July 2024 analysis on how employers recruit. This shift is supported by several national reform projects including the National Skills Passport and Learner Profile, both of which will be informed by the National Skills Taxonomy. There is movement towards a Learner Profile as a mechanism that Young People will use to represent their learning achievement while enrolled in schooling. Such a representation will also enable entry to a variety of post-school pathways, whether employment and/or tertiary education. Simply put, the landscape our Young People will transition into is one characterised by:

- a. Skills-based hiring.
- b. Work, not jobs. Suitability for that work is defined by the skills required to do it.
- c. Micro-credentialling to build skills and lifelong learners.
- d. An integrated tertiary education; not vocational education and training and higher (university) education as separate pathways or entities

Connections run deep within the world of skills and jobs. They remind us of why, ... and never let future generations down. ... and it is an imperative to which we must remain fully committed so all Australians can exercise their right to participate to their full potential.

(Professor Barney Glover, Jobs and Skills Australia Commissioner, National Press Club address August 2024).⁸

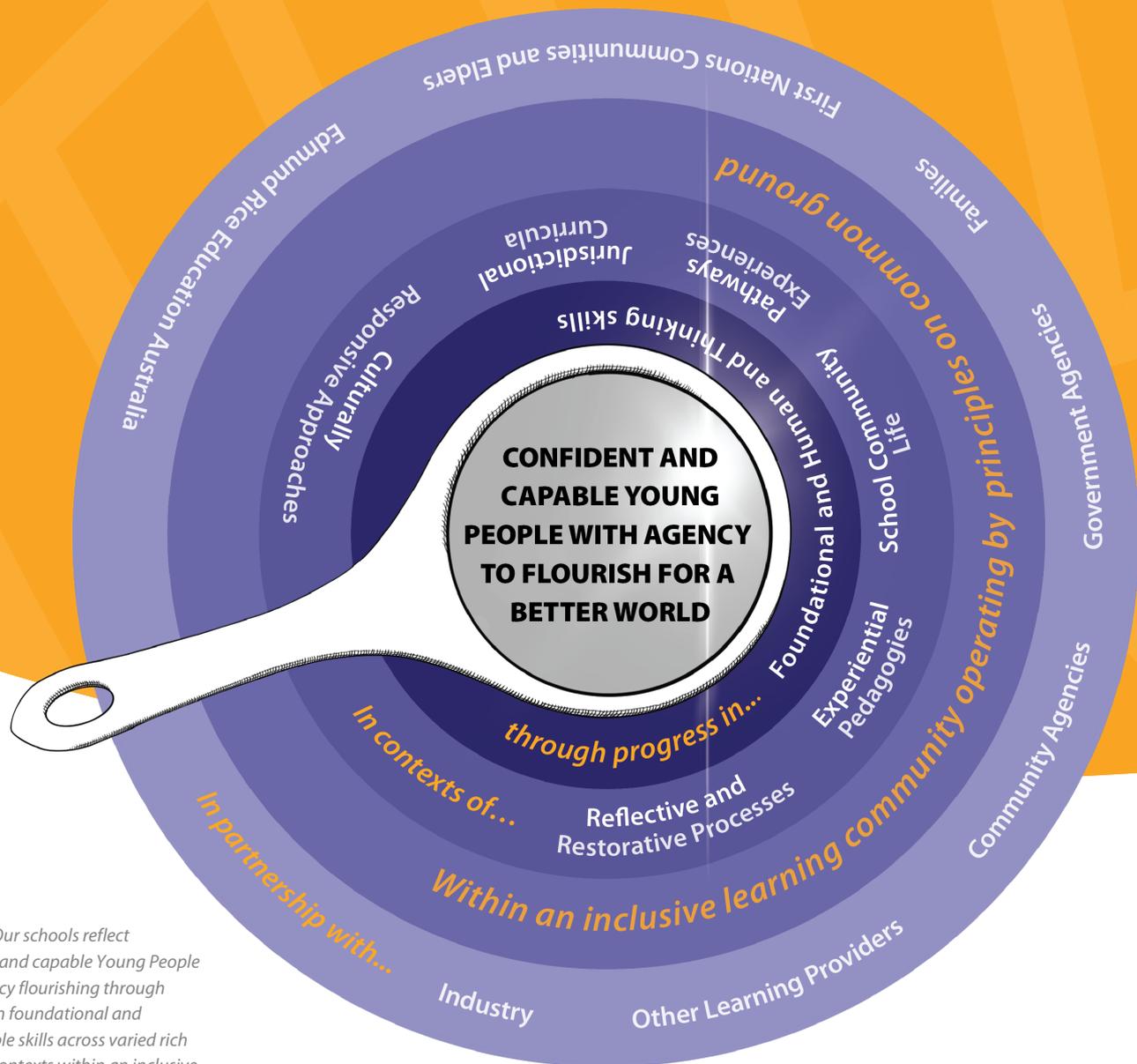


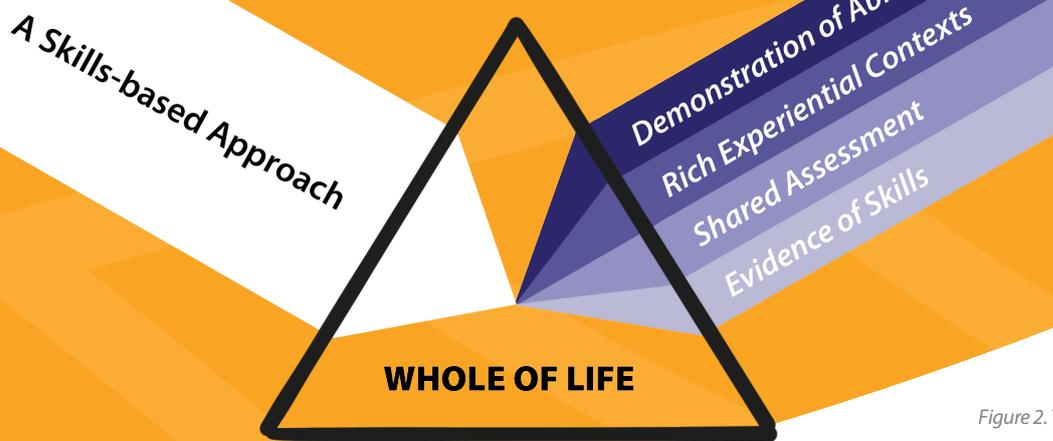
Figure 1. Our schools reflect confident and capable Young People with agency flourishing through progress in foundational and transferable skills across varied rich learning contexts within an inclusive community that partners with others to support learning and pathways outcomes.

A Skills-based Approach to Learning for the Whole of Life

Young People knowing and communicating their skills and what they can do with them creates opportunities to choose, create and navigate pathways to flourish throughout the whole of their lives.

Catching the light of Young People happens through using a language and understanding of learning that positions success as progress aligned to measures of skills. Reflecting that success is a skills passport built with and by each young person that demonstrates evidence of capabilities aligned to their interests, desired pathways and the demands of

a meaningful and purposeful life. Central to the principle of participation is the challenge to 'have a go'. We wrap communities of belonging around Young People so that they feel safe to take the risk. As their learning progress is recognised, the sense of safety to have a go, make mistakes and learn from failure shifts from that external community source to an internal one grounded in self-belief and confidence. Our ultimate measure of success will be the belief of our Young People in their own potential and agency to choose, create and navigate those pathways. Young People equipped to live a life of choice, over a life of chance.



A Skills-based Approach

Demonstration of Ability in Practice

Rich Experiential Contexts

Shared Assessment

Evidence of Skills

WHOLE OF LIFE

Figure 2. The features of a skills-based approach for the whole of life are demonstration of ability in practice, rich experiential learning, shared assessment, and evidence of skills.

Features of a Skills-based Approach to the Whole of Life

- **Demonstration of ability in practice promotes** inclusive and diverse ways to engage Young People. A focus on the process of learning, not just the tangible outcomes, enables a valuing of mistakes. Progressions that describe the development of skills are used to measure and track learning. The landscape of work emphasises the requirement to provide evidence of skills. Skills are practical, they are the actions taken to demonstrate what you can do with what you know. Capabilities are a combination of skills for a work or life outcome. Skills are the building blocks to form capabilities.
- **Flexibility of rich experiential contexts for learning,** including Young People's own experiences outside of school, supports the development of relevant foundational and transferable skills. Transferable skills are the skills that can be adapted and transferred across different industry contexts and are made up of both human and thinking skills. Foundational to these are the core skills such as literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. Multiple contexts for learning within and outside of the formal curriculum are possible sources of evidence of skill including project-based learning, adventure-based activities, and work (paid or unpaid) that a young person undertakes outside of school. Contexts for learning can begin collaboratively looking to the interests, identity and engagement of Young People, while integrating subject or learning area knowledge to support the development of skills.
- **Shared assessment of learning** with a young person is undertaken to make progress visible and measurable. Assessment as a continuous, shared and formative undertaking builds understanding and visibility of progress in skills for Young People. There are multiple opportunities to demonstrate skill development with a focus on strengths and areas for growth. Comparison is to a young person's own previous performance, not the performance of others. Emphasis on feedback for next steps as part of a shared assessment process is crucial in building a sense of agency with Young People.
- **Evidence of skills** is provided by a young person with support and guidance as needed. That evidence is used as a basis to communicate about their skills and demonstrate how they can be adapted to different situations both for shared assessment in a learning context and for access to pathways opportunities. The evidence provided can be measured and endorsed by industry or community partners using progressions that unpack what the development of a skill looks like. Endorsed evidence, as well as relevant accredited learning, is captured for a skills passport that reflects Young People's success. The passport serves as a credible and portable recognition of a young person's skills, a scaffold from which to build confidence and capabilities.

Personalisation: Access to Engage for Learning Progress

Core to our practice as Flexible Schools is the personalisation of learning. A common factor across all Young People in our schools is prior negative experiences in formal education. For many, this has damaged their learner identity, their belief in their capacity to learn and their belief in their right to a high-quality education. Their 'mirrors' for catching the light are often cracked when they first come to us. Young People need to be able access and engage in learning for progress to occur. Personalisation is the bridge - as barriers to access are removed, our Young People are keen to engage in learning and their potential to pursue pathways is high. Evidence of Young People's growth in their confidence to learn is shown clearly in qualitative data of personal reflections, case studies and course enrolment data. The Transformative Learning Model serves to quantify that growth and make it visible through measures of progress in foundational and transferable skills.

ACCESS

Barriers to accessing learning must be addressed through reversing the impact of prior negative learning experiences and appropriately resourcing learning environments. This happens through intentional relationships with Young People for learning, that build trust and a sense of safety to 'have a go' in a community of belonging. A considered approach that includes universal design for learning, differentiation and making reasonable adjustments to meet the individual needs of each young person ensure access to learning activities. Those activities are based in the potential for development of foundational and transferable skills that are relevant and current to the

landscape to ensure that Young People flourish through the pathways they choose, create and navigate.

ENGAGEMENT

Collaboration and consultation with Young People, families and stakeholders as part of the development of individual and group learning programs further supports both access and engagement in learning experiences. Prioritisation of the voice of Young People in planning, execution, assessment and reporting is essential to ensure that they know their skills, what they can do with their skills and can provide the evidence of their skills through use in practice. Harnessing the desire of Young People to impact the world positively using relevant experiential learning approaches focused around areas of interest and identity builds engagement and enables the adaptation of skills to a variety of contexts.

LEARNING PROGRESS

Young People must have access and be engaged to achieve quality learning outcomes. Progress is at the centre for all measures of learning. Monitoring and review of young people's learning progress, as well as their needs and the impact of adjustments is necessary. Learning is life long and life wide, and assessment of evidence from any aspect of a young person's life should always promote and enable further learning. Wherever the journey begins, measures of success reflect a comparison to previous individual performance, not using a grade to compare to others. This recognition serves to value and make each Young Person's learning journey visible.

Figure 3. Removing barriers to access supports engagement so that learning progress can occur.



ACCESS



ENGAGEMENT



**LEARNING
PROGRESS**

Strategies for Transformative Learning

The efforts of Young People and Educators, underpinned by relationship, with the elements of language, understanding, young person evidence, measures of progress, shared assessment and recognition are required for our learning to be transformative. Just as all of the elements of one method of starting fire: the soft wood; the hard wood; the hands that move and hold that wood, the point of friction to create the spark, the dry grass to feed the spark and the breathe that fans the spark to a flame are essential for fire and smoke.

A LANGUAGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF LEARNING BASED IN SKILLS

You can't demonstrate what you don't have the language for. As Young People use a language of learning focused on skills and based in credible, authentic standards, they come to know their skills, can communicate their skills, what they can do with them and can gather evidence in practice to demonstrate each skill in a given situation. Identifying evidence of their own learning deepens understanding and equips Young People to adapt their skills across a variety of contexts.

SHARED ASSESSMENT TO MEASURE LEARNING PROGRESS

'We value what we measure so we should measure what we value.'

Descriptions and measures of skills are consistent, valid, reliable and adaptable for multiple contexts. Young People's evidence of skills is assessed using clearly described continua to measure progress. Skills progressions align with the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities since these are national, embedded in the curriculum of some states and part of our civil accountability for educational programs. Reporting required by schools and celebration of success represents and emphasises the value of distance travelled by an individual young person. Feedback conversations include goals and strategies for next steps in the development of skills.

RECOGNITION

Valid endorsement by industry friends, of evidence of skills, provides portable and credible recognition of Young People's skills to build their confidence and capabilities to participate and flourish in life and work. Micro credentials used for recognition of skills can provide more immediate experiences of achievement and success for Young People, supporting further access and engagement. Accredited micro credentials can build into full qualifications and are nationally recognised through the Australian Qualifications Framework. Schools build and sustain relationships with community and industry to broaden the pathways for Young People. These relationships can be the vehicle through which endorsement of unaccredited micro credentials based on transferable skills occurs. A digital passport of both endorsed and accredited skills offers the capacity for use across digital and analogue contexts and enables continual updating by Young People beyond school.

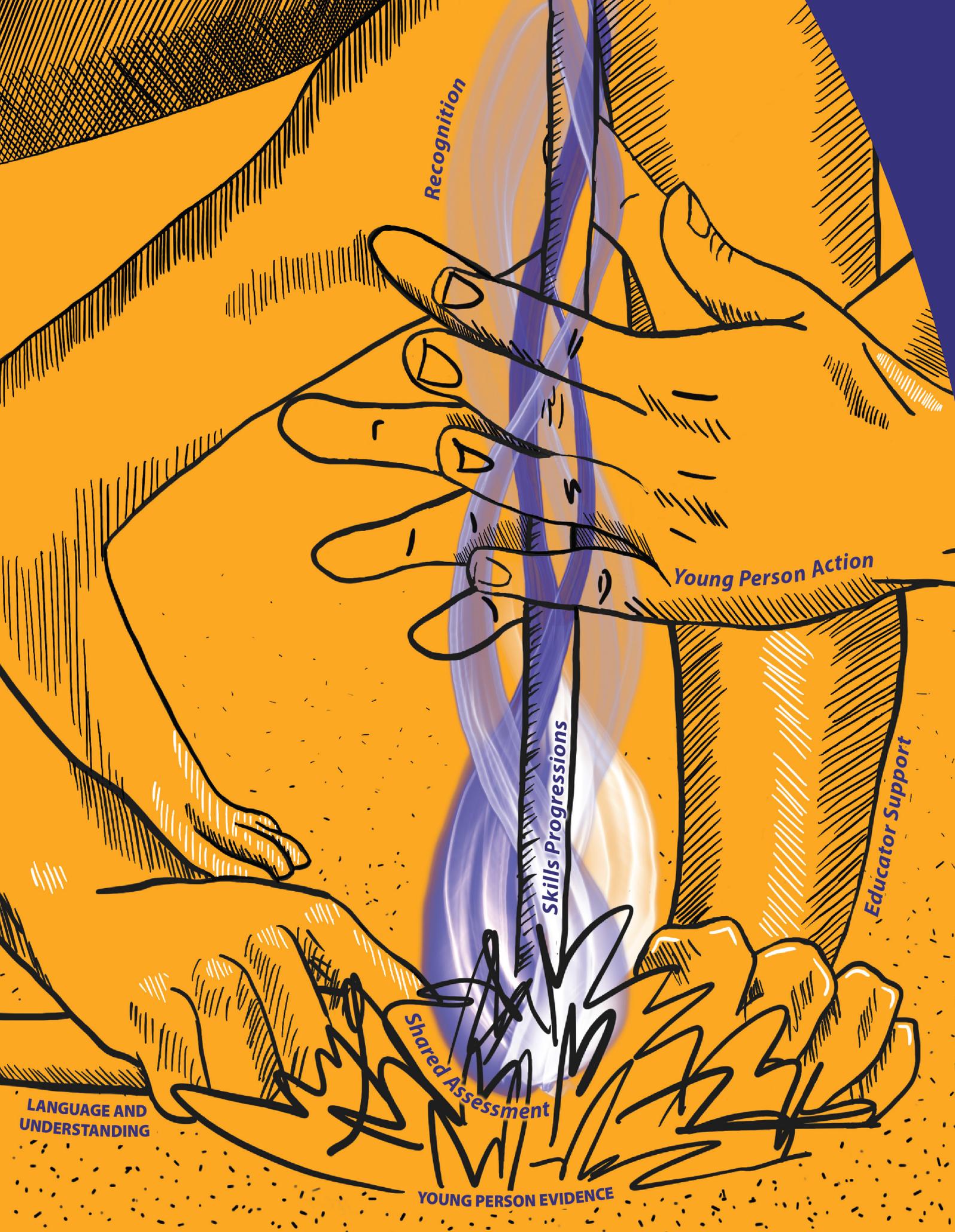


Figure 4. A foundation of language and understanding with shared assessment of Young People's evidence of skills aligned to measures of progress to provide recognition of skills.

Conclusion

In 2019, a group of First Nations Young People gathered in East Arnhem land as part of the Garma Festival. They created the Imagination Declaration, stating:

We are not the problem; we are the solution. We don't want to be boxed. We don't want ceilings. We want freedom to be whatever a human mind can dream. When you think of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander kid, or in fact, any kid, imagine what's possible. Don't define us through the lens of disadvantage or label us as limited. Test us. Expect the best of us. Expect the unexpected. Expect us to continue carrying the custodianship of imagination, entrepreneurial spirit and genius. Expect us to be complex. And then let us spread our wings and soar higher than ever before.

They asked us to, “...set an imagination agenda for our classrooms, remove the limited thinking around our disadvantage, stop looking at us as a problem to fix, set us free to be the solution and give us the stage to light up the world.”

Through transformative learning that personalises skills for the whole of life, we will have the means to not only catch the light of the two Young People in the opening vignette, but to shine that light on their confidence and capabilities for all to see. With agency, our Young People can direct their own light to choose, create and navigate pathways to flourish for a full and hope-filled future in a better world for all of us.

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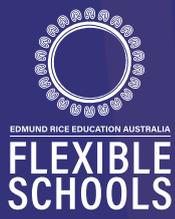
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