



## Just how forward thinking are you?

**A**re you a forward thinker with an eye on the future, or do you find your perspective engaged in a long-term relationship with the past? Your answer to that question is bigger than you, because, as a leader, your view of the future plays a pivotal role in the types of learning opportunities those around you may experience. I like to

think of myself as a forward thinker, but at times I have my doubts.

For example, I remember my first cellular phone. It was as big as a breadbasket, had two screw-on antennae, and came with a 20 minutes-per-month calling plan. Since it was only for emergencies, I never imagined I would use all those minutes. At that time, I simply couldn't envision a world where the entire web is at

our fingertips. Most of us saw the cell phone as simply an extension of our landline phones. We assumed we would only use it to do what we had always done — talk. This limited view of cell phones was defined by our past relationship with telephones.

Similarly, our struggle as educators is to reimagine what the future of

learning looks like without limiting our vision to past perspectives. This struggle is significant in defining our sector's present and possible future.

Many of us have heard this idea: Bring a doctor from 1909 into one of today's medical facilities and she would have little sense of what to do, but bring a teacher from the same time period into one of today's classrooms and she would simply pick up the chalk and start teaching. The entire industry of schooling is so locked into our current structures that it's hard to imagine how "disruptive innovation" could ever occur from within. Even some of our most innovative brick-and-mortar charter schools are indistinguishable from their traditional counterparts. Interactive white boards replace chalkboards, PowerPoint slides replace overhead transparencies, copies replace dittos, and lectures take place in front of students grouped at tables instead of organized in rows. However, the fundamental ways we visualize learning have not changed much. Even the push to teach 21st-century skills is only starting to pick up steam some 10 years into the "new" century.

As I struggle with this issue of forward thinking (or dare I say, thinking forward) and envisioning the future of learning for children and adults, I am inspired by the organization formerly known as the National Staff Development Council. NSDC, now Learning Forward, recognized a name change was both a symbolic and very real way to take control of a piece of our

sector's future. But a name change is not enough. How we as a community of learners re-imagine *learning* for students and the adults who support them will ultimately determine whether or not Learning Forward is truly looking, thinking, and learning forward.

To determine what type of forward thinker you are, examine your current views of the future and how they are tied to past perspectives: Do you look beyond the important, yet limiting, notion of improving schools or grapple with the broader issue of improving learning? Do you see existing technology as the answer or do you imagine learning environments for which the technology doesn't yet exist? Do you immediately consider what's needed to develop the capacity of adults who will support new learning environments? I have posed many questions and offered few answers — many of those answers we will discover together.

I challenge Learning Forward and our extended learning community to free our minds as we consider a world of possibilities beyond the structures that currently define our sector. How will we know we have finally arrived at this future that will redefine education? The forward thinkers among us know we never will ... and that's exactly how it should be!

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**Envision the future of learning for children and adults.**