

A Vibrant Learning Grid

Learners create rich opportunities

Amid a culture of flexible innovation, learners shape their own learning experiences, drawing upon a rich learning geography to identify resources that meet their needs.

Personalization of learning experiences and outcomes has become the norm as learning resources have proliferated and as neurological advances have yielded increasing insight into cognition and brain health. Those schools and districts that remain have become one part of a complex and vibrant set of options that includes community-based learning experiences offered by many kinds of institutions. Learning is available 24/7 and year-round across many learning platforms and beyond geographic limits.

With the help of diverse personal education advisors, learners assemble their own personal learning ecologies to support their individual learning pathways. Assessment designers have provided new methods for assessing and credentialing informal, immersive learning, easing mobility across many types of experiences. With a whole host of learning agents supporting learning, a diverse system of professional branding and validation has emerged to ensure quality.

Learning is seen as a shared community asset, with many people creating, preserving, and protecting critical resources. Learners and learning agents need skills such as visual literacy, collaboration, networking, and flexibility to navigate the learning ecosystem effectively. Although learners have the potential to be less restricted by their immediate surroundings than they used to be, community will is still needed to ensure that everyone has access to the full range of learning experiences.

OASIS



PROSUMER



DESERT

Moving through four possible futures of learning, these futures vary according to two critical uncertainties:

A National System for Global Competitiveness

Providers run a rich national system

In delivering a standardized national education system designed to ensure global competitiveness, a core group of globally connected, technologically advanced, and entrepreneurial providers works to highly specified standards.

With corporations and philanthropists having made twenty-year funding commitments, these providers work to educate an entire generation to the top of world tables in every subject area. Every child in a public learning center receives an up-to-date digital learning tablet every three years, has access to sports and fitness equipment, and has a personalized learning fitness and nutrition program. Even private and faith-based learning centers are required to follow the nationally agreed curricula and to demonstrate their value added.

OASIS



PROVIDER



DESERT

Will there be a learning oasis or a learning desert?
Will learning be controlled by prosumers or by providers?
Prosumers are proactive consumers who co-produce what they consume

The core group of providers collectively maintains visualizations of large data sets that describe learner demographics and performance, the impacts of interventions, and methods of practice. These data dashboards enable rapid high-level decision-making and track learners as they access learning services across communities.

The case has been made for the social and economic return on investment that a successful national learning system brings. But opponents argue that this highly regulated system restricts freedom of choice. Learners are beginning to question the focus on “topping global tables” and “beating other countries” as too narrow and out of step with quality of life and global cooperation.

Learners Forage for Resources

Learners fend for themselves

As the overheated global economy moved into prolonged meltdown, the movement toward dispersed and democratized open learning resources that began in the early part of the century degenerated into a low-cost, unregulated knowledge exchange.

Virtually all resources have been withdrawn from public education. Content is provided by learners and learning agents in a vast, unconnected marketplace. Data systems are not up-to-date, and there are only patchy ways to track and communicate learners’ achievements and needs.

Some of the most robust learning opportunities come from improvisational learning centers at fabrication hubs and from pop-up learning groups at science, technology, and art centers. In addition, “learning hot spots” driven by adults born in the 1980s and 1990s who experienced the last of the universal education systems of the late 20th century tend to take a hands-on, apprenticeship-based, and service-oriented approach.

Despite such beacons of hope, the general feeling is that today’s flexible, networked learning is not effective enough. Frustrated by the limited range of skills and capabilities with which new hires arrive, more businesses are developing intensive orientation courses to create a more level starting point. The national conversation is now addressing the so-called “lost decade” of 2015-2025.

Schools as Centers of Resilience

Providers control scarce resources

Amid growing disparity between the haves and have-nots, learning is structured by providers, who do their best to offer equitable education to all learners while managing scarce resources.

Government-run schools serve many learners as best they can, but many roles and functions are provided by independent learning agents. The most successful programs are practical ones that try to help young people and displaced workers tool up for the green jobs that many people are still hoping will turn around the economy.

In an attempt to streamline outcomes and resource allocation, all providers are subject to rigorous national standards. However, a lack of funding means that standardized testing has in large part been replaced by other measures of learner achievement determined by groups of providers that pool resources.

In this climate of constraint, learning centers have emerged as critical sites for promoting health, well-being, academic growth, environmental vitality, and connections across their communities. Even as communities have gotten better at networking to find creative ways of meeting their needs and providing a strong education for their children, some people who think that education takes a “big brother” approach have become more outspoken about insisting that they have a say in difficult choices.