“Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood,” said Mister Fred Rogers, many years ago.

The LEGO Foundation and Ashoka share Rogers’ unadulterated belief in the transformative power of play. Play is the way that we learn best, whether the lesson is personal, practical or academic. And that’s true whether we’re 1 years old, belly down on a rug, or shuffling around town at 100.

We also believe that play needs to welcomed and exercised in classrooms, as well as in less-traditional learning spaces, in order to activate the skills young people need to succeed.

Today, we’d like to introduce you to 30 educator-innovators that are using the transformative power of play to unlock learning and development benefits in young thinkers. They’re the Pioneers in the LEGO Foundation and Ashoka’s Re-imagine Learning Challenge, together representing some of our favorite ideas for using play to improve learning outcomes -- both in the classroom, where education happens, as well as in the mind, where ideas live, transform and inspire.

While these Pioneers have demonstrated impact, and have great potential to directly influence policy and shift resource allocation, the scale of the challenges in education -- in truth, skills-building -- are too big and too complex to be solved by these 30 innovators alone. Hundreds of millions of adults can neither read nor write (two-thirds of whom are girls or women), for example. And millions of young people, from vulnerable backgrounds in Bangalore to underserved communities in Brooklyn, need more effective, engaging and relevant curricula to reach their potential in a rapidly changing world.

Literacy and numeracy are important, but they’re no longer enough. We need to create a foundation that enables young people to become mindful and lifelong learners, able to quickly respond to whatever challenges present themselves. We need all hands on deck.

So, take inspiration from these Pioneers and reach out for advice. Join the global movement to redefine play, re-imagine learning, and help prepare young people to be the creative, inventive and empathetic leaders the world sorely needs.

Without further ado...

THE PIONEERS!

Professor S. [3]
Jan Von Meppen and the team at LudInc have designed a quest-based alternate reality game, featuring a time-traveling professor. The game not only brings lessons plans to life, but is also improving learning outcomes in German schools.
Based in London, now>press>play makes it easy for teachers to integrate kinaesthetic, experiential learning into their classrooms. In other words, this social enterprise gives students “an educational adventure they’ll never forget,” as they learn through sound, stories and movement.

**Lively Minds: Community-Run Play Centres.**
Working in rural villages with high levels of poverty across Uganda and Ghana, Lively Minds trains vulnerable mothers without formal education to run learning centers where pre-school children learn through play. Children get a solid head start as creative thinkers while mothers sharpen their parenting skills.

**codeSpark**
Co-founders Grant Hosford and Joe Schochet have created a “pick up and play” game that teaches children as young as 5 years old programming principles and computer science concepts. How? Through structured challenges and open-ended play, specifically crafted for young girls and low-income users, whose participation in computer science education is typically lower.

**Institute of Play**
This school is built on a foundation of game design -- “experiences that simulate real-world problems and require dynamic, well-rounded solutions.” Students don’t just listen and take notes, but are dropped into complex, inquiry-based problem spaces where learning is practically irresistible.

**Global Cardboard Challenge: Imagination Foundation**
This fun, international design challenge was inspired by “Caine’s Arcade,” and invites children to build anything -- really, anything -- with cardboard and recycled materials. Parent and teacher organizers can structure the challenge as a single- or multi-day event hosted inside or outside school to bring communities together for a day of play.

**Make It Epic! Middle School Re-Imagined**
Epic is a public charter middle school that challenges students in Oakland’s Fruitvale neighborhood -- a community where only half of students are expected to graduate high school -- to create impactful solutions to complex, real-world challenges. Teamwork and design thinking are stressed in the “gamified” environment, motivating young people as self-directed learners.

**Skateistan**
Kids show up to learn how to land kickflips and backside Smith grinds, along with other skateboarding tricks, but they stick around to take in Skateistan’s arts-based curriculum and semester-long educational topics. Because the program doesn’t require literacy, it’s attracted hundreds of children in Afghanistan, Cambodia and South Africa looking to build confidence pick up practical life skills.

**Clevio Coder Camp**
This camp in Jakarta, Indonesia, coaches teams of children to not only develop, but also market and sell educational games. But the key impact isn’t in the code, say co-founders Fransiska Oetami and Aranggi Soemardjan, it’s in the critical thinking, teamwork and leadership skills the campers learn over the course of the year.

**Studio SD**
Studio SD is not your typical government initiative: it’s a community-designed, school-operated studio project that lets students in southern Brazil gain hands-on experience making documentaries, TV shows, music videos, and more. Seven pilots are already in operation, reaching a network of more than 500 students, 50 teachers and thousands of local supporters, including the local media.

**Creative Classrooms Through Empowered Teachers.**
The name says it all -- almost. Aleta Margolis, an artist-turned-teacher-turned-social entrepreneur, founded Inspired Teaching as a believer that educators are “the most powerful lever for change” in education. Her year-long professional development program transforms teachers from information providers into “instigators of thought,” who then guide students to think for themselves as inventors, problem-solvers and social change leaders.

**Fabretto Children’s Foundation**
This foundation works directly with public preschool teachers to improve learning outcomes in rural, underserved communities in Nicaragua. Fabretto’s teacher development program, which focuses on hands-on activities and playful learning approaches, has been so effective that the Ministry of Education has adopted the training methodology in its own work.

**Trivselsprogrammet (TL)**
Founded in 2009 by athletic instructor-turned entrepreneur Kjartan Eide, Trivselsprogrammet is fostering a culture of creative and active play in more than 1,000 partner schools across Norway. Elementary and middle school students develop their bodies and minds through TL’s activity-based methodology, and pick up leadership skills along the way.

**LEMA: Literacy Education and Math Lab.**
At Catalina Gonzalez’s learning lab and at partner schools in Bogotá, Colombia, the Dominican Republic and other countries, trained coaches use games to make the mastery of basic literacy and numeracy both fun and easy for children. Gonzalez has trained nearly 200 coaches, including principals and teachers, to use play to improve learning outcomes for thousands of elementary school children. Parents love it.

**Community Science Workshops for Rural California**
This project started in San Francisco, in a garage filled with fossils, wood, animal bones, power tools, and homemade science exhibits, but has since spread to California’s rural, agricultural regions of the Central and Salinas Valleys. The Community Science Workshops are unique learning environments where young people, and their family members, can tinker, create and explore the world around them as budding scientists.
The Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory, founded in 1996, provides afterschool and summer programs for students in Philly’s low-income communities.

**Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory**

Reach young children outside of India’s education system.

**Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory**

Field staff, who set up day care facilities near construction sites, use age-appropriate learning methods adapted from traditional and popular games to

Rajani Paranjpe is bringing rich learning opportunities to children of migrant laborers in Maharashtra’s twin cities of Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad. Her

**The Society for Door Step Schools (DSS)**

Binoculars, a digital camera, and more, and can be quickly set up as a portable workstation for imaginative exploration anywhere.

**IKEDOO Institute**

IKEDOO is an experiential learning program in Bucharest, Romania, which teaches courses like geometry with hands-on activities to develop fine motor skills, enhance cognitive abilities, and encourage creative problem solving and experimentation. IKEDOO has put together over 200 hours of unique educational content -- and has more than 1,700 paying customers.

**Design for Change**

The Design for Change program, developed by Riverside School founder Kiran Bir Sethi, engages children as active participants in their communities, empowering them with an “I can” mindset. The design thinking framework being used in 30 countries gives children as young as 5 a chance to come up with solutions to real-world problems.

**The Creative Street Micro Entrepreneur Project**

This project, Protsahan, “gives at-risk children a voice they never believed they had” through creative media. Young girls between 6-14 in New Delhi, India, are the primary beneficiaries -- they’re given an unprecedented opportunity to produce and showcase films and digital stories, as well as develop a portfolio and marketable 21st century skills to break the cycle of poverty in their communities.

**Bringing Science to Everyone (Darwin’s Backback)**

In Temuco, a city in southern Chile, Fernando Zurita and Hector Jorquera are sparking children’s interest in science, as well as encouraging environmental stewardship, *con la mochila de Darwin* -- with Charles Darwin’s backpack. The kit contains a magnifying glass, a children’s microscope, binoculars, a digital camera, and more, and can be quickly set up as a portable workstation for imaginative exploration anywhere.

**The Society for Door Step Schools (DSS)**

Rajani Paranjpe is bringing rich learning opportunities to children of migrant laborers in Maharashtra’s twin cities of Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad. Her field staff, who set up day care facilities near construction sites, use age-appropriate learning methods adapted from traditional and popular games to reach young children outside of India’s education system.

**Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory**

The Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory, founded in 1996, provides afterschool and summer programs for students in Philly’s low-income communities.
Pre-teens and teenagers not only build boats for competitive sailing, but also build character, competence and confidence to help them reach their potential.

**Tackle** [34]

Tackle, based out of Bangalore, India, creates playful spaces in Indian slums, where youth volunteers serve as role models and mentors, leading their peers through a curriculum in theater, music, dance, storytelling, reading, and the arts. It started as a small project for 65 children, but today offers more than 2,500 children between the ages of 6 and 16 in low-income communities with creative outlets and strong social ties.

Source URL: https://www.changemakers.com/play2learn/blog/meet-30-pioneers-redefining-play-reimagining-learning

Links
[34] http://www.changemakers.com/project/tackle?enid=196107