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THE LEARNING System

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF DISTRICT LEADERS ENSURING SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS

WHAT'S INSIDE

**District
Leadership**
The future is
now.
PAGE 2

**Focus on
NSDC's
Standards**
More than a
smile and a
wave.
PAGE 3

NSDC Tool
Making the
most of the
2020 Forecast.
PAGES 4-5

IMAGINE THE POSSIBILITIES

2020 FORECAST EXPLORES 6 CHANGE FORCES
THAT WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

BY KATHERINE PRINCE

As we look to the future of learning, it's easy to imagine a better version of today's education system. We might project that learning experiences for both students and teachers will still take place mainly in school buildings, but that we will have distributed funding more equitably and will have closed the achievement gap.

But what if the world is changing so quickly and profoundly that we need to stretch further in imagining possibilities, both for students and the adults supporting their learning? What if tomorrow's challenges demand that educators learn and grow in different environments — and possibly develop new kinds of roles — in order to help students learn and grow for the future?

DISRUPTIONS TO THE STATUS QUO

To help those with a stake in learning explore possibilities for its future, KnowledgeWorks and the Institute for the Future recently released a second future forecast, *2020 Forecast: Creating the Future of Learning*. In highlighting profound disruptions to the status quo, it presents rich opportunities for expanding our understanding of possible futures and for considering how we might like to shape learning in an increasingly collaborative and open world.

Like the discussion in this article, the forecast is organized around six drivers of change, each of which corresponds with an impact area that shows where we are most likely to experience its effects.

Continued on p. 6

**To shape the future instead
of reacting to change after
change, it's worth asking what
future of learning we want to
create and collaborating with
others to move toward it.**



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Professional development is the most readily accessible, real-time venue for educators either to prepare for changing circumstances or develop strategies for responding to them.

Read Hayes Mizell's collected columns at www.nsd.org/news/authors/mizell.cfm.

The future is now

Colleges and universities don't often acknowledge the limits of preservice education, but they should. Students in educator preparation programs believe they are learning what they need to succeed as public school employees. But, at their best, preservice programs are based on extant knowledge — experiences, research, and writings about what is known. The programs cannot engage students in learning what is not yet known. It is not surprising that students graduate believing they are prepared for the future when, in fact, they are only prepared for the present (or, some critics contend, the past).

Today's schools are filled with educators who have learned the hard way that the contexts in which public education occurs change often and dramatically. Veteran teachers whose competencies were once not subject to scrutiny now have to demonstrate they are highly qualified. Educators who successfully managed myriad adjustments wrought by school desegregation now encounter new challenges prompted by increasing enrollments of students with entirely different cultures and languages. Most teachers' instruction is still lagging far behind students' use of technology and new media. Preservice education programs of the recent past did not prepare their students for these and other new realities, either because they were unknown or unappreciated at the time.

If there is a single word that is a compelling argument for the necessity and value of professional development, it is timeliness. Unforeseen circumstances impact teaching and learning, and frontline practitioners are the first to observe and experience the effects. Professional development is the most readily accessible, real-time venue for educators either to prepare for changing circumstances or develop strategies for responding to them.

When educators engage in what the National Staff Development Council calls a continuous

cycle of improvement through professional learning, they are in positions to anticipate the unknown. This is because they are always in an iterative process of reflection, dialogue, and inquiry that increases their understanding, as well as their learning. They are professionals taking the long view, aware that the effectiveness of their practice depends not only on what they know about the road they are on, but what they learn about the road ahead.

To become such learners, educators need the strong support of the school systems that employ them. School boards and superintendents must communicate the expectation that all educators will be learners, day in and day out, during their employment. School systems must provide the time, structures, leadership, and accountability that communicate more powerfully than words that the systems are serious about the professional learning of all teachers and administrators.

This intensity of support will not be forthcoming until school systems themselves regard professional development as more than a short-term fix for educators' lack of capacity. There is nothing wrong with engaging educators in learning a more effective curriculum or instructional methodology, but implementers are no substitute for thinkers.

It is thinker-educators who will be alert to signals of changing circumstances and seek learning that will enable them to adapt their practice successfully to future educational environments. These educators are currently in short supply. Their numbers will not increase until school systems look beyond the next public release of standardized test scores and act to transform professional development so educators can transform themselves. School-site, team-based, frequent professional learning can become the incubator for developing and nurturing thinker-educators who in future years will experience schooling contexts very different than the ones they know now.



Pat Roy is co-author of *Moving NSDC's Staff Development Standards Into Practice: Innovation Configurations* (NSDC, 2003)

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More than a smile and a wave

More than 35 years ago, Dan Lortie conducted a compelling study about teaching and teachers. An astonishing finding that still holds true in many places is that school structures isolate teachers rather than encourage collaboration. Schools function as a series of one-room schoolhouses lined up next to each other. In interviews, secondary teachers admitted that they spent most of their days interacting with students rather than with colleagues. They might see other teachers at the coffee pot, mail boxes, or copy machine. Most interactions were quick greetings that rarely allowed them to discuss teaching or learning.

Before launching into more formal professional learning community structures, one Arizona district I've worked with decided to build collaborative skills **first**. Their rationale? That one of the contributing factors to a successful learning community is staff members' ability to trust each other enough to have thoughtful discussions about classroom practices, challenges, and ways to resolve nagging classroom problems. Like this district did, central office staff members need to **support school-based professional learning about collaboration** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 149).

There are a number of ways that central office can provide support. Their **advocacy** with principals and lead teachers about the need to **build collaboration skills** is an essential first step. Some teachers will view collaboration as a time-waster — this is time they would rather spend in their own classrooms planning or correcting papers. Fullan (2008) reminds us that collaboration means connecting *peers with purpose*. In other words, the system shouldn't create

collaboration as an end in itself but in the service of improved instructional practices and student outcomes. Organizations can instill positive peer interactions when 1) the larger organization demonstrates that it values collaboration; 2) information about effective practices is disseminated overtly and extensively with all staff; and 3) administrators monitor these interactions and intervene when ineffective practices appear.

Cultivating collaboration skills does require **resources and materials**. Central office staff members play a pivotal role in discussing the critical question of time use with school board members and the community. Learning about strategies that other districts have used for finding time for collaborative learning can be helpful for the central office (see von Frank, 2008).

Finally, central office staff can **provide professional learning experiences so that collegial interaction is successful** and meaningful. The Arizona district mentioned above employed instructional and content area coaches to work with school staff on developing skillful collaboration. They helped faculty identify group norms, look at student work, conduct book studies, and discuss classroom practices. Formal trainings would not have been as meaningful as this personalized work with building staff.

Central office staff can and should play a role in developing school-based collaboration to ensure teacher interaction is a thoughtful conversation among peers rather than just a smile and a wave.

NSDC STANDARD

Collaboration: Staff development that improves the learning of all students provides educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate.

Learn more about NSDC's standards:
www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm

THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

Making the most of the 2020 Forecast: Creating the Future of Learning

BY JILLIAN COPPLEY DARWISH

As leaders create bold visions of the future of learning, they have both the responsibility and the privilege to challenge boundaries that others may never think to question. Consider using the 2020 Forecast as a tool to highlight emerging trends, ask critical questions, and inform decisions required to create a more powerful future. Use the forecast to:

- **Expand the conversation.** Stimulate provocative conversations with community members who haven't necessarily engaged in typical conversations on schooling and learning.
- **Support innovation.** Encourage early-adopter groups through support for strategic direction aligned with emerging trends.
- **Catalyze change.** Inspire creative thinking and expand individual and collective imagination for what is possible in teaching, learning, and education.

To use the 2020 Forecast to challenge the boundaries of the current system that you lead, consider the following suggestions.

DOWNLOAD

the complete 2020 Forecast at www.futureofed.org/

LEARN MORE

about the Institute for Creative Collaboration at KnowledgeWorks and find related resources at www.kwfdn.org/icc.

START EXPLORING

Create a lead learning team — invite interested staff to become students of the forecast who will start by studying the following elements of the forecast.



Drivers of change are major forces of transformation that will shape our efforts to re-make learning.



Signals are examples, or early indicators, of the changes described by the trends and the drivers of change.



Trends represent distinct directions of change that point to new concepts or new patterns of behavior likely to shape the future of learning.



Learning agents describe new roles and functions that might emerge in the future ecosystem of learning.

EXPAND THE INQUIRY

With a solid understanding of the forecast content, the lead learning team can use the strategies below to create effective learning experiences for the larger school or district community.

- **State the purpose:** To ensure both coherence within the organization and commitment among staff, clearly state the purpose for any learning experience and link it to the district's vision, its continuous improvement plan, and/or state standards.
- **Connect before content:** Because these concepts can be challenging, some participants might feel reluctant to engage. Learning and collaboration will be greatly enhanced in small, rotating groups of colleagues who build trust and relationships. Initiate learning experiences with questions about personal commitments and intentions as a means to create a supportive climate for learning.
- **Focus on mental models:** Sustained exposure to new and provocative ideas such as those in the forecast can relax the mind's hold on existing models, breaking old connections and making new ones that lead to entirely new possibilities. Design experiences that encourage participants to suspend, examine, and refine their existing mental models in light of the forecast content.
- **Manage creative tension:** How we think is the biggest factor limiting or expanding our boundaries. To create a future that is different from the past, encourage participants to refrain from reacting and problem-solving and instead to focus on what they want to create.

TAKE ACTION

The 2020 Forecast content, along with the processes described above, can have a tremendous impact on the knowledge and culture of a learning community. As a result, there may be multiple streams of ideas upon which to act. Which ideas hold the most promise and how will you know? Below are a couple of suggestions for consideration.

- **Idea fair:** Invite groups with ideas for action to move through cycles of sharing, receiving feedback, and refining. Encourage participants to represent their ideas using a variety of creative approaches, such as brief slideshows using only images. Whatever form the presentations take, the goal is quickly to get ideas in a form for sharing, feedback and collective sensemaking, and refinement.
- **Beta building:** Ideas that the group determines to have the most promise for affecting change and expanding boundaries move to the next stage. In this stage, participants implement successive experiments to test the ideas in practice and move through cycles of feedback and refinement. For instance, they might try out a new way of organizing work or personnel one day a week, in one building, for a short period of time. Because these ideas begin on a small scale, many innovations can be piloted concurrently.

DEEPEN YOUR UNDERSTANDING

These books encourage system leaders to explore several key concepts more thoroughly.

Community:

The Structure of Belonging by Peter Block (Berrett Koehler Publishers, 2008).

The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization by Peter Senge (Broadway Business, 2006).

Organizing for Learning: Strategies for Knowledge Creation and Enduring Change by Daniel H. Kim (Pegasus Communications, 2001).

Imagine the possibilities: 2020 Forecast explores 6

Continued from p. 1

1 SELF: ALTERED BODIES

College students are taking the ADHD and narcolepsy drug Adderall to study longer. Athlete Oscar Pistorius, who has prosthetic legs, came within seconds of qualifying for the 2008 Olympics. Weather patterns are becoming increasingly erratic.

Such phenomena point the way to how we will increasingly be able to experiment with our cognitive and physical performance as we gain new understandings of how the mind works and examine how innovations designed for people with disabilities might benefit others and challenge norms. We will also need to detect new and intense physical and neurological stressors in our biological, ecological, and built environments and manage our responses to them.

Schools will have the opportunity to promote community resilience in addition to creating increasingly personalized experiences for individual learners, whether they are children or adults.

2 ORGANIZATIONS: AMPLIFIED ORGANIZATION

Social media such as blogs, wikis, and social networking web sites are replacing traditional media outlets. Organizations are developing more permeable boundaries, for example by outsourcing research and development to networks of interested people.

As we get more comfortable with social and collective practices and become more skilled in navigating multiple media and social platforms, we can expect to see progressively more open leadership, with leaders

emerging according to the situation rather than from positions of power. We can also expect to see new organizational structures.

This remaking of both our formal organizations and our ways of organizing beyond their boundaries raises exciting possibilities for organizing learning and for extending our individual impacts through collaboration. For example, how might networks of adults working in more differentiated roles than today's teachers support learning?

3 SYSTEMS: PLATFORMS FOR RESILIENCE

We've seen many well-intentioned reforms fall short of expectations and many successful local solutions falter when transferred to other settings. Many people think that our education system was designed to select and sort for an industrial economy, not to support all young people in graduating prepared for a productive civic and economic life.

To meet future challenges for which it was not designed, education, like other systems, will have to adapt or transform with flexibility, innovation, and openness. By hanging on to the status quo, it will risk becoming decreasingly relevant.

In a world of transparency and distributed collaboration, schools have the opportunity to develop flexible infrastructures that can adapt quickly as needs and circumstances change. As they explore new structures, they might identify certain attributes — such as the core value of equity — as being essential to preserve.

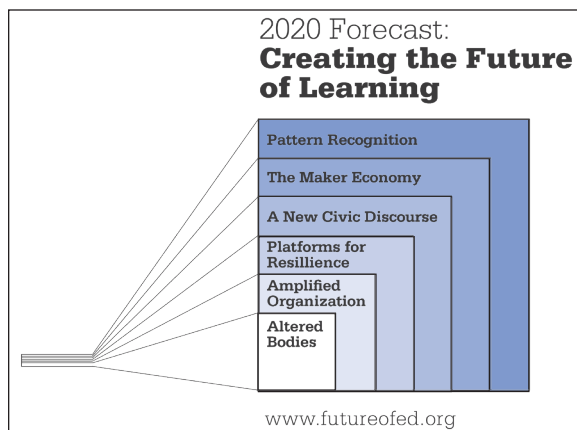
4 SOCIETY: A NEW CIVIC DISCOURSE

President Obama's campaign underscored how online forums and interactive media are creating new spaces for public dialogue, along with new expectations for participation. People displaced by Hurricane Katrina are finding ways to stay in touch across geographic distance.

As people negotiate identity and community across such platforms and find new bottom-up

Continued on p. 7

The forecast is organized around six drivers of change, each of which corresponds with an impact area that shows where we are most likely to experience its effects.



NSDC'S BELIEF

Remarkable professional learning begins with ambitious goals for students.

change forces that will shape the future of learning

COVER STORY

Continued from p. 6

ways of managing shared resources, people will expect to influence education just as they do other public institutions and decisions. Teachers have new options for shaping how they collaborate, learn, and influence the systems and students they serve. Students and families will monitor learning, seeking solutions outside the traditional system if needed. With other stakeholders, they and their teachers will co-create and access collective learning resources that will broaden the choice of public versus private education to include a much wider array of learning possibilities.

Educators have the opportunity to negotiate how to involve stakeholders in ways that enhance teaching and learning. They can also convene conversations about what kind of society we want to create and how our learning systems will contribute to it.

5 ECONOMY: THE MAKER ECONOMY

The price of 3-D printers, which create objects by applying successive layers of resin or other materials, is dropping dramatically. Open source principles involving peer review and transparency of process are moving beyond software to curriculum creation and beyond.

Such trends will combine to create new economies based on lightweight and ad hoc manufacturing that enables designers and consumers to produce and customize goods. Local econo-

mies will be transformed by both new micro-economies and new ways of interacting with the global economy. Already we are seeing some communities create local currencies to support local businesses.

As design becomes a basic skill, adult and student learners will have opportunities to be makers, producers, and innovators, enriching not just their learning but also our collective quest for solutions to pressing challenges.

6 KNOWLEDGE: PATTERN RECOGNITION

We're all long familiar with needing to manage information overload. As our online activities and our use of mobile devices such as GPS leave behind trails of data about our activities and preferences, and as we develop new tools for visualizing data, that challenge will only get more intense.

But those new visualization tools can help us work together to identify meaningful patterns, and we can use newly available data to inform new kinds of assessments based on reputation, mastery, and recognition. As early experiences with serious games such as World Without Oil have shown, we can also create new learning experiences combining digital and physical realities.

In addition to exploring new ways of facilitating and assessing learning, educators can benefit from considering how to support learners in developing visual literacy and in navigating new kinds of learning environments. ■

Exploring further

As these disruptions enable and require us to move toward a culture of creation, vibrant innovations in learning are likely to crop up wherever people coalesce to create them. To be prepared for the next 10 years, and to shape the future instead of reacting to change after change, it's worth asking what future of learning we want to create and collaborating with others to move toward it, while considering what forms professional learning will need to take to support that vision.

Indeed, if we have the opportunity to help our children and the adults who support their learning prepare for a very different world than we inhabit today, might it not be irresponsible to ignore these opportunities?

The guide on pp. 4-5 provides ideas for using the 2020 Forecast to facilitate conversations about the future of learning. Download a PDF version, order paper copies, or explore resources and examples at www.futureofed.org.

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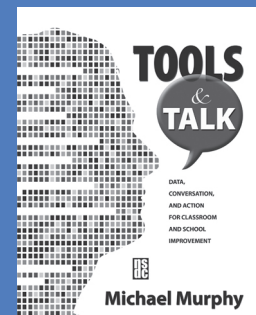
Walk your talk with NSDC's latest book

How do teachers and coaches start a conversation that will lead to improved practice? Michael Murphy's *Tools & Talk* provides structures and suggestions to answer that question for anyone who works with classroom teachers to find new ways to improve student learning.

Ready-to-use tools kick start discussions around how to build responsive, brain-based classrooms, create engaging student tasks, and form a classroom community of respect and learning. Data-gathering tools help teachers and coaches examine student engagement, how lesson and classroom design work together to support optimal learning, whether the school and classroom environment welcomes all students, and how well teachers are managing instructional processes.

Murphy provides a framework for conversations around the data, as well as prompts that allow coaches to discuss the findings in a collaborative way that encourages teachers to think critically about their own practices.

With an emphasis on strengthening supportive relationships, Murphy shows principals, assistant principals, instructional specialists, and anyone in a position to affect instruction how to gather and use data to improve teaching and contribute to schoolwide change.



Buy *Tools & Talk* from the NSDC bookstore at www.nsdccstore.org or call 800-727-7288.

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