

NEW WAYS TO LEARN AT THE 2014 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Learning Forward has expanded its conference content and design to engage participants and allow them to personalize their learning. Along with traditional offerings such as keynotes and preconference sessions, Learning Forward's 2014 Annual Conference features additions to the learning menu that reflect the latest professional learning trends.

Extended learning. Concurrent sessions will begin several months before the onsite conference and extend well after the conference is over. About 60 sessions will include virtual online communities where attendees can engage with fellow session participants, chat with the session presenter, access session materials, and begin work on session content before they meet face-to-face at the conference.

Experiential learning. Participants also can learn experientially in the Learning Hangout and iPD Showcases, interactive playgrounds for experimenting with and manipulating a variety of learning technologies. Here, attendees can find solutions to challenges facing their organizations, schools, or classrooms in engaging demonstrations. The 25-minute hands-on sessions are designed for participants to discover free or low-cost tools. All that is needed for success is an open mind, a mobile device, and a desire to learn some new tricks.

For more information, visit
[www.learningforward.org/
learning-opportunities/annual-
conference](http://www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/annual-conference).



THE CONFERENCE *of the* FUTURE

NEW THINKING, NEW TOOLS, AND NEW WAYS FOR ADULTS TO LEARN

By Carol François

The explosion of readily available information can make tracking trends in almost any field — especially education and professional learning — seem like an impossible task.

But there's no doubt that learning and education, along with the organizations and institutions that support them, are undergoing rapid change. Many consider education to be the next frontier for a theory known as "disruptive innovation," in which new products or services cause

evolutionary transformation.

In fact, disruption in education is already underway and, with it, disruption in the field of professional learning — including how, when, why, and what Learning Forward offers.

One of the standard tools in professional learning is the large-group learning experience known as the annual conference. Among education associations, Learning Forward has offered one of the most successful conferences for more than 40 years. Futurists warn, however, that we cannot ignore the implications disruptive innovation theory presents for this particular learning design. And Learning Forward is ready to meet this challenge.



THE WIKIPEDIA STORY

Joseph Bower and Clayton Christensen first described the original theory of disruption, now known as new market disruption or disruptive innovation, in “Disruptive technologies: Catching the wave” (Bower & Christensen, 1995). In *The Innovator’s Dilemma*, Christensen (2003) describes how companies ignore new technologies that don’t serve the needs of their customers or fit within their existing business models. However, as the new technology continues to mature, it eventually takes over the market (Thompson, 2013).

A classic example of a disruptive innovation is Wikipedia. The traditional form of general encyclopedias — carefully edited, printed in hardcover volumes — has been replaced by this free, nonprofit, community-edited online encyclopedia. Former market leader Encyclopedia Britannica ended print production in 2012. Because Wikipedia is free, has unlimited size, and initiates instant updates, it has effectively eliminated challenges for profitable competition in the consumer market.

The hardcover encyclopedia is as anachronistic now as the door-to-door encyclopedia salesmen of the past. People still want access to information that en-

cyclopedias store, but they aren’t willing to purchase printed volumes when a free, paperless alternative is easily available. Their need is for information, not for a collection of books to occupy several feet of bookshelf space.

REVOLUTIONIZE THE CLASSROOM

In the book *Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns*, Clayton Christensen and co-authors Michael Horn and Curtis Johnson apply disruptive innovation theory to education. They write, “For a revolution to take place in education, changes will have to occur that will disrupt the status quo. The key to revolutionizing the classroom is not just by adding technology, but rather by the ways that technology will be introduced to make schools student-centric, personalized, and customized. Under the current system, customizing education is expensive.” *Disrupting Class* recommends computer-based learning as the path to revolutionizing the classroom (Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2008).

In a report published by Cisco titled *The Learning Society*, the new technologies Christensen references in *Disrupting Class* are seen as ways to increase possibilities

Share your creative ideas with Carol François and help design the conference of the future at Learning Forward’s Annual Conference Dec. 6-10 in Nashville, Tennessee.



Fast-paced learning. At Fast Forward sessions, attendees will hear fast-paced, concise presentations, also variously known as PechaKucha, Ignite, or Bytes. Each presentation is seven minutes long with 15 to 18 slides and designed to challenge learners to think fast and absorb quickly.

Custom learning. Participants can stop in for some or all of the presentations presented continuously in the Learning Hangout space outside the Exhibit Hall. Conversely, for those who want concentrated doses of learning on a single topic but from the perspective of different experts, the Leadership Forum or the Common Core Forum are good options. Each forum will feature 10 to 15 speakers on each of the two topics, and attendees can make the circuit to each table to hear each speaker’s take on the subject.

Informal learning. Another new conference feature is an example of informal learning and part of the networking meet-up series designed for attendees to gather casually either with colleagues who perform similar jobs or with those who share an interest in an education hot topic. Nationally known facilitators will lead the groups, but the real learning will come when participants bring their knowledge, spontaneity, and interests to the sessions.

for learning throughout life, improve access, and intensify and spread the process of knowledge creation leading to a “Learning Society.”

These emergent innovations help create a new vision of learning — learning as an activity, not a place, where it is wide open to new people with new ideas. In the Learning Society, “we’ll find learners ‘pulling’ learning toward themselves rather than teachers ‘pushing.’ And learning systems that spread far beyond school and involve learners and parents as contributors as well as customers” (Cisco, 2010).

The report goes on to say, “We need to change the question. Rather than ‘How can we get people into school?,’ we need to ask, ‘How can we enable people to learn most effectively throughout their lives?’”

The authors contend that education systems will have a role to play, but only if they are radically reformed in ways that enable them to interact with and shape the Learning Society that surrounds them.

Their vision of a Learning Society is one that engenders a culture of learning throughout life while aiming to develop motivated, engaged learners who are prepared to conquer the challenges of tomorrow as well as those of today. Society takes learning to the learner, seeing learning as an activity, not a place, while at the same time believes that learning is for all, so no one should be excluded (Cisco, 2010).

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING’S ROLE

Creating such a society requires professional learning to be at the center of the change process. Educators will need to learn in ways they never have before using tools they never have before. In short, disruption is on the horizon for professional learning. So what might the new formats, content, and tools of professional learning be?

In a blog post on the website Edudemic, author Katie Lepi describes trends in education technology that teachers support and want to learn how to use. Citing research that gathered data from European and North American teachers to learn what they thought about the most prevalent education trends, Lepi lists these 10 technology tools educators are interested in either learning how to use or that they understand to be important to the future of education:

- Web tools for education;
- Online education resources;
- Digital literacy;
- Personal learning networks;
- Blended learning;
- Social media in education;
- E-moderation (facilitation of online communication or learning);
- Mobile learning;
- Digital games in education; and

- Interactive whiteboards (Lepi, 2013).

Zaid Alsagoff, e-learning manager at International Medical University, expanded on Lepi’s list in a SlideShare program titled “16 learning trends we simply can’t ignore!” While his list overlaps with Lepi’s, he noted a few additional trends that impact how professional learning is supported. Alsagoff says these technologies will also be commonplace in classrooms and professional learning:

- Massive open online courses (MOOCs): A type of online course aimed at large-scale participation and open access via the web;
- Interactive e-books;
- Classroom engagement student response systems that empower teachers to engage their students via smartphones, laptops, and tablets;
- Augmented reality connecting the physical and digital worlds; and
- Alternative assessments such as rubrics, e-portfolios, peer assessment, and learning analytics (Alsagoff, 2013).

These lists leave little doubt that education and educators are about to experience disruptive innovation requiring new thinking, new tools, and new ways for adults to learn and move traditional education to another plateau — a plateau where things look dramatically different than the schools and classrooms of today.

NEW TOOLS FOR NEW LEARNING

To get to the next plateau, educators need a solid framework for understanding what is available for their own learning as well as methods for evaluating the effectiveness of these tools.

In a June 2014 report, EdSurge researchers described their efforts to map the professional learning landscape. The mapping exercise produced a framework that explores how technology supports professional learning as well as the components of strong professional learning systems. The researchers developed a four-way classification system to describe the professional learning tools:

1. **Educators need tools to engage.** New professional learning tools must engage educators by enabling them to join groups and online communities, ask questions, and share resources through webinars, online courses, and modules.
2. **Educators need tools to learn.** Educators need to access content-rich tools presented in a variety of ways that help them implement skills and ideas.
3. **Educators need support tools.** Professional learning has to support educators to connect and share their practice with experienced mentors for feedback and coaching.
4. **Educators need tools to measure the effect of profes-**

sional learning. Educators need some form of collecting data on their practice as well as growth or progress in adopting new practices or acquiring new skills (EdSurge, 2014).

The research on disruptive innovation, Lepi's list of preferred technologies, and EdSurge's work to scan the professional learning landscape have had considerable impact on how Learning Forward designs its learning offerings and particularly how the organization approached the 2014 conference content and design.

Conferences no longer can be one-event wonders quickly forgotten once the conference program and notes are discarded, but rather must be part of attendees' ongoing, long-term personal learning network that uses blended learning, social media, and mobile learning as part of their professional learning tool box.

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Stepping stones to leadership

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protocols, i.e. refraining from solving problems but instead asking questions that facilitate principals' on-the-job learning (Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013).

PULLING THE PIECES TOGETHER

Ongoing evaluations continue for the Principal Pipeline Initiative. As districts head into the next school year, changes that foster success for student outcomes continue. And the data show progress: In Gwinnett County, 94 out of 112 recent graduates from leadership programs were promoted into new leader roles.

Spiro sees these changes as positive. "Partnerships with business sectors, teachers, and other districts can help streamline resources and open up other opportunities," she says. Strong leadership and vision can pull all of these pieces together.

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